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Garance Abdat

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Garance ABDAT

Ecole Normale Supérieure de Lyon  
Département des langues, littératures et civilisations étrangères

*The Tree of Knowledge is not that of Life; or, from the  
Enlightenment to 19th century Gothic literature, the Rise and  
Fall of Scientific Utopias*

Mémoire de Master 1



Sous la direction de Mme Christine Murphy Berthin, professeure à Paris X Nanterre



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## Unweaving the Rainbow

But grief should be the instructor of the wise;  
 Sorrow is knowledge: they who know the most  
 Must mourn the deepest o'er the fatal truth,  
 The Tree of Knowledge is not that of Life.  
 Philosophy and science, and the springs  
 Of wonder, and the wisdom of the world,  
 I have essay'd, and in my mind there is  
 A power to make these subject to itself—  
 But they avail not.

(*Manfred*, Act I, scene I, ll. 10-18)

Byron's epic drama *Manfred*, written in 1816-1817, constitutes a Gothic, supernatural retelling of the moral dilemma opposing happiness and science. While the hero, tortured by a mysterious sense of guilt for some offense relating to the death of his beloved Astarte, laments his inability to find solace and comfort in any activity, the insistence on the contradiction between knowledge and happiness permeates the story, as his vast knowledge makes him all the more aware of how powerless he ultimately is. The allusion to the Tree of Knowledge also casts a religious light on the poem through the allusion to the book of Genesis, and to the disobedience of Adam and Eve which led to their fall from Grace. The reference is also a barely hidden reminder of the pride – a distinctive trait of Byronic heroes – animating Manfred, and implicitly all the men involved in the same quest for knowledge. A capital sin, Pride comes to be represented as inherent to any scientific enterprise, but also as a token that they are doomed to failure and dire consequences.

This feeling of powerlessness and disenchantment is associated to the Romantic period by a number of scholars, who note that in the aftermath of the French Revolution, dreams of military glory, social reformation and political progress collapsed, as the French Republic degenerated into Terror, the military reign of Napoleon, and eventually culminated in the Restoration of the



monarchy, re-establishing a *status quo* many had hoped would disappear. The opening lines of Musset's *Confession of a Child of the Century* are undoubtedly the most famous literary rendering of the lingering feeling of melancholy and despondency plaguing the youth of France :

Then came upon a world in ruins an anxious youth. The children were drops of burning blood which had inundated the earth; they were born in the bosom of war, for war. For fifteen years they had dreamed of the snows of Moscow and of the sun of the Pyramids.

They had not gone beyond their native towns; but had been told that through each gateway of these towns lay the road to a capital of Europe. They had in their heads a world; they saw the earth, the sky, the streets and the highways; but these were empty, and the bells of parish churches resounded faintly in the distance.<sup>1</sup>

This passage perfectly encapsulates the general sense of lateness, of living in the aftermath of a great revolution that had forever changed the hopes and aspirations of the people, while failing to fulfil its promises in terms of actual liberation. Still buzzing with a belief in military conquest as a path to self-fulfilment, and with the desire to explore a boundless world of possibilities laid open before them, the children of the century were instead confronted with the return of the stifling institutions of the past and the enforcement of a stricter sense of social hierarchies. To quote Chasles: “At the time in which I was born, the abortion of hoped-for utopias was complete... Those born like I between 1798 and 1800 were scarred: we are the children of disaster, cradled by the shipwreck of a noble ideology.”<sup>2</sup>

The historical awareness discernible in Chasles's memoirs is characteristic of an early 19<sup>th</sup> century feeling of abandonment or degradation compared to the bombastic and flamboyant 18<sup>th</sup> century, and it contributes to what Benjamin Hutchinson<sup>3</sup> describes as a feeling of “lateness” typical of the period. He reads post Romantic literature through its responses to a sense of lateness and a quest for legitimacy in spite and because of that lateness, defined as “the opposite of progress – as the sense of ending, rather than of beginning.”<sup>4</sup> Such a narrative of lateness, he notes, “runs counter to the instinctive human preference for ‘a story of improvement (over) a story of deterioration’” (Hutchinson 5). It is impossible to understand 19<sup>th</sup> century Romantic

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<sup>1</sup> Musset, Alfred. *Confession of a child of the century*. Penguin Classics, 2012, p.3.

<sup>2</sup> Chasles, Philarète, *Mémoires, vol.I*. Charpentier, 1876, p.15.

<sup>3</sup> Hutchinson, Benjamin. *Lateness and Modern European Literature*. Oxford University Press, 2016, p.5.

<sup>4</sup> Velleman, David. ‘Well-being and Time’ in *Pacific Philosophical Quaterley* 72 (1991), pp.48-77, p. 50.

or Gothic literature without insisting on the great degree of historical awareness that informed its take on social, political, but also scientific issues, from the appropriate reaction to the Revolution to the salvation of a race that might degenerate or be overpowered.

Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* is most obviously affected by its close historical vicinity to the French Revolution, and by the uncertainty that followed the Revolution, hovering over political institutions and social relations. Indeed, the early 19th century is "an age of transition. Mankind have outgrown old institutions and old doctrines, and have not yet acquired new ones" which "is not a state of health, but, at the best, of convalescence"<sup>5</sup>, and at the worst, a state of decline. That sense of decline is perceptible in Stevenson's *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, which is a tribute to the sense of degeneration and lack of control from the individual in a corrupt universe threatened with social unrest and class warfare. As for Wells's *The Island of Doctor Moreau*, it is emblematic of the cultural anxiety generated by new developments in science and medicine, and notably of the fear of seeing man revert to a primal, animal state.

It is notable that all three novels should at once be concerned with science and "the opposite of progress" - two notions that might seem antithetical. Indeed, not only does the sense of ending inherent to lateness run counter to the human desire for progress, it also stands in stark contrast to the Enlightenment motto and belief in an ever-progressing society through scientific innovation. Karl Lowith suggests in *Meaning in History*<sup>6</sup> that "the post Enlightenment orthodoxy of a theological, ever-improving world is little more than messianism in disguise, and that modernity can accordingly only be justified by recourse to an eternal deus ex machina" (Hutchinson 4). It might just be, then, that those authors refused to subscribe to that narrative of progress, and wrote in reaction to it. The historical legacy of the Enlightenment and of the French Revolution was to shape the mentalities and *episteme* of the following generations. It is obvious

that the individual's existence and sense of life is determined by the historical situation in which he finds himself and to which he must respond; and that, moreover, this exposure to history constitutes a curse for modern Man, since he comes too late and thus is no longer

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<sup>5</sup> Stuart Mill, John. 'The Spirit of the Age', first published in *The Examiner*, January-May 1831. References are to Ryan, Alan (ed.). *Mill: The Spirit of the Age, On Liberty, The Subjection of Women*. Norton, 1996, pp.8 and 5 resp.

<sup>6</sup> Lowith, Karl. *Meaning in History: The Theological Implications of the Philosophy of History*. University of Chicago Press, 1957.

able to reconceive in vigorous and future-oriented terms the universal cultural legacy of the past that he inherits... For modern Man, escaping from the burden of history is no longer possible<sup>7</sup>.

As such, it appears logical that major intellectual figures should react aggressively to the economic, social and cultural changes observable in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, especially in the urban population, since urban life was characterised by a rapidly expanding population, the concentration of extremes in terms of wealth and poverty in the same space, and the collapse of religious belief associated to a reshuffling of moral codes as attitudes to class and sexual roles underwent erosion. The discrepancy between the scientific and political discourse of progress and the reality of the increasing poverty and degradation of the urban working-classes, combined to the destruction of the landscapes by growing industries and factories, only grew more noticeable throughout the century. The period was afflicted by a

growing sense of a lack of synchrony between the rhetoric of progress, the confident prediction by the apostles of laissez-faire of ever increasing prosperity and wealth, and the facts on the ground, the evidence in front of people's eyes, of poverty and degradation at the heart of ever richer empires<sup>8</sup>

And this discrepancy increased as the empire expanded, giving rise to "the belief in the existence of degeneration, or even a suspicion that it existed, [which] fostered a sense that what might really be happening to civilisation lay somehow hidden" (Greenslade 15). Intellectuals and middle-classes alike turned to science for answers as to the nature of man, and the fate awaiting him, frequently alluding to the "dark side of progress"<sup>9</sup> founded on the Darwinian revolution in biology and harnessed to psychological medicine through determinism.

While vastly informed by a reaction against the Enlightenment and the general feeling of discontent that followed, the 19<sup>th</sup> century Gothic genre strives to question linear narratives, those Jean-François Lyotard calls "*grand narratives*", especially the rhetoric of political and scientific progress, described as cultural inventions meant to shape our understanding of history.

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<sup>7</sup> Wiese, Benno von. 'Zeitkrisis und Biedermeier in Laubes Das junge Europa und Immermanns Epigonen', in *Euphorion*, vol.36, 1935, pp.163-97, p.182, cited in Hutchinson, p.15.

<sup>8</sup> Greenslade, William. *Degeneration, Culture, and the Novel, 1880-1940*. Cambridge University Press, 1994, p.15.

<sup>9</sup> Subtitle of J. Edward Chamberlain and Sander L. Gilman's collection of essays *Degeneration: The Dark side of Progress*. Columbia University Press, 1985.

In his classic 1979 work *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, Lyotard summed up a range of views as a critique of the institutional and ideological forms of knowledge. Against the proponents of the idea that history is told in a linear and factual manner, Lyotard argues that narrative knowledge is knowledge in the form of *story-telling*.

The concept of *grand narrative*, and in particular what Lyotard called the “emancipation narrative”, concerns the kind of *meta-narrative* which seeks to connect events in a logical manner, i.e., to infuse history with a sense of teleology. While primitive myths and legends are obvious examples of such grand narratives, religion and the rhetoric of progress also belong to that category. Meta-narratives derive from the observation that institutionalised narrative knowledge is a means to exert power and control individuals’ behaviour. The popularisation of the ideas of the Enlightenment introduced a new set of explanations of the world in terms of material progress and natural causes that could be applied to both the natural realm and the human one. The involvement of intellectuals in the political events of the late 18<sup>th</sup> century is a prime example of the links between power and knowledge.

In a period of great change and cultural anxiety, it is unsurprising that a number of intellectual should seek to debunk the hypotheses and philosophies that motivated and determined past history, in order to attempt to produce knowledge of their own, and to make sense of the new world they found themselves in. Moreover, the Gothic literature of the period took it upon itself to bring back a sense of the irrational into a world that was becoming increasingly rationalised and alienated men, preventing them from accessing the true happiness they were simultaneously promised.

We shall therefore seek to explore how Shelley, Stevenson and Wells all purported to rebut a series of philosophical and scientific claims concerning the nature of man and his relation to the world he inhabits, by showing how they engaged with questions such as the nature of man and his place in the universe, the role of the scientist in the promotion of knowledge and experimentation, and the future of mankind.

We shall also explore how this feeling of lateness influences the writing style of the different authors, as 19<sup>th</sup> century writers are characterised by their partaking in “the fear that there is nothing new left to say, that the weight of precedence precludes the later author from being original” (Hutchinson 14). Lateness is described as an a priori condition defined by the

impossibility to escape the creeping influence of the past, especially past writers. “Conceptually the central problem for the latecomer necessarily is repetition, for repetition dialectically raised to re-creation is the ephebe’s road of excess, leading away from the horror of finding himself to be only a copy or a replica”<sup>10</sup>. The awareness of his status reflects in the author’s writing style, leading to a desire to incorporate new modes of storytelling, either by inventing a new genre altogether (science fiction), revisiting past genres such as the Gothic romance, or borrowing from the medical and scientific literature of the period.

We shall also take into account the degree to which all three authors aspired to be the conveyors of a moral message that might provide readers with a possible reaction to the challenging events of the century. By taking on a responsibility towards the general public, they continued the legacy inherent to the figure of the poet as a prophet and leading figure comforting the masses. In doing so, we shall see whether they were careful enough not to fall into the same erroneous ways as Frankenstein, Jekyll and Moreau; thus fulfilling the prophecy forecast by the demons in *Manfred*, that

his aspirations  
 Have been beyond the dwellers of the earth  
 And they have only taught him what we know—  
 That knowledge is not happiness, and science  
 But an exchange of ignorance for that  
 Which is another kind of ignorance.  
 (*Manfred*, Act II, scene IV, ll.69-74)

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<sup>10</sup> Bloom, Harold. *The Anxiety of Influence*. Oxford University Press, 1973, p.80.

## I. Dialectic of Enlightenment: the decline of the ambitions of the Enlightenment

### a) “Man is too wicked to be free”<sup>11</sup>: the impossibility of reformation

The demise of the French Republic as it fell into the excesses of the Terror and led to the rise of a new form of tyranny in the shape of the French Empire of Napoleon may have meant the temporary dismissal of the political ideas supported by the Revolution, but it did not mean the dismissal of all the theories that had informed the Revolution, most notably the theories of education or those relating to the nature of man defended by the philosophers of the Enlightenment. On the contrary, the 19<sup>th</sup> century perception of science can be described as a century-long reaction to the idea of the perfectibility of man through science that is most tellingly endorsed by the Marquis de Condorcet.

In his 1795 *Sketch for a Historical Picture of the Progress of the Human Mind*, Condorcet presents a vision of history as “the story of man’s progress from superstition and barbarism to an age of reason and enlightenment”<sup>12</sup>. Even though the idea is a staple of 18<sup>th</sup> century intellectual thought, “Condorcet’s originality was to extend the doctrine of progress to every department of human activity; he saw history as the story of intellectual, political, economic, social and artistic progress, all necessarily interconnected”<sup>13</sup>.

His account is that of a linear progress of the human mind, seemingly without end, and dependent on the material conditions of existence in the world man inhabits:

Its result will be to show by appeal to reason and fact that nature has set no term to the perfection of human faculties; that the perfectibility of man is truly indefinite; and that the progress of this perfectibility, from now onwards independent of any power that might wish

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<sup>11</sup> Original quotation : 'Man in general, if reduced to himself, is too wicked to be free.', cited in Berlin, Isaiah. *The Crooked Timber of Humanity*. Pimlico, 1990, p.123.

<sup>12</sup> Condorcet, Jean-Antoine-Nicolas de Caritat, Lukes, Steven, & Urbinati, Nadia. *Condorcet : Political writings*. Cambridge University Press, 2012, p. x.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

to halt it, has no other limit than the duration of the globe upon which nature has cast us.<sup>14</sup>

Condorcet greatly insists on the fallacy of pessimism, and argues for optimism and the belief in the necessary improvement of mankind through science, indissolubly linking the two:

We shall find in the experience of the past, in the observation of the progress that the sciences and civilisation have already made, in the analysis of the progress of the human mind and of the development of its faculties, the strongest reasons for believing that nature has set no limit to the realisation of our hopes<sup>15</sup>

But this idea of indefinite progress, slowly realising the potential of man, is based on the controversial premise of his inherent goodness, an idea that will be much discussed by thinkers of the Enlightenment and their conservative counterparts:

Is not a mistaken sense of interest the most common cause of actions contrary to the general welfare? Is not the violence of our passions often the result either of habits that we have adopted through miscalculation, or of our ignorance how to restrain them, tame them, deflect them, rule them?... will not the free man's sense of his own dignity and a system of education built upon a deeper knowledge of our moral constitution, render common to almost every man those principles of strict and unsullied justice, those habits of an active and enlightened benevolence, of a fine and generous sensibility which nature has implanted in the hearts of all and whose flowering waits only upon the favourable influences of enlightenment and freedom?<sup>16</sup>

This natural goodness exonerates man from any responsibility in the circumstances in which he spends his life, and Condorcet points to the corrupting effects of governments and societies, in a position reminiscent of the works of a Rousseau:

is there any vicious habit, any practice contrary to good faith, any crime, whose origin and first cause cannot be traced back to the legislation, the institutions, the prejudices of the country wherein this habit, this practice, this crime can be observed<sup>17</sup>.

This belief in the possible reformation and betterment of an inherently good being informed the debate on the nature of man, in which Mary Shelley's father William Godwin took part, arguing that "perfectibility is one of the most unequivocal characteristics of the human species, so that the political, as well as the intellectual state of man, may be presumed to be in a course of

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid, p.4.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid, p.175.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid, pp.191-2.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid, p.193.

progressive improvement”<sup>18</sup>. On the opposite side, thinkers such as Joseph de Maistre argued that man was inherently wicked because of his sinful nature, and in chapter 3 of *Considerations on France* (‘On the Violent Destruction of the Human Species’), he surveyed the history of conflict to prove that man was naturally violent: “Unhappily, history proves that war is, in a certain sense, the habitual state of mankind, which is to say that human blood must flow without interruption somewhere or other on the globe, and that for every nation, peace is only a respite”<sup>19</sup>.

Even though this intellectual debate dates back from the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, it very much informed the intellectual thought of the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, especially as William Godwin was very influential over the two generations of English Romantic writers, inspiring Samuel Taylor Coleridge’s ideal of a pantisocracy, and Percy Bysshe Shelley’s thoughts on the nature of man and the role of science in his development. Mary Shelley dramatized the debate through contrasting views about the moral nature of Frankenstein’s creature, the artificial offspring of the rationality so dearly defended by her father. Indeed, the creature claims to be inherently good, but to have been driven to evil deeds by rejection and guilt. The debate on the goodness or wickedness of the monster is twofold, since it includes a general reflection on the nature of man as well as it carries political implications in relation to the French Revolution. Jean-Jacques Lecercle notes that

Mary Shelley attribue la source de son idée à une discussion de « diverses doctrines philosophiques » entre Shelley et Byron, touchant en particulier à « la nature du principe vital ». Il apparait donc que l’origine ultime de Frankenstein est une discussion philosophique<sup>20</sup>.

Given the *milieu* in which she was raised and educated, it is unsurprising that Mary Shelley should have devoted much care and attention to political theories revolving around the question of revolutions. Lecercle notes that while the temporality of the novel remains uncertain (Walton’s first letter is dated “Dec. 11th, 17—” (Shelley 2)), a series of clues are scattered in the novel, such as the fact that the De Lacey’s should read *The Sorrows of Young Werther* (Shelley 151), originally translated into English in 1779, or the allusion to Charles I during

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<sup>18</sup> Godwin, William. *An Enquiry Concerning Political Justice, and its Influence on General Virtue and Happiness*, vol. 1. G.G.J. and J. Robinson, 1793, p.12.

<sup>19</sup> Maistre, Joseph de. *Considerations on France*. Cambridge University Press, 1993, p.23.

<sup>20</sup> Lecercle, Jean-Jacques. *Frankenstein, Mythe et Philosophie*. Presses Universitaires de France, 1988, p.10.



Frankenstein's trip in Oxford, when he notes "our minds were filled with the remembrance of the events that had been transacted there more than a century and a half before. It was here that Charles I had collected his forces." (Shelley 194). Those historical allusions enable Lecercle to conjecture that the story takes place between 1792 and 1799, i.e. during the French Revolution and its descent into the Terror (Lecercle 55). While the protagonists' journey throughout Europe seems undisturbed by the wars that should be taking place, and no direct allusion to the Revolution is made, it is a further indication of the importance of the revolutionary background in the shaping of Shelley's historical awareness. It also makes all the more tempting the interpretation of the novel as a revolutionary tale, with 18<sup>th</sup> century minded-characters (Frankenstein in his quest for knowledge and unbound optimism, the De Lacey's as the perfect Rousseauistic cottagers, and most of the characters in terms of sensibility) gradually plunging into despair as their monstrous creation becomes uncontrollable and violent.

The very genre of the gothic novel was historically linked to the French Revolution and the Enlightenment as the natural literary offspring of a change in the perception of history, the mobs and the people. Schafer chooses to read the ontological guilt of the Gothic romance hero as a manifestation of his historical consciousness and the awareness of his status as a revolutionary compared to the Ancien Régime model of the past:

[T]he guilt which underlies the Gothic and motivates its plots is the guilt of the revolutionary haunted by the (paternal) past which he has been striving to destroy; and the fear that possesses the Gothic and motivates its tone is the fear that by destroying the old ego-ideals of church and state, the West has opened a way for the irruption of darkness: for insanity and the disintegration of the self. Through the pages of the Gothic romance, the soul of Europe flees its own darker impulses.<sup>21</sup>

Frankenstein's sense of guilt is characteristic of the discovery of his responsibility in the descent into madness and violence sweeping over Europe; moreover, it is easy to argue that the motif of the double which is a recurrent feature in the novel serves to operate the fragmentation ('disintegration') of the self. Another great literary figure and keen social observer of the time, the Marquis de Sade, wrote at length about the then newly-emerging genre, explaining that the Gothic romance was thriving on the revolutionary soil as its natural consequence, absorbing the tensions generated by the 18<sup>th</sup> century:

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<sup>21</sup> Fiedler, Leslie A. *Love and Death in the American Novel*. Criterion, 1969, p. 15.

Ce genre... devenait le fruit indispensable des secousses révolutionnaires dont l'Europe entière se ressentait. . . il n'y avait point d'individu qui n'eut plus éprouvé d'infortunes en quatre ou cinq ans que n'en pouvait peindre en un siècle le plus fameux romancier de la littérature: il fallait donc appeler l'enfer à son secours ... et trouver dans le pays des chimères, ce qu'on savait couramment en ne fouillant que l'histoire de l'homme en cet âge de fer.<sup>22</sup>

It would thus seem that the very genre Mary Shelley elected bore heavy connotations linking it to a historical reflection on the nature of revolutions. Similarly, the topic is addressed by her choice of a protagonist, since the metaphorical tradition that links monstrosity to revolution dates back from Burke's writings, and was taken up by Mary Wollstonecraft. In *An Historical and Moral View of the Origin and Progress of the French Revolution* (1794), she grants one concession to the Burkean conservatives, admitting that the revolutionaries have gone astray and become monsters. But she resolutely insists that these monsters are social products: "They are not the living dead, nor are they spectres arisen from the tomb of the murdered monarchy. Rather, they are the products of oppression, misrule, and despotism under the Ancien Régime. The lower orders are driven to rebellion.". They have been "depraved by the inveterate despotism of ages"<sup>23</sup>, and eventually turned against their oppressors in parricidal fashion<sup>24</sup>.

Similarly, the monster is not a creation *sui generis*, suddenly appeared without rhyme nor reason. His coming onto the world is a historical event connected to a well-established tradition of scientific and philosophical enquiry, coupled with anxiety regarding the permanence of human life. As such, the link between the monstrous mob and the Shelleyan monster becomes obvious as

the Monster's rhetorical style tells us that his identity as a rebel was learned, not innate. In direct contradiction to the Burkean tradition of the monster as evil incarnate, the creature

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<sup>22</sup> Translated into English as: "This genre... became the indispensable fruit of the revolutionary tremors which were felt by the whole of Europe ... there was not a single person who had not experienced more misfortunes in four or five years than could be painted in a century by the most famous novelist of literature: one had therefore to call upon hell as an expedient ... and find in the country of chimeras what was currently known simply from the history of mankind in this age of iron". Cited in Praz, Mario. 'Introductory Essay,' in *Three Gothic Novels*. Peter Fairclough, 1968, p. 14.

<sup>23</sup> Wollstonecraft, Mary. *An Historical and Moral View of the Origin and Progress of the French Revolution*. Delmar, 1975, p. 252.

<sup>24</sup> Levine, George. *The Endurance of "Frankenstein": Essays on Mary Shelley's Novel*. University of California Press, 1979, pp. 143-71, pp.161-62.

tells Frankenstein: "I was benevolent and good; misery made me a fiend". This disjunctive rhetoric itself reenacts a passage from benevolence to rebellion. In part, the Monster has been converted to his demonic identity, and does not deserve Victor's reactionary labelling, which assumes that he is the principle of evil incarnate. And Victor's rejection is all the more ironic because the utopia projected by the monster is highly paternalistic: he wants to be cared for by Victor, whom he calls his "natural lord and king."<sup>25</sup>

Numerous critics have backed up the interpretation of the monster as a revolutionary figure, the embodiment of the "outsider" demanding recognition and acceptance. As Fiedler notes, "he is the son of the new age, and at the same time he is the personification of all that the new age would like to banish from its memory: the struggle against feudalism, the revolutionary principles, and the new class created by the application of the enlightened sciences"<sup>26</sup>.

"The son of the new age", the monster is bound to embody its contradictions, and conflicting visions about the nature of man; his unnatural birth and existence outside of a human community make him the perfect character through which to explore the theme of the social construction of monsters. The passage on the instruction of both Safie and the monster through the study of Volney is revealing in that it is emblematic of the Janus-like nature of man: "Was man, indeed, at once so powerful, so virtuous and magnificent, yet so vicious and base? He appeared at one time a mere scion of the evil principle and at another as all that can be conceived of noble and godlike." (Shelley 140). The monster argues that the contradiction is not innate, but learnt, and attributable to a decaying civilisation. Similarly, Justine's unexpected trial and subsequent sentencing as a murderess is a social ritual that transforms a "very clever and gentle and extremely pretty" young woman (Shelley 70) into a "wicked murderer" (Shelley 97), i.e. a monster. Her dual nature is a social construction relying on judicial and religious discourse, as indeed she blames her confessor for pressuring her into confessing to a crime she hasn't committed. Through the figure of the sinful confessor, Shelley explores the idea of the social construction of man's identity on a new level, since Justine is talked into beginning "to think that [she] was the monster" that religious authorities and society said she was. Her mother before her had fallen into the same trap, believing the death of her children to be the result of her unnatural and undignified partiality for one of them, and becoming increasingly convinced of the veracity of this irrational claim by her confessor ("I believe her confessor confirmed the

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Fiedler, Leslie A. *Love and Death in the American Novel*. Criterion, 1969, p. 209.

idea which she had conceived.”, Shelley 70). Language, and more specifically religious or judicial discourse, becomes performative and instrumental in the making of monsters.

The monster thus becomes the embodiment of those debates through the dichotomy between his constant plea for the recognition of his goodness, and his murderous actions; a dichotomy which mirrors the clashing narratives of the self on the one hand and society on the other. Ironically, immediately after Justine warns the reader against the dangers of believing in rumours and the discursive construction of monsters, she laments having been held responsible for “a crime which none but the devil himself could have perpetrated.” (Shelley 97), therefore reinforcing the monstrous nature of the creature. While he laments the death of Frankenstein, he acknowledges to be deserving of Walton’s contempt and recognises the dreadful change that has occurred within him, from his early promises of benevolence and kindness to a steady descent into the pits of agony:

Once my fancy was soothed with dreams of virtue, of fame, and of enjoyment. Once I falsely hoped to meet with beings who, pardoning my outward form, would love me for the excellent qualities which I was capable of unfolding. I was nourished with high thoughts of honour and devotion. But now crime has degraded me beneath the meanest animal. No guilt, no mischief, no malignity, no misery, can be found comparable to mine. When I run over the frightful catalogue of my sins, I cannot believe that I am the same creature whose thoughts were once filled with sublime and transcendent visions of the beauty and the majesty of goodness. But it is even so; the fallen angel becomes a malignant devil. Yet even that enemy of God and man had friends and associates in his desolation; I am alone. (Shelley 274)

The boundaries are once more blurred between the monster and human beings, since both, while naturally good, can degenerate into a state of brutality and violence because of their exposition to the malignant influence of society, and because of the social, discursive, and performative recreation of their identity.

It would appear that the monster is a literary creation meant to embody the concept of the perfectibility of man and his inherent goodness, thus engaging with the works of Godwin, and most notably his belief that there were “no innate principles” that man is born endowed with a clear conscience of, and as such we are “neither virtuous nor vicious as we first come into existence”<sup>27</sup>. However, the monster constantly argues for his goodness, culminating in his

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<sup>27</sup> Godwin, William. *An Enquiry Concerning Political Justice*, 2 vols. Robinson, 1793, Vol. I, p.12.

defining statement: “I was benevolent and good; misery made me a fiend. Make me happy, and I shall again be virtuous” (Shelley 114). Not only does the monster claim to have been born good, he directly equates happiness and virtue, in a gesture reminiscent of Greek philosophy. Throughout the novel, the monster is perhaps the only character who insists so much on the importance of happiness, while other characters tend to place the emphasis on other virtues such as disinterestedness, civil duty, or sacrifice. Speaking about the De Lacey, the monster exposes a worldview in which happiness induces virtue, which in turn makes one more deserving of happiness: “I thought (foolish wretch!) that it might be in my power to restore happiness to these deserving people.” (Shelley 134). The only instance in which virtue and despair are reunited are with the De Lacey “I distinguished several other words without being able as yet to understand or apply them, such as ‘good,’ ‘dearest,’ unhappy.” (Shelley 131), which prompts the monster to want to restore the happiness they deserve.

The conditions for happiness defined by the monster are sociability and the possibility of practising one’s virtues in the domestic sphere. Being part of a social network is presented as the pinnacle and necessary if not sufficient condition to happiness, and therefore to virtue, and its absence is the chief reason the monster ever engaged in murder: “I am malicious because I am miserable. Am I not shunned and hated by all mankind?” (Shelley 174). The thesis defended by the monster is clear-cut but still takes into account the possibility for tragic reversal, as he explains when he threatens retaliation:

Shall I respect man when he condemns me? Let him live with me in the interchange of kindness, and instead of injury I would bestow every benefit upon him with tears of gratitude at his acceptance. But that cannot be; the human senses are insurmountable barriers to our union. Yet mine shall not be the submission of abject slavery. I will revenge my injuries; if I cannot inspire love, I will cause fear, and chiefly towards you my archenemy, because my creator, do I swear inextinguishable hatred (Shelley 175)

Sociability becomes a two headed figure, just like human beings themselves. In this passage, the monster appears to be the embodiment of a Rousseauistic philosophy arguing for the necessary sociability of man and reconciliation to his peers through a social contract. Indeed,

Mais si le monstre est seul, comme l’est l’homme à l’état de nature, sa solitude lui pèse, il ne rêve que d’un contrat social, et toute son histoire s’explique ainsi : dans la première partie de son existence, il tente de conclure ce contrat avec les autres hommes ; devant leur refus, la seconde partie de son existence se passe à dénouer par la violence le contrat qu’ils ont conclu entre eux et qui l’exclut. C’est ainsi qu’il justifie le meurtre indirect de Justine : parce qu’il

est « à jamais privé de tout ce qu'elle pourrait (lui) donner », c'est à die du plaisir de sa (de la) société, il retourne contre elle « les lois sanguinaires des hommes » (ibid). Le montre n'est un loup pour l'homme que parce que le contrat social veut l'ignorer. Et par un retournement rousseauiste, il montre que la formule de Hobbes s'applique en réalité à l'homme en société : ce sont les lois qui sont sanguinaires. (Lecerclé 36)

However, the monster quickly realises that he must forever be excluded from the normal, human networks of sociability. As he remarks, “the human senses are insurmountable barriers to our union”. While living with the De Lacey, peaceful cohabitation depends on their ignorance not only of his physical appearance, but also of the reality of his existence: the cottagers referred to him as a ‘good spirit’ performing ‘wonderful’ tasks for them (Shelley 134), but as soon as they come face to face with him, all pretence of a link must be dropped. The monster is regularly confronted to the hostility and murderous instincts of men, and as he unknowingly approaches a village shortly after his birth, “The whole village was roused; some fled, some attacked me,” (Shelley 123), causing him to retreat and “and lay down happy to have found a shelter, however miserable, from the inclemency of the season, and still more from the barbarity of man” (Shelley 123). Yet, in spite of this assault, he decides to believe in the goodness of man and in the possibility that he might meet a different fate if he was able to first wheedle the De Lacey with good deeds and above all by remaining unseen. In every instance of violence described above, it is a collective force that opposes the monster with violence, a fact worth keeping in mind as evidence of the social nature of man's violence.

Still, Frankenstein refuses to acknowledge the idea that the monster's violence (and, by extension, man's own violence) comes from society, contra Hobbes (“ cette violence, c'est la société des hommes qui la lui a imposée”, Lecerclé 23). On the contrary, during the Alpine encounter during which they exchange their stories, Frankenstein constantly reminds the monster that in spite of his declaration he has so far invariably fallen back into murderous deeds, and is responsible for most of the chaos and desolation occurring in the novel. His arguments put forward the notion of fate, and the seemingly automatic reaction of hatred that the monster's appearance must elicit, triggering his murderous instincts anew:

How can you, who long for the love and sympathy of man, persevere in this exile? You will return and again seek their kindness, and you will meet with their detestation; your evil passions will be renewed, and you will then have a companion to aid you in the task of destruction. (Shelley 176-77)

Tellingly enough, it is the monster's natural sociability, another notion vastly debated by 18<sup>th</sup> century philosophers, which must lead to his downfall. However, Frankenstein is not satisfied either with the alternative solution offered by the monster, i.e. the possibility of the creation of a female mate that the monster may live with in order to fulfil his need for companionship while remaining remote from the company of men. From an historical perspective, Shelley also seems to offer a word of warning about the dire consequences of shutting out whole portions of the population and excluding them from the natural bonds of affection:

‘I have no ties and no affections, hatred and vice must be my portion; the love of another will destroy the cause of my crimes, and I shall become a thing of whose existence everyone will be ignorant. *My vices are the children of a forced solitude that I abhor, and my virtues will necessarily arise when I live in communion with an equal.* I shall feel the affections of a sensitive being and become linked to the chain of existence and events from which I am now excluded.’ (Shelley 178-79)

As we will show later when discussing Shelley's engagement with Cartesian thought and its implications to human relations with the natural world (I.C), the author argues against a strict opposition between two philosophies, and in favour of reconciliation through mutual understanding. While the figure of the monster is clearly a nod to the French Revolution and subsequent revolutionary fever, it is not a thoroughly negative one, as he constantly seeks compromise. Having seemingly renounced the company of men, the monster still longs for the creation of a fellow monster who would provide companionship and assistance, thus fulfilling his need for intimacy:

It is true, we shall be monsters, cut off from all the world; but on that account we shall be more attached to one another. Our lives will not be happy, but they will be harmless and free from the misery I now feel. Oh! My creator, make me happy; let me feel gratitude towards you for one benefit! Let me see that I excite the sympathy of some existing thing; do not deny me my request!’ (Shelley 176-77)

Once more, the question of happiness is central to his claim, and it would appear that it cannot be envisioned without the support of mankind. Having a bride would only partially meet his needs and would simply be enough to save him from a life of misery; hence perhaps Frankenstein's hesitation in front of his request. However, the picture he presents his maker with is one of a life that is both “peaceful and human” (Shelley 176), thus supporting the idea that companionship is enough to make life bearable (very much as was the case with the De Lacey's). Moreover, read as an allegorical claim, the passage would indicate that allowing the survival of a part of revolutionary idealism might prove “peaceful and human” instead of

detrimental to the current order of society. Shelley seems to call for the mitigation of both extremes.

In the end, it appears that on this subject as on many others, the novel itself is torn « entre la linéarité du récit et les emboitements de la narration, entre l'optimisme de la révolte et le pessimisme de la résignation, entre la bonté innée du monstre et sa méchanceté acquise » (Lecerclé 25). But the monster is not the only ambiguous figure supposedly embodying theses about the nature of man and the possibility of the realisation of a rationalist utopia. The De Laceys, who are the perfect representation of the philosophical tradition of *kalos kagathos* and the ideal of a life remote from civilisation and in harmony with nature (which closely resembles the Rousseauistic utopia), actually represent the failure of fantasy. While they exemplify the ideals of benevolence and acceptance the monster longs for, they will betray him and teach him a bitter lesson about the actual nature of man. In this regard, the exchange that takes place between the monster and the blind man is revealing:

These amiable people to whom I go have never seen me and know little of me. I am full of fears, for if I fail there, I am an outcast in the world forever.'

'Do not despair. To be friendless is indeed to be unfortunate, but the hearts of men, when unprejudiced by any obvious self-interest, are full of brotherly love and charity. (Shelley 159)

Both speakers argue for the natural goodness of man, even though they have both already suffered from the dire consequences of excessive trust confronted to wickedness and egoism. Unfortunately, the monster must learn to take into account both the prejudices against his physical appearance ("They are kind—they are the most excellent creatures in the world; but, unfortunately, they are prejudiced against me." Shelley 159), which do not contradict the philosophical tradition he is drawing from, and the other, deeper argument, that of his own inhumanity, which must necessarily prevent him from weaving any form of relationship with men: the old man can only promise to "be in any way serviceable to *a human creature*." (Shelley 160, italics mine).

Furthermore, the model of life they represent has become outdated and cannot hope to remain ahistorical forever, and history (Revolution) reminds them of their partaking in a larger context through the irruption of the monster, who is to them both a factor of progress (by working for them) and a disruptive and potentially lethal force. And indeed, the setting on fire of the cottage



comes as the natural conclusion to the utopian parenthesis, and the arcadian fantasy the creature indulged in must be burnt to ashes, in an ironic fulfilling of his earlier prophecy by which he had told the old man “You raise me from the dust by this kindness” (Shelley 160). The only conclusion to his attempt at communication with human beings in that to dust he shall return, as indeed only the destruction of Frankenstein’s body on the funeral pyre can put an end to this tale of woe.

Moreover, the scene “of almost ritualistic destruction has the quality of a purging or purification: as if the creature must destroy the vestiges of the family life to which he became ‘devoted’. His disillusionment with the family is measured in this violent scene.”<sup>28</sup> The implications here are twofold: first, in order to go on with his own personal development, the monster needs to get rid of the remnants of a vanished past he could never have been a part of. Secondly, the vision of the revolution presented here remains ambiguous, as the revolutionary mob burns down the last dykes to his anger, i.e. the bonds of friendship, natural affection and hierarchy, (landed) property and 18<sup>th</sup> century values. However, as Haggerty notes, “his actions reflect the violence with which they threatened him”<sup>29</sup>, thus introducing an idea of either retaliation or self-defence implying that the new generation has a right to fight for its survival.

Eventually, the monster’s progression throughout the novel from a benevolent creature to a remorseless murderer seeking the destruction of his maker at any price reads like the negative inversion of Godwin’s narrative of benevolence as a cardinal virtue leading to the ever increasing betterment of man. In this regard, the dedication to Godwin which opens up the novel reads like a direct engagement with and rebuttal of the theories championed by the author’s father, especially in his claims that “There is no characteristic of man, which seems at present at least so eminently to distinguish him, or to be of so much importance in every branch of moral science, as his perfectibility” and additionally that “there is no science that is not capable of additions; there is no art that may not be carried to a still higher perfection. If this be true of all other sciences, why not of morals? If this be true of all other arts, why not of social institution?”<sup>30</sup>. The ideals of reason, virtue and sociability fail to produce happiness in Shelley’s

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<sup>28</sup> Haggerty, George E. ‘What Is Queer About Frankenstein?’ in Smith, Andrew (ed.). *The Cambridge Companion to Frankenstein*. Cambridge University Press, 2016, pp. 116-27, p.118.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Godwin, William. *Enquiry concerning political justice and its influence on morals and happiness*. J. Watson, 1842, p.27.

Gothic tale, hampering the hopes for progress.

However, as the century progresses, the ambivalence becomes less prominent as writers gradually seem to indulge in pessimism and reject theories of the inherent goodness of man and of its perfectibility. In this regard, Stevenson's *The Strange Case* presents us with the inability to escape the base instincts of man; yet, the position defended by the author is not entirely clear, as the evil side seems to prevail over man's best efforts to control it.

The main thesis of the novel is the double nature of man, as clearly expressed in the sentence that encapsulates the core of the plot: "all human beings, as we meet them, are commingled out of good and evil: and Edward Hyde, alone in the ranks of mankind, was pure evil." (Stevenson 78). And indeed, the main moral message to be taken from this novel, which, perhaps because of the personality of its author, is a clearly didactic or moralistic one, is that little can be done to alter the nature of man, and that no attempt to do so should be made. Describing himself, Jekyll notes that

It was thus rather the exacting nature of my aspirations than any particular degradation in my faults, that made me what I was and, with even a deeper trench than in the majority of men, severed in me those provinces of good and ill which divide and compound man's dual nature. (Stevenson 73-74)

Throughout the novel, the dual nature of man is posited as a given of nature; and Jekyll's enterprise appears as the desperate attempt of a foolish and conceited man to conceal his vices. However, the novel does not present us with ordinary levels of goodness or evil that would make man mediocre in both his vices and virtues. On the contrary, the balance between Jekyll and Hyde is broken since, while Jekyll retains a full consciousness of his double nature and is able to morally disapprove of his evil twin's actions, Hyde is presented as "pure evil"; and while Jekyll is able to feel regrets and fears, the only sentiments Hyde experiences are fury and hatred, until the moment of his death. Hyde appears as little more than the exaggeration of the tendencies inherent to man, and his evilness is crystallised by the breaking of the balance between instincts and reason that is the toll of every other man. Jekyll notes that

The pleasures which I made haste to seek in my disguise were, as I have said, undignified; I would scarce use a harder term. But in the hands of Edward Hyde, they soon began to turn toward the monstrous. When I would come back from these excursions, I was often plunged into a kind of wonder at my vicarious depravity. This familiar that I called out of my own soul, and sent forth alone to do his good pleasure, was a being inherently malign and

villainous; his every act and thought centred on self; drinking pleasure with bestial avidity from any degree of torture to another; relentless like a man of stone. (Stevenson 81)

So while Hyde's actions are the hyperbolic expression of Jekyll's undisclosed desires, they remain their mere exaggeration and can be supposed to be of a similar nature (see part II on the discussion on masturbation and sexual degeneracy in Victorian England). Therefore, Stevenson seems to argue that man is inherently morally tainted, and that while a life of suppression and self-restraint can allow the individual to remain on the path of virtue and righteousness (albeit at the price of a certain degree of hypocrisy and self-denial breeding frustration, or an "aversion to the dryness of a life of study" Stevenson 79), it is all too easy to relax the grasp of moral conscience and let it slumber.

That night I had come to the fatal cross-roads. Had I approached my discovery in a more noble spirit, had I risked the experiment while under the empire of generous or pious aspirations, all must have been otherwise, and from these agonies of death and birth, I had come forth an angel instead of a fiend. The drug had no discriminating action; it was neither diabolical nor divine; it but shook the doors of the prison-house of my disposition; and like the captives of Philippi, that which stood within ran forth. At that time my virtue slumbered; my evil, kept awake by ambition, was alert and swift to seize the occasion; and the thing that was projected was Edward Hyde. Hence, although I had now two characters as well as two appearances, one was wholly evil, and the other was still the old Henry Jekyll, that incongruous compound of whose reformation and improvement I had already learned to despair. The movement was thus wholly toward the worse. (Stevenson 79)

While Jekyll will not disavow the opinion that man is first and foremost a compound, he cannot deny that the evil side of his personality must often prevail over its virtuous counterpart. The whole passage relies on a system of binary oppositions, neither being satisfactory in their own right; and Jekyll either indulges in a self-aggrandising fantasy of himself as "an angel" or paints his moral character in the darkest light. Eventually, the doctor must realise that the nature of man is compound, that the evil side must necessarily prevail over the benevolent one, and that no "pure" human type leaning towards goodness can be created.

Moreover, the tale engages with 19<sup>th</sup> century theories of atavism and degeneracy, as we shall see more at length in the second part of this study. Not only is Hyde's appearance a reflection of his defective moral character ("Evil besides (which I must still believe to be the lethal side of man) had left on that body an imprint of deformity and decay." (Stevenson 78), it is made the embodiment of the theory that one's appearance determines one's moral character through the

issue of size:

The evil side of my nature [...] was less robust and less developed than the good [...] In the course of my life, which had been, after all, nine-tenths a life of effort, virtue, and control, it had been much less exercised and much less exhausted. And hence, as I think, it came about that Edward Hyde was so much smaller (Stevenson 78).

But those theories also derive from an interest in Darwinism and the notion of the kinship between man and animals. Indeed, throughout the novel, Hyde is described by Jekyll as “the animal within [him]”. By the end of the novel, as Jekyll’s confession unfolds, the doctor refers to how he “lay caged in his flesh” (Stevenson 94) very much like an animal. It remains unclear whether the parallel with an ape is entirely negative though, as Hyde is much more alive than any other character in the novel: Jekyll remarks the

ape-like tricks that he would play me, scrawling in my own hand blasphemies on the pages of my books, burning the letters and destroying the portrait of my father; and indeed, had it not been for his fear of death, he would long ago have ruined himself in order to involve me in the ruin. But his love of life is wonderful; I go further: I, who sicken and freeze at the mere thought of him, when I recall the abjection and passion of this attachment, and when I know how he fears my power to cut him off by suicide, I find it in my heart to pity him. (Stevenson 94)

While Jekyll’s feeling towards Hyde surprisingly entail a paternal sense of responsibility and pity towards his ungodly offspring, what is most striking about this passage is the lust for life Hyde exhibits, and his willingness to do everything in his power to survive. The resurgence of the survival instinct atrophied in the modern man (a fact Nietzsche would deplore) is another hint at the dual nature of man, not only conceived as the opposition between good and evil, nor civilisation and primitivity, but also as both a rational being and an animal.

While *The Island of Doctor Moreau* is not much concerned with philosophical theories attached to the nature of man, it indirectly wrestles with the philosophical issues associated to the twofold nature of man. Unlike *Frankenstein*, which revolves around the dichotomy between life and death, and the material and the spiritual, and *The Strange Case*, which is infused with Christian beliefs about the body / soul and good / evil dichotomies, *The Island* is a reflection on the opposition between the natural and the artificial, and the tension between the human and the animal within us. While in the two novels aforementioned, the concern with the nature of man is rather explicit, with Wells it is necessary to keep in mind the global structure of his works

and the part *The Island* plays in it. In his article 'Human Evolution, An Artificial Process', he summarises the core of his argument as follows:

That in civilised man we have (1) an inherited factor, the natural man, who is the product of natural selection, the culminating ape . . . and (2) an acquired factor, the artificial man, the highly plastic creature of tradition, suggestion and reasoned thought. In the artificial man we have all that makes the comforts and securities of a civilisation a possibility . . . And in this view, what we call Morality becomes the padding of suggested emotional habits necessary to keep the round Palaeolithic savage in the square hole of the civilised state. And Sin is the conflict of the two factors - as I have tried to convey in my Island of Dr. Moreau.<sup>31</sup>

So the novel is based on the premise of the dual nature of man as partly indebted to nature and biology and partly indebted to the civilisation and intellectual tradition he grew up in. Unlike Shelley or Stevenson, Wells does not posit the inherently moral nature of man (benevolent with the former, sinful with the latter); on the contrary, morality is a thoroughly social notion that only helps subdue the natural instincts of the species and is necessary to life in community.

While Wells's works border on science fiction and are inspired by Darwinism, it is tempting to read *The Island* as part of a broader tradition of animal fables<sup>32</sup>, which uses animals to represent the society of men; which in this case is even more striking as the Beast-people are in between man and animal. Prendick claims to see in them "the whole balance of human life in miniature, the whole interplay of instinct, reason and fate in its simplest form" (Wells 120), thus hinting at the necessity to interpret the fable as a reflection on human societies, and human beings themselves. Moreover, even as he returns to civilisation (i.e., London), the confrontation with his human peers is not enough to shake off the impression that life on the island was remarkably similar to life in a metropolis: "ironically, after living with them for ten months, he increasingly sees the Beast People as an image of humanity; and when he returns to London, sees in Londoners the image of the beasts." (Jones 129).

What, then, does *The Island* tell us about the nature of man? Above all, it is remarkable through its confrontation of two hypotheses: either there is no nature of man, and animals can be turned

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<sup>31</sup> Wells, Herbert George. 'Human Evolution, An Artificial Process', in Philmus, Robert & Hughes, David Y. (eds.). *H. G. Wells: Early Writings in Science and Science Fiction*. University of California Press, 1975, p.210.

<sup>32</sup> Jones, Myrddin. 'Orwell, Wells and the Animal Fable', in *English: The Journal of the English Association* 33, No. 146, 1984, pp. 127-36, p.129.

into men, or there is such a thing as a natural instinct which cannot be reformed, even through education. Since he claims to have chosen the human form out of aesthetic curiosity, one cannot expect Moreau to dwell very much on the philosophical implications of his choice. His take on the matter is grossly direct and materialistic: “the great difference between man and monkey is in the larynx, he continued,— in the incapacity to frame delicately different sound-symbols by which thought could be sustained.” (Wells 90). The doctor does not seem to believe in the innate superiority of man or indeed even in the existence of a human soul, though he claims to be a Christian.

However, his experiments lead him to engage with the question of education, and whether natural instinct can be tamed. At first, he would seem to reject the claim and argue that since the mind is ruled by the body, the simple transformation of the brain structure through vivisection might be enough to affect the intellect: “the possibilities of vivisection do not stop at a mere physical metamorphosis; a pig may be educated. The mental structure is even less determinate than the bodily” (Wells 89). And yet, at several points during his confession to Prendick, he mentions his failed attempts at instilling a moral sense or intellectual abilities in some of his creatures. For instance, he initially thought that vivisection would be enough to positively transform the gorilla he experimented on:

Then I took a gorilla I had; and upon that, working with infinite care and mastering difficulty after difficulty, I made my first man. With him it was chiefly the brain that needed moulding; much had to be added, much changed. I thought him a fair specimen of the negroid type when I had finished him (Wells 94).

Since his initial aim was to make his “first man”, Moreau seems to believe that physical alteration is enough to turn an animal into a member of the human species, albeit into a representant of one of the “lower races”. And yet, this primitive man needs to be refined through education to become a proper member of society. The first steps in this education are purely mechanical, in keeping with Moreau’s theory, and revolve around the learning of language:

I spent many days educating the brute [...] I taught him the rudiments of English; gave him ideas of counting; even made the thing read the alphabet. But at that he was slow, though I’ve met with idiots slower. He began with a clean sheet, mentally; had no memories left in his mind of what he had been. (Wells 94)

While this first part of his education is successful, the gorilla must then become socialised with the Kanaka men (even though their initial reaction is one of fear). Integration appears to succeed

at first:

they received him and took his education in hand. He was quick to learn, very imitative and adaptive, and built himself a hovel rather better, it seemed to me, than their own shanties. There was one among the boys a bit of a missionary, and he taught the thing to read, or at least to pick out letters, and gave him some rudimentary ideas of morality (Wells 95)

Here appears the most delicate part of one's education: the instillation of moral values. While this concern may appear moot compared to the more impressive and abstract notions required to learn how to master language, it is actually the most important and useful tool to shape the beasts' morality since "the beast's habits were not all that is desirable." (Wells 95) and they have a natural tendency to regress: "the stubborn beast-flesh grows day by day back again [...] I mean to conquer that." (Wells 95). As Myrrdin Jones explains: "consequently, by using hypnotism, he attempts to replace 'old inherent instincts by new suggestions'" (Jones 127), which translates into the transubstantiation of baser instincts into moral ideas useful to life in a society: "Very much indeed of what we call moral education, he said, is such an artificial modification and perversion of instinct; pugnacity is trained into courageous self-sacrifice, and suppressed sexuality into religious emotion." (Wells 89-90).

Morality is thus not something that is inherent to the nature of animals or men. Religious discourse simply happens to be the most efficient tool to prevent the Beast-people from rebelling, and to encourage them to fight off their natural instincts: "a series of propositions called the Law battled in their minds with the deep-seated, ever-rebellious cravings of their animal natures." (Wells 101). Yet, Prendick immediately adds that "this Law they were ever repeating, I found, and ever breaking." (Wells 101), undermining the belief in the virtue of education to subdue natural instinct, and ultimately the belief in reason or morality as being on par with natural instinct.

The image of man that is thus defended is that of creatures given to their instincts, and in which civilisation and outer respectability are but a social veneer. Prendick must make great efforts to remind himself that his belief that Londoners are also Beast-people "is an illusion; that these seeming men and women about [him] are indeed men and women,— men and women for ever, perfectly reasonable creatures, full of human desires and tender solicitude, emancipated from instinct and the slaves of no fantastic Law" (Wells 168). But the fact that this should prove impossible is telling of the actual nature of man according to Wells: creatures that are not reasonable, nor noble, and still a prey to their instincts. And he goes even further by constantly

repeating the idea that education and civilisation can actually do very little to alter this innate fact.

We have so far seen different ways of conceptualising the nature of man. But the debate needs to take into account his tendency to sociability, and once more, it is man's social behaviour which is more telling of his nature. Here, interestingly, the most complex debate is not centred on the protagonists of the novels. While both Frankenstein and Jekyll are motivated by self-interest, and a narcissistic drive towards greatness and power, the moral compass of the reader is mainly turned towards their creations. If the monster is initially benevolent, he does display threatening bouts of jealousy and violence - a good example being his fury upon beholding the medallion portrait of Frankenstein's mother :

As I fixed my eyes on the child, I saw something glittering on his breast. I took it; it was a portrait of a most lovely woman. In spite of my malignity, it softened and attracted me. For a few moments I gazed with delight on her dark eyes, fringed by deep lashes, and her lovely lips; but presently my rage returned; I remembered that I was forever deprived of the delights that such beautiful creatures could bestow and that she whose resemblance I contemplated would, in regarding me, have changed that air of divine benignity to one expressive of disgust and affright. Can you wonder that such thoughts transported me with rage? (Shelley 171)

Hyde exhibits a similar tendency to consider others only in relation to himself and in terms of the (sadistic) pleasure or interest he might derive from them. Individuals are not valued for themselves but in terms of transactional relations.

But what is more interesting is the reactions of the secondary characters to them, which are dependent on both a form of herd or mob mentality and a strong rejection of the monstrous Other, in an attempt to preserve the social order. The societies that we are presented with seem to rely heavily on the notion of sacrifice as studied by René Girard.

Sacrifice [...] can be defined solely in terms of the sacred, without reference to any particular divinity; that is, it can be defined in terms of maleficent violence polarized by the victim and metamorphosed by his death (or expulsion from the community, which amounts to the same thing) into beneficent violence. Although the sacred is "bad" when it is inside the community, it is "good" when it returns to the exterior. The language of pure sacredness retains whatever is most fundamental to myth and religion; it detaches violence from a man to make it a separate, impersonal entity, a sort of fluid substance that flows everywhere and impregnates



on contact. The concept of contagion is obviously a by-product of this way of envisaging the sacred. As a concept contagion makes empirical sense in many cases, but it is mythic insofar as it ignores the reciprocal aspect of violence; it literally reifies the violence that is active in human relationships by transforming it into a pseudo-substance. Though generally *less* mythic than the language of divinity, the language of pure sacredness is *more* mythic in that it eliminates the final traces of the real victims, thereby concealing the fact that the sacred cannot function without surrogate victims.<sup>33</sup> (Girard 294)

Close to Mary Douglas's analysis of the concept of pollution, Girard argues that the *raison d'être* of a sacrifice is to redirect the violence raging inside the community and threatening its viability towards the exterior, often through the ritual murder of a victim designated as responsible for the disturbances occurring within the community. The ritual murder and the victim are both endowed with a sense of sacredness, as they allow for the redirection of violence and ultimately bring good to the community, and must be isolated as "the sacred needs to be continually hedged in with prohibitions. The sacred must always be treated as contagious because relations with it are bound to be expressed by rituals of separation and demarcation and by beliefs in the danger of crossing forbidden boundaries" (Douglas 22).

The monster is an obvious representative of the figure of the scape goat, since he is constantly shunned by man. Noting that as he approached it "The whole village was roused; some fled, some attacked [him]" (Shelley 123), the monster unconsciously underlines the unifying effect he has on the villagers, forcing them to act as a coordinated body (or a mob) rather than as a superposition of individuals. Similarly, Frankenstein is at the mercy of a crowd after Clerval's death, of which he is suspected to be responsible: "several people crowded towards the spot. They seemed much surprised at my appearance, but instead of offering me any assistance, whispered together with gestures that at any other time might have produced in me a slight sensation of alarm." (Shelley 112), and rightly so, since the mob grows increasingly accusative and threatening, leaving Frankenstein to fear for his life: "While this strange dialogue continued, I perceived the crowd rapidly increase. Their faces expressed a mixture of curiosity and anger, which annoyed and in some degree alarmed me." (Shelley 113). Herd mentality and its propensity to misjudge a situation and resort to violence is even more painfully demonstrated by the reaction to Justine's accusation and eventual sentencing: "I perceived that the popular

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<sup>33</sup> Girard, René, *Violence and the Sacred*. Bloomsbury, 1988.

voice and the countenances of the judges had already condemned my unhappy victim” (Shelley 95). Roused by emotion at the death of a child, and perhaps fearing for its safety, the mob disregards previous accounts of morality to designate a culprit and sacrifice her for the apparent good of the community.

The image of fire is a recurrent element in both novels and always comes closely associated with the outsider’s power to make the other characters unite against him. While we have alluded to the purifying effects of the fire earlier while discussing *Frankenstein*, and their role in reducing to ashes the unrealistic fantasy of a life of harmony between the monster and cottagers, the ambivalence of this element is alluded to from the very moment Frankenstein beholds the blasting of the tree (“I beheld a stream of fire issue from an old and beautiful oak which stood about twenty yards from our house; and so soon as the dazzling light vanished, the oak had disappeared, and nothing remained but a blasted stump.” Shelley 37); and is torn between amazement at the power of the elements and sadness at the destruction of the “old and beautiful oak” symbolising permanence and tradition.

Similarly, the monster is greatly confused by the opposite properties of the fire, since he describes his first encounter with it as bewildering: “I was overcome with delight at the warmth I experienced from it. In my joy I thrust my hand into the live embers, but quickly drew it out again with a cry of pain. How strange, I thought, that the same cause should produce such opposite effects!” (Shelley 120). It is simultaneously closely linked to the Miltonic imagery of “the demons of hell after their sufferings in the lake of fire” (Shelley 122) and therefore indirectly to the sufferings of the monster himself, and also to the possibility of acceptance as the monster asks the blind man whether he would allow him “to remain a few minutes before the fire” (Shelley 158) to alleviate his fatigue and solitude, in hopes of bonding with the old man.

In *The Strange Case*, Hyde accomplishes the miracle of uniting the different protagonists in spite of their different social backgrounds and diverging interests, in their common hatred of him. The fear that foul play involving Hyde and his master may have occurred is strong enough to lead Poole to take drastic measures and go fetch Utterson in hopes he might help the servants:

MR. UTTERSON was sitting by his fireside one evening after dinner, when he was surprised to receive a visit from Poole. ‘Bless me, Poole, what brings you here?’ he cried; and then taking a second look at him, ‘What ails you?’ he added; ‘is the doctor ill?’ ‘Mr. Utterson,’ said the man, ‘there is something wrong.’ Take a seat, and here is a glass of wine for you,’

said the lawyer. (Stevenson 47)

The extent to which Poole's action is a social transgression is visible in Utterson's initial reaction of surprise, and in turn leads him to let go of propriety by pouring himself the butler a glass of wine. It is all the more obvious as Utterson is visibly riddled with class prejudices, as "he observed with wonder the greatness of the relief that appeared upon the butler's face, and perhaps with no less, that the wine was still untasted when he set it down to follow" (Stevenson 48). As both men enter Jekyll's house, they find the servants huddled together, anxiously waiting for their arrival:

The hall, when they entered it, was brightly lighted up; the fire was built high; and about the hearth the whole of the servants, men and women, stood huddled together like a flock of sheep. At the sight of Mr. Utterson, the housemaid broke into hysterical whimpering; and the cook, crying out, 'Bless God! it's Mr. Utterson,' ran forward as if to take him in her arms. (Stevenson 49)

The gathering of the servants in front of the fire reads like a congregation of believers waiting for some great miracle to be performed by a man endowed with sacredness and spiritual powers, in this case Utterson. The religious nature of the scene is highlighted by the comparison between the servants and a "flock of sheep", which alludes to the recurrent biblical metaphor and directly echoes Girard's analysis of the herd mentality and sacrifice of the scapegoat.

The first instance of this unity against him, however, is even more telling. As Hyde tramps the little girl, a lawyer and upstanding gentleman, a poor little girl (of dubious moral life since she was out on her own at "three o'clock o[n] a black winter morning" (Stevenson 6), her working-class family and a middle-class doctor described as "the usual cut-and-dry apothecary, of no particular age and colour, with a strong Edinburgh accent, and about as emotional as a bagpipe" (Stevenson 7) all side together as they partake in the same immediate, intense disgust for Hyde, which Enfield describes as "a loathing... at first sight" (Stevenson 6) on his part, while the doctor "was like the rest of us; every time he looked at my prisoner, I saw that Sawbones turn sick and white with the desire to kill him" (Stevenson 7). While it is understandable for any human being to feel a deep wave of disgust towards an individual capable of hurting a child, Enfield analyses the situation as more than a natural reaction, as suggested by the very strong vocabulary that he uses ("the desire to kill"). Moreover, it is not the first time that Hyde's strange influence over the people around him is remarked upon, as during their first encounter Utterson describes Hyde as "small and very plainly dressed, and the look of him, even at that

distance, went somehow strongly against the watcher's inclination" (Stevenson 17). Murder is on the front of their minds, and the characters seem to unite in a form of telepathic communion, with Enfield noting that "I knew what was in his mind, just as he knew what was in mine; and killing being out of the question, we did the next best", hinting at the similarity of their feelings as well as at the desire to suppress the threat embodied by Hyde.

It remains unclear whether collective murder is truly "out of the question" as the description goes on. Indeed, the scene reads like a sacrificial, murderous mob ready to take action to dispose of the wretch amongst them:

all the time, as we were pitching it in red hot, we were keeping the women off him as best we could, for they were as wild as harpies. I never saw a circle of such hateful faces; and there was the man in the middle, with a kind of black, sneering coolness — frightened too, I could see that — but carrying it off, sir, really like Satan. (Stevenson 7)

Hyde himself, though normally unfazed by strong display of aggressivity towards him, is struck by the strong sense of danger that transpires from the crowd: "there was something about the lot of us that meant mischief, and at last he struck" (Stevenson 7). The allusion to Satan (a comparison already drawn by Utterson earlier in the novel, as he lamented the fate of Jekyll: "O my poor old Harry Jekyll, if ever I read Satan's signature upon a face, it is on that of your new friend.", Stevenson 19) only serves to reinforce the impression that Hyde is a dark force, a demon that must be exorcised or disposed of for the greater good of society – and also contributes to the ritualistic dimension of the scene as one of designation of the evil force to be driven out. The choice of the colloquial phrase "red hot" is the final addition that conjures up images of ritualistic sacrifice destined to purify society from the intruder.

And yet the characters' willingness to destroy the outsider is always justified by his actions, and coincide with the main function of the sacrifice of the scapegoat, which is to "prevent a recurrence of destructive violence" (Girard 295) and the spreading of contagion, i.e. violence. The scapegoat must thus necessarily be an entirely destructive and evil force, and should it not be the case, as with the monster, it must be perceived and constructed to be so. The question then at stake is that of the legitimacy of their actions. In Hyde's case there can be no doubt, since he is intended to be a purely evil creature; and yet, Lanyon's analysis of his disgust towards him is questionable :

At the time, I set it down to some idiosyncratic, personal distaste, and merely wondered at the acuteness of the symptoms; but I have since had reason to believe the cause to lie much

deeper in the nature of man, and to turn on some nobler hinge than the principle of hatred.  
(Stevenson 68)

It is unclear whether that “reason to believe” is merely an allusion to the detailed explanation of the birth of such a creature, or whether it has darker implications. Indeed, the vagueness of the statement combined with the aggressive use of the term “reason” is very reminiscent of the linguistic forms used to allude to rumours or sources of uncertain knowledge. As for the allusion to a “nobler” motivation than sheer idiosyncratic dislike for Hyde, it can be a hint at the necessity of the sacrifice of the scapegoat to preserve the cohesion of the community – but it could also be interpreted as an attempt to rationalise what is ultimately also part of “the nature of man” i.e. the herd mentality associated to a desire for blood and the designation of an obvious culprit for the malfunctioning of society. As Mary Douglas observes, “It is only by exaggerating the difference between within and without, male and female, above and below, with and against, that a semblance of order is created” (Douglas 4), meaning that the phenomena of exaggeration of differences is inherently punitive and exclusionary.

This hypothesis seems all the more convincing as “nobler” moral principles are actually remarkably absent in the novel: Jekyll himself recognises his main motivation to have been self-interest and pride, and religion is conspicuously absent. The morality of the protagonists is entirely replaced by a system of “reputation” that steps in its place, and social order very much relies on the concealing of the baser, questionable actions of most characters (Utterson’s nightly shenanigans, the suspicions of blackmail and homosexuality, etc). Those indications of the acute consciousness of the author that Victorian male circles rely on a “don’t ask, don’t tell” policy undermines the moral argument defended by Lanyon.

Another element that contributes to this effect is how unfazed the characters are by the obvious moral(istic) undertones of Jekyll’s tale (which are one of the reasons he refuses to disclose the formula of the potion he used): while they all agree that Hyde is sheer evil and should be suppressed, and that his death was the natural conclusion to his criminal career, none of them questions their own motivations and the evil presence or “animal” lurking inside of them. Far from being a cautionary tale of self-betterment, Jekyll’s woes only serve to reinforce the other character’s sense of entitlement and self-righteousness. Once the Other has been disposed of, there is no reason to devote too much attention to issues of morality anymore, and they are all free to resume their dual lives. In this they are very similar to Jekyll who simply brushed aside Hyde’s actions as entirely independent of his will, arguing that

the situation was apart from ordinary laws, and insidiously relaxed the grasp of conscience. It was Hyde, after all, and Hyde alone, that was guilty. Jekyll was no worse; he woke again to his good qualities seemingly unimpaired; he would even make haste, where it was possible, to undo the evil done by Hyde. And thus his conscience slumbered. (Stevenson 81)

In the same way, Utterson and Enfield are able to silence their moral conscience and read Jekyll's tale as "apart from ordinary laws", meaning that no lesson can be drawn from his strange tale. The very structure of the "case" also contributes to the labelling of the story as a pathological abnormality, whose rules do not apply to common experience.

Even though the setting of the story is quite different, and the stakes are much higher in terms of actual survival, *The Island of Doctor Moreau* presents the reader with a number of similar concerns, especially in the episode of the chase and killing of the Leopard-man. The killing of the Leopard-man corresponds to a logical necessity, with an initial situation rather similar to that described by Girard: a community in the midst of despair and disarray, because of the killing of a rabbit by one of the Beast-people, i.e. the transgression of one of the laws that hold society together. Because of the possibility that the tasting of blood might encourage reversion to the animal nature of the Beast-people and undo Moreau and Montgomery's work to educate them, the essence of the social link uniting all the inhabitants is endangered and social hierarchies are challenged by an act of rebellion against the authority of the men ruling the island. Moreau's reaction is to assemble the congregation of the Beast-People in order to publicly punish the transgressor, as the punishment must act as a deterrent ("We must make an example" Wells 111). However, the necessity to act in public is also motivated by the desire to bring the community closer by having them all partake in the punishing, in this case the chase and killing, of the Leopard-man.

The whole scene reads like a religious ceremony, as illustrated by Prendick's description: "Imagine the scene if you can! We three blue-clad men, with our misshapen black-faced attendant, standing in a wide expanse of sunlit yellow dust under the blazing blue sky, and surrounded by this circle of crouching and gesticulating monstrosities" (Wells 113). The insistence on the essential separation between the officiants (by virtue of both their humanity and matching outfits) and the congregation that surrounds them is a circle is reminiscent of a number of religious ceremonies. Moreau blaring his horn acts as a signal that the ordinary laws of the community are suspended during the sacrifice.

The line between religious and social ceremonies is thus blurred, and religious rituals become

a tool to hold a society together, which is consistent with Girard's claim that all social and cultural institutions are rooted in the sacred. During the scene, the social hierarchy enforced on the island is mimicked by the roles attributed to the participants: while the three men stand at the top of the hierarchy, within the Beast-people one is distinguished as the Sayer of the Law and endowed with the responsibility to declaim the rules holding society together.

The scene is written so as to build up suspense and a sense of anticipation. As Moreau urges the creatures to start repeating the 'litany' of the law, he delegates some of his power to the Sayer of the Law while actually manoeuvring towards the disclosure of the breaching of the rules:

‘Say the words!’ said Moreau. Forthwith all in the kneeling assembly, swaying from side to side and dashing up the sulphur with their hands,—first the right hand and a puff of dust, and then the left,—began once more to chant their strange litany. When they reached, ‘Not to eat Flesh or Fowl, that is the Law,’ Moreau held up his lank white hand. ‘Stop!’ he cried, and there fell absolute silence upon them all. I think they all knew and dreaded what was coming. I looked round at their strange faces. When I saw their wincing attitudes and the furtive dread in their bright eyes, I wondered that I had ever believed them to be men. (Wells 114)

This passage is crucial on two levels of interpretation: first, it reminds the reader of the quintessential late 19<sup>th</sup> century claim that education as a reformation tool is useless against a strong natural instinct, and that human (?) behaviour is determined by biology. Secondly, the dramatization reveals the theatricality inherent to any social ritual or gathering, in a nod to the irrational lurking behind seemingly organised social institutions.

The sacrificial scene in itself is very typical of what Girard suggests. The chase is set off by the signal given by Moreau when he shoots at the Leopard-man:

I heard the crack of Moreau's pistol, and saw the pink flash dart across the tumult. The whole crowd seemed to swing round in the direction of the glint of fire, and I too was swung round by the magnetism of the movement. (Wells 116)

Once more, the allusion to fire reads as a signal for the beginning of the second phase of this socio-religious ritual. By noting how entranced and transfixed he was, Prendick pays tribute to the power of the mob, and to the exhilarating effects of collective action, especially when it is oriented towards the punishing of a sacrificial victim. His remark that “most of us now had lost the first speed of the chase, and had fallen into a longer and steadier stride.” (Wells 117) is also a good illustration of the working of the mob as united body rather than a gathering of individuals – it is quite significant that he should drop the distinction between him and the

Beast-people for the duration of the scene. For all his disgust when he notes the Wolf-bear exhibited “the exultation of hunting” (Wells 117), and constant disclaimers that he was only participating in the chase out of fear for his life should he be left behind with the brutes, Prendick is ultimately the one to murder the Leopard-man and thus complete the sacrifice. Interestingly enough, he appeals to the brute’s humanity to justify his action, and explains that mercy guided his hand (“When I heard that, I forgave the poor wretch all the fear he had inspired in me” Wells 119). What truly matters, however, is not the apparent motivation behind the sacrifice, since, as Girard explains, men can be deceived into thinking that their action is necessary because of the confusion between the symbolic efficiency of the ritual, and its actual effects.

The collective aspect is never lost even though Prendick is the one to formally kill the brute. Indeed, Moreau urges him not to kill it (and his motivations are complex, part of it deriving from the complexity of his work and the value of every animal life, part of it relating to the necessity of punishing the creature rather than merely suppressing it), and several of the Beast-people jump in as well, although their reasons are much more obvious than Moreau’s:

Abruptly I slipped out my revolver, aimed between its terror-struck eyes, and fired. As I did so, the Hyena-swine saw the Thing, and flung itself upon it with an eager cry, thrusting thirsty teeth into its neck. (Wells 119)

While Prendick attributes the reaction of “the excited carnivorous Beast-people” (Wells 119) to their desire to lay hands (and paws) on the body and eat it, their action can also be explained in terms of willingness to partake more fully in what should have been a collective, ritualistic killing and was somehow confiscated by Prendick’s instinctive decision. Whatever their motivations, the salutary effects of the ritual can immediately be observed as

Upon the beach among the rocks beneath me were the Ape-man, the Hyena-swine, and several other of the Beast People, standing about Montgomery and Moreau. They were all still intensely excited, and all overflowing with noisy expressions of their loyalty to the Law; yet I felt an absolute assurance in my own mind that the Hyena-swine was implicated in the rabbit-killing. A strange persuasion came upon me, that, save for the grossness of the line, the grotesqueness of the forms, I had here before me the whole balance of human life in miniature, the whole interplay of instinct, reason, and fate in its simplest form. (Wells 120-21)

In spite of his certainty that the Hyena-swine was not innocent in the killing of the rabbit, and that he might therefore just as well have qualified as a fitting victim for the sacrifice, Prendick must recognise that for the time being the social cohesion on the island has been successfully



salvaged. The fact that the Hyena-swine should have been spared is merely an indication of the ultimately arbitrary nature of the accusations levelled at the sacrificial victim: in this case, the Leopard-man can only blame himself and his momentary weakness (manifested through his attempt to harm Moreau) for his plight, while the Hyena-swine owes his survival to his ability to remain cold-headed and slip under the radar. What truly matters to the upholding of social institutions is not the actual actions of the individual but the capacity to collectively agree on the designation of a victim as responsible for the demise plaguing the community. Prendick's last sentence is also quite telling, in that it is a direct transposition of human social rituals on this animalistic society, and he must acknowledge the veracity of Girard's claim that social life relies on a network of irrational relations manifested through religious or esoteric rituals disguised as mere political phenomena.

All three novels therefore present the reader with unbelievable events that temporarily suspend the ordinary laws of social life and nature. However, in all three cases, they end on the reassertion of the primacy of religious ritual over reason-based social institutions, and on the reaffirmed belief in the necessity for those rituals in order to salvage human relations.

b) “‘Heaven, hast thou secret? Man unveils me: I have none’”: the end of the belief in science as able to account for all observable phenomena

Another crucial part of the engagement between 19<sup>th</sup> century gothic literature and the philosophy of the Enlightenment is the questioning of the possibility, but also of the desirability, of accessing truth at any cost, and coming to a complete understanding of the world.

Wordsworth famously declared that

The knowledge both of the Poet and the Man of science is pleasure; but the knowledge of the one cleaves to us as a necessary part of our existence, our natural and unalienable inheritance; the other is a personal and individual acquisition, slow to come to us, and by no habitual and direct sympathy connecting us with our fellow-beings. The Man of science seeks truth as a remote and unknown benefactor; he cherishes and loves it in his solitude: the Poet, singing a song in which all human beings join with him, rejoices in the presence of truth as our visible friend and hourly companion. Poetry is the breath and finer spirit of all

knowledge; it is the impassioned expression which is in the countenance of all Science.<sup>34</sup>

Wordsworth, a fierce critic of the budding Industrial Revolution he blamed for the destruction of the landscapes of his beloved Lake District, distinguishes between two models of relation to the truth. One is fruitful, natural, and beneficial to both the individual and the society he lives in – it is that of the Poet. The other, on the contrary, alienates man from the beauty of nature and the company of his peers, and must remain barren knowledge that cannot contribute to the happiness or bettering of the individual – it is the path embraced by the scientists whose rise Wordsworth was distrustful of. Poetry is the only rhetorical way of reconciling the two by infusing the objective knowledge of facts with the breath of life and a deeper sense of meaning.

While discussing the Romantic distrust of modern science and its pretention to do away with the wonders of the natural world by reducing them to physical phenomena that could be explained by a few scientific laws, Roslynn D. Haynes notes that

the Romantics case against Enlightenment science hinged on its reductionist philosophy, for they saw that limiting the universe to a sum of separate, measurable entities limited man as well, since it denied the validity of emotions, nonrational experiences, spiritual longings, and individuality (Haynes 76).

The fear of seeing man reduced to a natural phenomenon amongst many others, desecrating ideals and principles of nobility, love, and disinterestedness, was inconceivable and unforgivable to the first generation of English Romantics, and while some members of its second generation, notably Lord Byron and P.B. Shelley himself, were well-versed in the modern sciences, others gradually refined their mentors' contempt for science, dramatizing the nefarious effects of the unconditional belief in science in poems (Keats' *Lamia*) and prose, as Mary Shelley does, setting a pessimistic example for her Gothic legacy.

In both *Frankenstein* and *The Strange Case*, this ambiguous approach is visible through three main devices: the questioning of the ethics behind scientific research (which will be explored later on), the questioning of the possibility to access a universal, objective truth, and the question of the possibility nefarious consequences of the unveiling of truth.

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<sup>34</sup> Wordsworth, William. *The Lyrical Ballads*, 'A Preface', in *The Poetical Works of William Wordsworth*, vol.1. Peck and Newton, 1836, p.xxiii.

The writing style used by both Shelley and Stevenson is telling of the difficulty inherent to any attempt at communicating a seemingly “objective” truth. Both authors resort to complex narratives devices to create embedded stories. Frankenstein is essentially an epistolary novel, in which Walton tells his sister of both what he witnessed himself and of the tale Frankenstein told him. However, Frankenstein proves to be an unreliable narrator at various points in the novel, since he fails to properly remember events, for instance by changing the wording of the threat the monster levels at him, by changing within the span of a few line his “I shall be with you on your wedding-night” to “I will be with you in your wedding-night” (Shelley 206), thus altering the meaning behind those words; or by refusing to confront an uncomfortable truth in a process reminiscent of the concept of “mauvaise foi” developed by Sartre, which he defines as “une conduite d’excuse, ou, si l’on veut, le fondement de toutes les conduites d’excuses”<sup>35</sup>. The concept of bad faith is interesting in that it is distinct from lying, since it is by definition the action of a subject unconsciously lying to himself as opposed to willingly and consciously lying to other people:

La mauvaise foi... est bien un mensonge à soi. Dans la mauvaise foi c’est à moi-même que je masque la vérité. Il s’ensuit d’abord que celui à qui l’on ment et celui qui ment sont une seule et même personne, ce qui signifie que je dois savoir en tant que trompeur la vérité qui m’est masquée en tant que trompé. ... Pour échapper à ces difficultés, on recourt volontiers à l’inconscient. (Sartre 87-88)

The ambiguity between the subject as both the liar and the one being lied to is particularly fitting for Gothic novels granted the recurrence of the figure of the doppelganger and phenomena relying on the intervention of a double. Bad faith is in this case exemplified by Frankenstein’s refusal to understand the rather obvious threat of retaliation uttered by the monster after the destruction of his own bride. Tellingly enough, Frankenstein, a superiorly intelligent being, is unable to see through a transparent threat so as not to acknowledge his personal responsibility. The same mechanism intervenes when he resolves not to save Justine’s life by confessing to know the identity of William’s murderer on the grounds that his tale would sound unbelievable to a common mind. As such, this phenomenon is present every time the personal responsibility of the subject is at stake. It acts as a shield protecting him from the consequences of his actions. As Sartre explains, lies uttered and believed in in the name of bad faith “rassur[ent] éminemment parce qu’[ils] constituent un jeu permanent d’excuses” (Sartre

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<sup>35</sup> Sartre, Jean-Paul. *L’être et le néant, essai d’ontologie phénoménologique*. Gallimard, 1943, p.78.

78). While the psychological implications of this phenomenon on the character of Frankenstein are interesting in and of themselves, bad faith also sheds doubt on the possibility of actually gaining access to the truth, since even facts one knows can be hidden from one's conscience by an unwilling phenomenon of repression. And since Frankenstein is also trying to gain Walton's sympathy, he is lying to both of them by refusing to acknowledge his responsibility. Not only is truth mediated by the very structure of the novel (the epistolary form), characters directly involved in the action are also alienated from the truth by their own bad faith.

Yet, it would be unfair not to take into account the question of narrative credibility, dubious as it may be as the protagonist's main motivation. As he resolves not to share his knowledge of the identity of the monster, arguing that no one would believe him, Frankenstein is effectively hinting at the failure of communication through logos and the incommunicability of the truth:

My first thought was to discover what I knew of the murderer, and cause instant pursuit to be made. But I paused when I reflected on the story that I had to tell. A being whom I myself had formed, and endued with life, had met me at midnight among the precipices of an inaccessible mountain. I remembered also the nervous fever with which I had been seized just at the time that I dated my creation, and which would give an air of delirium to a tale otherwise so utterly improbable. I well knew that if any other had communicated such a relation to me, I should have looked upon it as the ravings of insanity. [...] These reflections determined me, and I resolved to remain silent. (Shelley 85-6)

Silence is the only outcome as naked truth cannot be communicated, since human interactions are bound within the limits of the credible.

Moreover, the question of the truth is further complexified as Shelley must distinguish between forms of truth, with factual or scientific truth being opposed to moral and emotional truth. As Elizabeth declares when complaining to Frankenstein about the unfairness of Justine's condemnation, "I know, I feel she was innocent; you are of the same opinion, and that confirms me. Alas! Victor, when falsehood can look so like the truth, who can assure themselves of certain happiness?" (Shelley 105). Not only is this passage interesting because Elizabeth links the question of truth to that of happiness, hinting at their contradictory nature, it is also telling of a separation of truth between different orders, reminiscent of the Pascalian analysis. In his Provincial Letters, Pascal argued for the separation of knowledge between different regions which each depended on a specific capacity of the mind, either reason or faith: "How do we learn the truth about facts? That will be from our eyes ... which are the appropriate judges of fact, as reason is of natural and intelligible things, and the faith is of things that are supernatural

and revealed”. ‘The faith’ is not simply any religious faith; it is a specific kind of belief dealing with the revelations and truths of the heart. By arguing that she can actually *feel* that Justine must be innocent, Elizabeth claims to have faith in her, hinting at the superior nature of that knowledge against seemingly irrefutable facts, including Justine’s own confession.<sup>36</sup>

Finally, even Frankenstein’s recalling of the events depends on the veracity of the information he has been told by other characters, most notably the monster, who tells him of his wanderings in Switzerland and his life with the De Laceys, but also of the information he is given by Elizabeth, Clerval or his father’s letters informing him of the death of William and subsequent trial of Justine. The latter case is perhaps the most laden with interpretation, as Justine confesses to an act Frankenstein knows she is not guilty of, and thus their identity briefly merges as both seem responsible for the murder of William. Justine’s contradictory discourse about her responsibility (or lack thereof) in the murder contributes to a reflection on truth, since she admits to lying and now fears the consequences of that lie in the eyes of God more than the death sentence she has received: ‘I did confess, but I confessed a lie. I confessed, that I might obtain absolution; but now that falsehood lies heavier at my heart than all my other sins. [...] In an evil hour I subscribed to a lie’ (Shelley 97). The logical (and religious) inconsistency between the act of confession and lying is a direct hint at the difficulty to articulate a narrative of truth even in a context that favours honesty as a discursive strategy.

If accessing the truth is that difficult for the characters of the story, it is even more so for the reader, who must also take into account the stylistic flourishes and rhetoric of all characters, while simultaneously being warned that the whole (of a narrative) cannot be reduced to the sum of its parts, as made tragically obvious by the monster’s incapacity to become and be recognised as fully human even though he is composed of human body parts. Therefore, the reader is reminded that his knowledge of the events occurring in the novel has been filtered through different levels of mediation by narrators with contradictory interpretations and interests. It could thus be that the constant references to mythology (including the myth of Prometheus present in the subtitle) and Christian elements reveals the failure of logos, the type of rational discourse favoured in Western thought, to convey the deeper meaning of the novel (and of

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<sup>36</sup> Pascal, Blaise. *The Provincial Letters, letter I*. Chicago 1952, p.180.

psychic life), and the necessity to abandon a rhetoric based on facts and the linear narration of events to focus instead on the arch-mythos underlying the mental principles and representations of the characters and readers alike.

Stevenson's tale is just as dependent on a multi-layered narration of events, as the structure of the novel is that of a case composed of a main narrative (told by an omniscient narrator following the adventures of Utterson) and by a series of letters, wills, and oral testimonies of the strange events occurring in the streets of London. The very choice of the genre of the Gothic romance which he favours over the naturalist / realist novel gaining popularity in his days is an acknowledgment that the disclosure of truths about human nature parts way with a strictly realistic account of everyday life. The aesthetics of the novella are reconciled to its themes, as the various letters scattered in the novel, which contain most of the useful explanations the reader needs, echo the theme of multiplicity of points of view and perspectives on events. If the theme of duality and secrecy was not a sufficient indication of the importance of the topic in the novel, Stevenson also reinforces this notion through the fragmentary nature of the narrative which is told from different points of view, including third person narration. "This kind of restless narrative mobility echoes the instability of the self, but also the very emptiness of that self"<sup>37</sup> and alerts the reader about the fragmentary nature of truth itself.

The characters often question their ability to access truth, especially in its written form, first when Utterson and Enfield discuss the veracity of Hyde's cheque to the family of the young girl he nearly killed: "I gave in the check myself, and said I had every reason to believe it was a forgery. Not a bit of it. The cheque was genuine." (Stevenson 8). While it is unsurprising that Enfield should question the morality and social position of Hyde (especially given the temptation of the assimilation between the upper-class and civilisation), the question of the "forgery" of written documents runs deeper, especially as it becomes a clue for Utterson to follow in his investigation of the relationship between Jekyll and Hyde. Indeed, his suspicions are reinforced by the visit of his friend Guest, who takes it upon himself to examine the cheque

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<sup>37</sup> Smith, Andrew. *Victorian demons : Medicine, masculinity, and the Gothic at the fin-de-siècle*. Manchester University Press, 2004, p.39.

to assess Hyde's sanity thanks to his knowledge of graphology:

'I have a document here in his handwriting; it is between ourselves, for I scarce know what to do about it; it is an ugly business at the best. But there it is; quite in your way a murderer's autograph.'

Guest's eyes brightened, and he sat down at once and studied it with passion. 'No, sir,' he said: 'not mad; but it is an odd hand.'

While Guest's interest in graphology is quite typical of the sort of occupations a late 19<sup>th</sup> century gentleman might indulge in, it is also a nod to new developments in the judicial methods of the police, which increasingly relied on very specialised areas of knowledge to lead their investigations. The belief that one's handwriting is a reflection of one's psychological motivations and character is merely a transposition of the belief in phrenology and is part of a rising interest in the other pseudo sciences championed by Lombroso and the likes. However, Guest's expert curiosity is awakened by the resemblance between this autograph and Jekyll's handwriting, which, after the examination of a letter signed by the doctor, he concludes to have been written by the same person. While both men decides that the right course of action is to never again allude to the similarity between the two, Utterson cannot help but shiver at the implications of this discovery:

But no sooner was Mr. Utterson alone that night than he locked the note into his safe, where it reposed from that time forward. 'What!' he thought. 'Henry Jekyll forge for a murderer!' And his blood ran cold in his veins. (Stevenson 36-7).

The narrative dramatizes the issue of trust and knowledge, with the written document being described as "a forgery" on the doctor's part. As the plot thickens, Utterson is led to question the veracity of written truth and testimonies, even though they are a central part of his personal and professional life and thus constitute the core of his social relations. The pinnacle of that contradiction is reached with the episode of the doctor's will, described as disgraceful and dangerous by Utterson as it goes against commonly accepted customs and represents another mystery of its own: "This document had long been the lawyer's eyesore. It offended him both as a lawyer and as a lover of the sane and customary sides of life, to whom the fanciful was the immodest." (Stevenson 12-3), irritating Utterson and increasing his curiosity to investigate the relationship between Jekyll and Hyde ('I thought it was madness,' he said, as he replaced the obnoxious paper in the safe, 'and now I begin to fear it is disgrace.', Stevenson 13). The physical manifestation of an unspoken, yet undiscovered truth in the form of the will, i.e. a written document infused with legal power proves unsettling and disturbing in the tightly ordained

administrative world on which the British Empire relied.

But while written testimonies and official documents are the pinnacle of the rational type of logos discourse 19<sup>th</sup> century men subscribe to, doubt is also cast on verbal exchanges in which the relationship between both speakers should be one of trust and act as a legitimising device for their narrative. Learning about the incident with the child, Utterson feels contrived to ask his cousin about the precision of his tale:

‘You see, Richard, your tale has gone home. If you have been inexact in any point, you had better correct it.’

‘I think you might have warned me,’ returned the other, with a touch of sullenness. ‘But I have been pedantically exact, as you call it.’ [...]

Mr. Utterson sighed deeply but said never a word; and the young man presently resumed. ‘Here is another lesson to say nothing,’ said he. ‘I am ashamed of my long tongue. Let us make a bargain never to refer to this again.’

‘With all my said the lawyer. ‘I shake hands on that, Richard’ (Stevenson 10-11).

While Enfield’s account of that night has been scrupulously accurate, a fact he emphatically expresses while seemingly mocking the professional deformation that leads his cousin to question even his testimony, the possibility of a lie by omission or dubious addition to the story enters the mind of Utterson. Since the suspicion of hidden motivations or erroneous retelling of events lays at the heart of social conventions and determines the very possibility for social relations, it is better to hold one’s tongue than to question the exactness of other people. Silence is the only viable option to maintain social relations, in direct contradiction with the philosophical ideal of the Socratic method of maieutics which consists in argumentative dialogue, based on a system of asking and answering questions to stimulate critical thinking, with its premise being that the truth can be made to emerge from the interaction between two people and the confrontation of two rational minds<sup>38</sup>. In a way, it could be argued that Stevenson provides the reader with a vision of communication as counter-maieutics, necessarily preventing individuals from reaching truth through social interaction, and presenting debate as dangerous to the social fabric (with Enfield’s sullenness the manifestation of a certain

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<sup>38</sup> Jarratt, Susan C. *Rereading the Sophists: Classical Rhetoric Refigured*. Southern Illinois University Press, 1991, p 83.



irritation).

Moreover, the characters in Stevenson's novel are not exempt of *mauvaise foi* either, with the Jekyll / Hyde dichotomy being the prime example of the conscious duality Sartre describes, arguing that "je dois savoir cette vérité pour me la cacher" (Sartre 88), which is precisely what Jekyll does by hiding his responsibility and pretending that he shouldn't be held accountable for the actions of a being that is "pure evil". The culmination of the rhetoric of bad faith is attained as he describes how he gradually came to accept the monstrous actions of Hyde as inherent to his nature and completely indifferent to Jekyll's:

Henry Jekyll stood at times aghast before the acts of Edward Hyde; but the situation was apart from ordinary laws, and insidiously relaxed the grasp of conscience. It was Hyde, after all, and Hyde alone, that was guilty. Jekyll was no worse; he woke again to his good qualities seemingly unimpaired; he would even make haste, where it was possible, to undo the evil done by Hyde. And thus his conscience slumbered. (Stevenson 81)

Though literally aware and conscious of the actions of his evil counterpart, Jekyll willingly fools himself into believing he cannot be held morally responsible for his actions, thus perfectly illustrating Sartre's theory. However, as the unwilling transformation back into Hyde and the tragic ending of the novel imply, the rhetoric of bad faith cannot be upheld for a long time, and the subject eventually becomes confronted by his own contradictions. In terms of access to the truth, the novel dramatizes the true incommunicability of knowledge, since some characters, despite the tragic example set out by Jekyll and the clear moralistic component of his confession, still refuse to apply those moral truths to themselves (none of the gentlemen involved in the story seem ready to change their own vice-ridden lives), thus contradicting the belief in the disclosure of the truth as powerful enough a tool of reformation, and invalidating the Socratic idea that "no one does wrong voluntarily, but that all do wrong against their will".

The theme of knowledge is also explored in terms of the desirability of ever accessing the truth, especially in relation to scientific endeavours. The paradoxical relation to knowledge, as that which is at once ardently pursued but also feared as it jeopardises the integrity and happiness of the subject, is dramatized by the difficulty of casting a sound moral judgement over scientific discoveries, a difficulty which appears early in *Frankenstein* with the image of the tree blasted

by the bolt of lightning:

As I stood at the door, on a sudden I beheld a stream of fire issue from an old and beautiful oak which stood about twenty yards from our house; and so soon as the dazzling light vanished, the oak had disappeared, and nothing remained but a blasted stump. (Shelley 37)

This seemingly innocuous event is the origin of young Frankenstein's fascination for the laws of electricity, which had not been of much interest to him before:

Before this I was not unacquainted with the more obvious laws of electricity. On this occasion a man of great research in natural philosophy was with us, and excited by this catastrophe, he entered on the explanation of a theory which he had formed on the subject of electricity and galvanism, which was at once new and astonishing to me. (Shelley 37).

The description of the blasted tree relies on the common metaphor of the revelation of the truth as an illumination casting light on a situation. In this case, the insistence on the spectacular visual effect of lightning which Frankenstein "beheld" is consistent with the notion of the *aletheia* as a visual revelation. The consequences are a change in the course of studies Frankenstein set out for himself, and ultimately the new ghastly orientation in his experiments can be attributed to this instant of revelation of the powers of electricity. On this instance, revelation ultimately leads to dreary consequences, as some truths are better kept relegated to the subconscious.

The notion of unveiling of the truth harks back to the Greek concept of the *aletheia*, which was first developed by Parmenides, since in Greek mythology Aletheia is the goddess of truth understood as "unconcealment". The word itself is a composite of "lethe", which stands for "oblivion", and the privative "a"; the idea being that truth is the unveiling of illusions<sup>39</sup>. Different versions of the Aletheia mythos are recorded, according to which she is alternatively the daughter of Zeus or a creation of Prometheus. This second version, recorded by Aesop in his *Fables*, is of course the most symbolically interesting one.

The concept was developed and reinfused with modern meaning by philosopher Martin Heidegger, who opposed the two figures of the Ancient goddesses of truth, Veritas on the one hand, and Aletheia on the other. While the former stands for naked truth and positive facts, the latter stands for an active concept and a process of conscious unveiling and revelation of the hidden truth, requiring more efforts on the part of the subject. As he notes, "To raise the question

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<sup>39</sup> ἀλήθεια. Liddell, Henry George & Scott, Robert. *A Greek-English Lexicon at the Perseus Project*.

of *aletheia*, of disclosure as such, is not the same as raising the question of truth. For this reason, it was inadequate and misleading to call *aletheia*, in the sense of opening, truth.”<sup>40</sup>. The unveiling of the truth thus differs from the simple statement of facts describing a state of affairs (correspondence) or fitting into a system (coherence), and acquires a religious dimension present in the very etymology of the word. *Aletheia* appears as a sacred force through which things are made intelligible for human beings in the first place, as part of a holistically structured background of meaning.

Heidegger also wrote that "*Aletheia*, disclosure regarded as the opening of presence, is not yet truth.”<sup>41</sup>. It might then be interesting to distinguish between *aletheia* and truth in our discussion of literature, with *aletheia* being the unveiling of a disturbing truth, repeatedly presented in the novels as a dangerous, disruptive force, whereas truth would be a more sustainable approach to life and knowledge, and a positive relation to knowledge compatible with the doxa. The question that then appears as central in the novels is whether *Aletheia* should prevail over *Doxa*, and whether a false opinion making life bearable is not preferable to the disclosure of the truth, which in Gothic literature frequently leads to either madness or death.

In *Frankenstein*, the problem of the disclosure of truth is alluded to on several occasions, as early as Frankenstein’s discovery of the theories of Agrippa and the subsequent decision to pursue a type of forbidden knowledge who, mastered and applied to practical experimentation, can only be detrimental to both the scientist and the species. Indeed, Frankenstein blames both his father and curiosity, i.e. his eager desire to pursue what he thought to be the truth, for the tragedy he has gone through. Throughout the novel, he consistently argues for the cautious pursuit of scientific truths as prone to ruining a man’s sanity and life, stating that

If the study to which you apply yourself has a tendency to weaken your affections and to destroy your taste for those simple pleasures in which no alloy can possibly mix, then that study is certainly unlawful, that is to say, not befitting the human mind. If this rule were always observed; if no man allowed any pursuit whatsoever to interfere with the tranquillity of his domestic affections, Greece had not been enslaved, Caesar would have spared his country, America would have been discovered more gradually, and the empires of Mexico and Peru had not been destroyed. (Shelley 56-7).

The scientist thus offers his own story as a cautionary tale against the pernicious effects of the

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<sup>40</sup> Heidegger, Martin. *On Time and Being*. Harper and Row, 1972, p. 70.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*

pursuit of “unlawful” truth over the subject. The simple tone and use of the second person personal pronoun make his advice all the more powerful as he resorts to a confessional tone and the exposition of personal experience and first-hand knowledge of the danger inherent to study, as opposed to a vague or theoretical rhetoric. By the end of the novel, Frankenstein has therefore learnt that the correct way to transmit deep knowledge is to do so through mutual confiding in the other and building a meaningful relationship.

But the uncomfortable truth that Shelley is concerned with is not merely scientific, but also factual, and sentimental. After William’s death, Frankenstein seeks loneliness and solace in the Alp glaciers, but is confronted to the certainty of the identity of his brother’s murderer, and thus indirectly of his own responsibility or even culpability in the matter, though he initially refuses to acknowledge it.

I perceived in the gloom a figure which stole from behind a clump of trees near me; I stood fixed, gazing intently: I could not be mistaken. A flash of lightning illuminated the object, and discovered its shape plainly to me; its gigantic stature, and the deformity of its aspect, more hideous than belongs to humanity, instantly informed me that it was the wretch, the filthy daemon, to whom I had given life. What did he there? Could he be (I shuddered at the conception) the murderer of my brother? No sooner did that idea cross my imagination, than I became convinced of its truth; my teeth chattered, and I was forced to lean against a tree for support. The figure passed me quickly, and I lost it in the gloom. Nothing in human shape could have destroyed the fair child. He was the murderer! I could not doubt it. The mere presence of the idea was an irresistible proof of the fact. (Shelley 83)

The truth is literally revealed to him in a “flash of lightning”, as was the case with the blasting of the tree. The truth is literally rendered visible by the light and by its embodiment into a being of gigantic stature, and the beholding of it elicits a strong physical reaction in Frankenstein, threatening the integrity of his body, and even his life, since it will lead him to spend a night in the mountains, vulnerable to the elements: “No one can conceive the anguish I suffered during the remainder of the night, which I spent, cold and wet, in the open air. But I did not feel the inconvenience of the weather; my imagination was busy in scenes of evil and despair”. (Shelley 84) Interestingly enough, while the revelation of the identity of William’s murderer has a physical impact on him, Victor notes that he is more disturbed by the thought of the monster’s responsibility than by the biting cold, hinting at the moral peril represented by truth.

In Stevenson's novel, the ambiguous value of science and revelation is expressed through two devices: the reaction of characters upon learning the truth about Hyde, and Jekyll's own relation to his experiment. The most interesting case is that of Utterson and Jekyll's old friend Lanyon, who succumbs from shock even though he is first introduced as a genial, "a hearty, healthy, dapper, redfaced gentleman, with a shock of hair prematurely white, and a boisterous and decided manner." (Stevenson 13), whose diverging scientific views are the cause of his estrangement from Jekyll. The doctor describes him as "a hide-bound pedant for all that; an ignorant, blatant pedant." (Stevenson 24) who scorns at Jekyll's "scientific heresies" (Stevenson 24), deeming them too fanciful.

After Lanyon beheld Hyde's transformation into Jekyll, Utterson, worried by the growing self-inflicted isolation of his friend, pays him a visit, and notes that as Lanyon

came in, he [Utterson] was shocked at the change which had taken place in the doctor's appearance. He had his death-warrant written legibly upon his face. The rosy man had grown pale; his flesh had fallen away; he was visibly balder and older; and yet it was not so much, these tokens of a swift physical decay that arrested the lawyer's notice, as a look in the eye and quality of manner that seemed to testify to some deep-seated terror of the mind. (Stevenson 39)

Sturdy, healthy Lanyon thus becomes physically affected by the strength of the shock he has confronted, to the extent that he expresses relief at the thought of his impending death:

it was with an air of greatness that Lanyon declared himself a doomed man. 'I have had a shock,' he said, 'and I shall never recover. It is a question of weeks. Well, life has been pleasant; I liked it; yes, sir, I used to like it. I sometimes think if we knew all, we should be more glad to get away.' (Stevenson 39-40)

Death is a welcome ending to the moral sufferings Lanyon had to endure; and the only possible outcome to the revelation. The effect of the disclosure of the truth is so intense that the very mention of Jekyll's name is enough to reactivate traumatising memories and prompt physical change ("Lanyon's face changed, and he held up a trembling hand" (Stevenson 40)), and to lead him to ask as a(n anticipated) dying wish never to hear of his old friend again, for he "cannot bear" to talk about it (Stevenson 40). The theme of the unutterability of the truth and of the impossibility to share it with others through language, i.e. logos, is a recurring theme in the novel, since Lanyon is adamant that he won't share his knowledge ("I cannot tell you ... I cannot bear it." Stevenson 40), in the same way that Jekyll justifies his refusal to see Utterson by writing

I have brought on myself a punishment and a danger that I cannot name. If I am the chief of sinners, I am the chief of sufferers also. I could not think that this earth contained a place for sufferings and terrors so unmanaging; and you can do but one thing, Utterson, to lighten this destiny, and that is to respect my silence (Stevenson 41)

Not only can that danger not be named because the truth is beyond the possibilities offered by the human tool of logos, but silence is also the chief protector against the nefarious power of the truth. As it unfolds in the hands of Utterson, a double degree of mediation is necessary: first, the record is Lanyon's account of the situation, and the disclosure of the truth through this written account still depends on the previous receiving by Lanyon of a letter ("I received by the evening delivery a registered envelope, addressed in the hand of my colleague and old school-companion", Stevenson 63). The paroxysmal moment occurs as Hyde offers Lanyon a bargain with the devil, in the purest tradition of the Faustian scientists trading his happiness, and quite possibly his soul, against the promise of knowledge:

Will you be wise? will you be guided? will you suffer me to take this glass in my hand and to go forth from your house without further parley? or has the greed of curiosity too much command of you? Think before you answer, for it shall be done as you decide. As you decide, you shall be left as you were before, and neither richer nor wiser, unless the sense of service rendered to a man in mortal distress may be counted as a kind of riches of the soul. Or, if you shall so prefer to choose, a new province of knowledge and new avenues to fame and power shall be laid open to you, here, in this room, upon the instant; and your sight shall be blasted by a prodigy to stagger the unbelief of Satan. (Stevenson 70-71)

The cryptic tone of Hyde's speech, though useful at piquing Lanyon's (and the reader's) interest and curiosity, finds justification in the consequences of the deal with the devil, which is rendered even more explicit by the overt reference to Satan. The capital sin of curiosity is alluded to as a way to disqualify the pursuit of knowledge as a noble human endeavour, and to remind man of the cost of rising above his station. However, the religious vocabulary and the mystical undertones it entails are also symptomatic of the failure of the language of reason to account for a number of physical and scientific phenomena, which can only be expressed through metaphorical speech, if at all. Logos is disqualified as a means to account for phenomena that escape the narrow scope of possible human knowledge; just as the reason for the universal hatred towards Hyde cannot be rationally justified nor expressed into words because he is literally the embodiment of the most uncomfortable truth a human being can be faced with – both the fact that his identity is primarily plural, and the revelation of his murderous instinct.

Secondly, Jekyll himself seems to be conscious of the limitations of the human mind and of the dangers of his discovery; for this reason, he refuses to compile his notes and organise them into a scientific journal; on the contrary, his tale will assume the form of a written testimony or confession, harking back to older, Christian, pre / anti-scientific accounts of human actions, and invalidating the claims of science to an all-encompassing vision of the world. Justifying his decision not to detail his scientific experiments, the doctor alludes to two main arguments: the necessity to forget about his ghastly experiments, and their danger:

For two good reasons, I will not enter deeply into this scientific branch of my confession. First, because I have been made to learn that the doom and burthen of our life is bound for ever on man's shoulders, and when the attempt is made to cast it off, it but returns upon us with more unfamiliar and more awful pressure. Second, because, as my narrative will make, alas! too evident, my discoveries were incomplete. (Stevenson 75-76)

The moralistic undertones are perceptible in the recognition of the impossibility for man to escape his condition and of the dire consequences any attempt of this nature must necessarily imply. The allusions to fate are clear indications of the fallacy of human will and of the existence of a higher, moral truth about human nature, as opposed to the rational and practical truth uncovered by experimentations. Furthermore, Jekyll could only progress so far in his research, and was unable to secure a way out of his dilemma. The disclosure of the truth is therefore also dangerous because since man is by definition unable to fully process it, he is also unable to react accordingly and confine the possible damage. Jekyll's confession becomes a sacrificial gesture as the doctor takes on the role of custodian for truths that are too great for Man, as he refuses to grant future generations the possibility to continue his research, since it is not the degree of accession to the truth that matters as much as its essence and the very fact that it should be partly disclosed.

Wells is even less ambiguous about his opinion on the necessity of disclosing the truth, especially because of the urgency that permeates his novel, since the lives of the protagonists are constantly in danger. In *The Island of Doctor Moreau*, knowledge is described as dangerous on two levels: first from an ontological perspective, since the discovery of the possible manipulation of bodies induces the fear of regression; but also from a more practical, one might even say political, viewpoint.

Prendick appears as a model of Victorian virtue, well-versed in the practice of renouncing

uncomfortable truths and sacrificing his curiosity on the altar of his own well-being. When Montgomery becomes too prolific with his confessions, Prendick decides not to push the issue any further: “I felt I had him at a disadvantage, had caught him in the mood of indiscretion; and to tell the truth I was not curious to learn what might have driven a young medical student out of London. I have an imagination. I shrugged my shoulders and turned away.” (Wells 22).

However, the rest of the story is not as consistent with this practical, prudent approach. Having been told of the exact nature of the Beast-people and of the experiments conducted on the island, Prendick grows increasingly concerned at the limited scope of his knowledge, and years for more information: “That these man-like creatures were in truth only bestial monsters, mere grotesque travesties of men, filled me with a vague uncertainty of their possibilities which was far worse than any definite fear.” (Wells 100). Uncertainty borders on psychological torture as the ambiguous nature of the Beast-people makes them more unpredictable than they would have been, had they simply been blood-thirsty or properly domesticated animals. Throughout his interview with Moreau, Prendick presses the doctor to answer all of his questions, especially those relating to the more fundamental and problematic part of his work, i.e. the decision to imitate the human figure: “I asked him why he had taken the human form as a model. There seemed to me then, and there still seems to me now, a strange wickedness for that choice.” (Wells 90). While Prendick does not present the reader with a possible explanation (even though it would be easy for the reader to assume that pride and the desire to imitate the Maker were actually driving Moreau’s actions), this last comment indicates that while he was never completely satisfied with Moreau’s aesthetic explanation, he thought it wiser to drop the issue and not address it more openly, as the explanation he might have offered would have been difficult to fathom.

And sure enough, at times when he does insist on being told the whole story, he quickly comes to regret it, as with the Kanaks:

All the Kanaka boys are dead now [...] The other one—was killed. Well, I have replaced them. Montgomery went on much as you are disposed to do at first, and then—

‘What became of the other one?’ said I, sharply,—‘the other Kanaka who was killed?’

‘The fact is, after I had made a number of human creatures I made a Thing.’ He hesitated.

‘Yes,’ said I. ‘It was killed.’

‘I don’t understand,’ said I; ‘do you mean to say—’



'It killed the Kanakas—yes. It killed several other things that it caught. (Wells 95-6)

From that moment on, Prendick's peace of mind is irremediably lost, shaken by both the admission to unnatural experiments and by the certainty that he might very well encounter the same fate as the Kanaka men, and be killed by one of the creatures.

On the contrary, Moreau does not have the least moral or ontological qualm about talking openly about his creations. While cold-headed enough to remain relatively unfazed by the implication of his discoveries in terms of the essence or future of man, Moreau is very conscious of the alarming nature of some of the conclusions that can be drawn for the behaviour of the Beast-people. Describing their attempt at mimicking a semblance of human life, he remarks on the contradictory nature of their inclinations, but also on the fallacy of their imitation:

There's something they call the Law. Sing hymns about 'all thine.' They build themselves their dens, gather fruit, and pull herbs— marry even. But I can see through it all, see into their very souls, and see there nothing but the souls of beasts, beasts that perish, anger and the lusts to live and gratify themselves. (Wells 98)

Moreau, as a scientist, is able to see past the layer of civilisation spread upon their actual instincts, and to unveil the true nature to which they must necessarily revert. Refusing to actually trust in their attempts and credit their effort is part of a strategy of un-concealment that rejects delusions of all kind, even when they make one's life more bearable. But as we shall show later on, Moreau is not representative of what it means to be human, and therefore his actions are devoid of any potential exemplary value, as he does not need the same psychological safety barriers as the other characters. On the contrary, his understanding of the necessity to keep some things to himself is entirely motivated by practical, safety reasons.

Indeed, as he continues to seek answers about the behaviour of the Beast-people, Prendick comes to realise how flimsy the foundations of their little society are. While it would initially appear wise to enquire after the habits and lifestyle of the beast-people so as not to interfere with them, this quest only serves to highlight the virtues of ignorance:

I was urgent to know how these inhuman monsters were kept from falling upon Moreau and Montgomery and from rending one another. He explained to me that the comparative safety of Moreau and himself was due to the limited mental scope of these monsters. In spite of their increased intelligence and the tendency of their animal instincts to reawaken, they had certain fixed ideas implanted by Moreau in their minds, which absolutely bounded their imaginations. They were really hypnotised; had been told that certain things were impossible,

and that certain things were not to be done, and these prohibitions were woven into the texture of their minds beyond any possibility of disobedience or dispute. Certain matters, however, in which old instinct was at war with Moreau's convenience, were in a less stable condition. A series of propositions called the Law (I had already heard them recited) battled in their minds with the deep-seated, ever-rebellious cravings of their animal natures. This Law they were ever repeating, I found, and ever breaking. (Wells 100-01)

This passage is interesting on two different grounds. First, it emphasises the lack of security of a system entirely relying on trusting that the Beast-people would be too hypnotised by Moreau to ever attempt rebellion, as indeed they are constantly caught breaking the law. In this regard, it can be said that the knowledge of that structural weakness impairs Prendick's life on the island. But it also depicts a society in which a minority of physically-weaker individuals (three men against over sixty Beast-people) are able to control a much stronger majority through the manipulation of their ignorance. The Beast-people are too limited to actually think (as Prendick tragically emphasises after his suicide attempt, stating that "They may once have been animals; but I never before saw an animal trying to think." (Wells 85), or scheme a plot in order to overthrow Moreau's rule over them. Indeed, they are creatures ruled by their emotions, and therefore the traumatic remembrance of the sufferings endured in the House of Pain is enough to prevent them from plotting. Prendick and the reader are thus presented with a social organisation relying on the ignorance of the people, and depending on the perpetuation of this state of things to survive. A social, Marxist type of reading is all the more tempting as their organised religion centred on the cult of Moreau – the Law- definitely becomes "the opium of the people" that prevents them from rebelling.

The political manipulation of knowledge also explains the violence with which Moreau and Montgomery react to Prendick's suicide attempt. Indeed, as he immerses himself in the water, he starts to shout uncomfortable truth that could endanger the other men's position on the island:

'You who listen! Do you not see these men still fear you, go in dread of you? Why, then, do you fear them? You are many—'

'For God's sake,' cried Montgomery, 'stop that, Prendick!'

'Prendick!' cried Moreau.

They both shouted together, as if to drown my voice; and behind them lowered the staring faces of the Beast Men, wondering, their deformed hands hanging down, their shoulders hunched up. (...) I went on shouting, I scarcely remember what,—that Moreau and Montgomery could be killed, that they were not to be feared: that was the burden of what I

put into the heads of the Beast People. I saw the green-eyed man in the dark rags, who had met me on the evening of my arrival, come out from among the trees, and others followed him, to hear me better. At last for want of breath I paused. (...)

He coughed, thought, then shouted: 'Latin, Prendick! bad Latin, schoolboy Latin; but try and understand. *Hi non sunt homines; sunt animalia qui nos habemus—vivisected.* A humanising process. I will explain. Come ashore.' (Wells 82-3)

The whole passage tells of a rivalry for the access to or disclosure of knowledge to a dangerous, enthralled audience. Unlike Prendick, Moreau and Montgomery know the full story behind the existence of the Beast-people, and know that if they somehow managed to understand that they are not actually men and that their animal nature actually grants them an advantage over their masters, they could easily organise a mutiny, or simply give in to the unbounded violence lurking within them. The threatening presence of the Beast-people "behind them" is a reminder of both the power they hold over them and of the frailty of that power. They are thus prepared to go to great lengths to prevent the truth from being revealed to them – hence Moreau's use of Latin to ensure that the creature will not be able to understand him. On the other hand, Prendick too is very well aware of the importance of knowledge in uprisings, and can see that he might rally the creatures he still believes to be men behind him to put an end to the sufferings on the island. The passage emphasises the political instrumentalisation of the truth rather than its epistemological component, which is perhaps due to the context in which the novel was written (with the growing discontent of the increasingly educated working-class). Since the volatile nature of knowledge constitutes a danger to their peaceful and stable rule, Moreau and Montgomery will have no choice but to share it with Prendick, so that he might feel more vividly the necessity of concealment.

While he is initially doubtful about the safety conferred by the delusion of the Beast-people, Prendick later comes to embrace Moreau's strategy; and after the latter's death, he uses rhetoric to his advantage to manipulate the Beast-people and secure his position on the island :

Then the Satyr raised a doubt. I answered him. Then one of the dappled things objected, and an animated discussion sprang up round the fire. Every moment I began to feel more convinced of my present security. I talked now without the catching in my breath, due to the intensity of my excitement, that had troubled me at first. In the course of about an hour I had really convinced several of the Beast Folk of the truth of my assertions, and talked most of the others into a dubious state. (Wells 154)

Rhetoric and logos thus become instrumentalised as political weapons rather than instruments

of accessing the truth. It would thus appear that nowhere in the novel is truth actually valued in and of itself – on the contrary, it is always the aim of either a heartless scientist, or debased as a mere tool to secure political power. The disclosure of the truth becomes part of a more subtle and dangerous game, but lacks value per se.

As the century progresses, the general assumption seems to remain that man is not ready for the full disclosure of the truth, especially when it has to do with human nature. Arthur Machen's *The Great God Pan*<sup>42</sup> deserves a mention as the pinnacle of that century-long, growing distrust in the desirability of accessing the truth. The novel is very similar to *The Strange Case* in that it relates the story of a doctor of “transcendental medicine” (Machen 2) conducting experiments that shake the normal boundaries of human experience and identity. Another common feature is the high degree of mediation through the use of letters, embedded stories, medical notes and testimonies that hint at the necessity to alienate oneself from direct contact with the truth. Throughout the novel, the question of the necessity of learning or concealing the truth is a central theme, since from the beginning Clarke attempts to convince his friend not to experiment on Mary<sup>43</sup>, while the aim of the experiment itself is concealed to the reader, who must leave the tale to unfold its mystery, ever so slowly.

Charles Herbert, the first character the reader is presented with who might shed light on the diabolical nature of the secret surrounding Helen Vaughan, refuses to tell his good friend Villiers of the core of the matter, arguing that discovering the truth would ruin Villiers as it has ruined himself: “I could tell you certain things which would convince you, but you would never know a happy day again. You would pass the rest of your life, as I pass mine, a haunted man, a man who has seen hell.” (Machen 15); the allusion to sight, and to the beholding of truth reinforces the motive of the *aletheia*, while the mention of hell argues for a vision of knowledge as morally dubious if not entirely evil; and the quest for the truth is presented as dangerous and capable of destroying a man's sanity and position in the world.

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<sup>42</sup> Machen, Arthur. *The Great God Pan*. Secker, 1926.

<sup>43</sup> “Consider the matter well, Raymond. It's a great responsibility. Something might go wrong; you would be a miserable man for the rest of your days.” (Machen 8).

The mystery thickens as Clarke, who is in possession of the truth regarding the ungodly actions of Helen Vaughan, strongly advises his friend to abandon the pursuit of knowledge in order to protect his sanity and happiness:

“MY DEAR VILLIERS, — I have thought over the matter on which you consulted me the other night, and my advice to you is this. Throw the portrait into the fire, blot out the story from your mind. Never give it another thought, Villiers, or you will be sorry. You will think, no doubt, that I am in possession of some secret information, and to a certain extent that is the case. But I only know a little; I am like a traveller who has peered over an abyss, and has drawn back in terror. What I know is strange enough and horrible enough, but beyond my knowledge there are depths and horrors more frightful still, more incredible than any tale told of winter nights about the fire. I have resolved, and nothing shall shake that resolve, to explore no whit farther, and if you value your happiness you will make the same determination. Come and see me by all means; but we will talk on more cheerful topics than this. (Machen 25)

Clarke hints at mysteries and revelation dangerous to the human understanding and far beyond what any man could mentally endure. In sharp contrast with the metaphorical tradition which normally accompanies the idea of revelation and disclosure, here truth comes associated to the imagery of the “abyss” and appears as a threatening disruptive force. Clarke’s warning is all the more striking as he claims to only “know a little”, thus hinting that the fragment of the truth he possesses is sufficient to scare a man out of his wits, and that the full exposition of the mystery would be too much to handle.

As in *The Strange Case*, the revelation of even a partial truth is mediated through the use of a letter, hinting at the impossibility of a direct confrontation with it; moreover, Clarke, Frankenstein and Jekyll all appeal to the same argument of human happiness being incompatible with the search for the truth, thus urging their reader (or Walton) to renounce it if they value a holistic human life. Once more, the urge to get rid of the disturbing element introduced by the papers manifests itself in Clarke’s proposal to burn the portrait and papers relating to the story, trusting in the purifying properties of the element. Later on, Villiers will similarly advise Austin to burn the sketchbook he has received from Meyrick, a painter who has succumbed from “an utter collapse of the whole system, probably caused by some severe shock” (Machen 36) after beholding the true form of Helen Vaughan<sup>44</sup>. The immediate, although counter-intuitive,

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<sup>44</sup> “They are frightful. Lock the book up again, Austin. If I were you I would burn it; it must be a terrible companion even though it be in a chest.” (Machen 26).

reaction to a disturbing truth is the dropping of the veil back onto it, and the artificial, socially constructed pretence of ignorance.

While some consciously make a choice to ignore the issue, some have no choice but to face it – such is the case for Lord Argentine, who subsequently commits suicide; and a doctor who autopsied another victim claims to “know perfectly well what caused death. Blank died of fright, of sheer, awful terror; I never saw features so hideously contorted in the entire course of my practice, and I have seen the faces of a whole host of dead.” (Machen 17) as a result of having been exposed to Helen’s transformation. It is also worth noting that the man to whom this story happened remains unnamed, and that “Blank” is merely an alias, hinting at the extent to which concealment is necessary in fin-de-siècle London. As Villiers and Austin discuss the series of suicide rattling the upper-class, Villiers remembers the appearance of Crashaw on the night he died, and how as he left Helen Vaughan’s house his face was livid with

Furious lust, and hate that was like fire, and the loss of all hope and horror that seemed to shriek aloud to the night, though his teeth were shut; and the utter blackness of despair. I am sure that he did not see me; he saw nothing that you or I can see, but what he saw I hope we never shall.” (Machen 32).

That last remark on the important role played by sight in the phenomenon of the *aletheia* and the hope that his own eyes should never be confronted to the naked truth underlines the physiological and psychological impact of revelation. The truth is presented as too terrible to be processed by a human mind, and time and time again, the characters must either refuse to seek it or succumb to the horror they behold, as is the case with Austin who refuses to read through the document Villiers presents him with<sup>45</sup>.

Indeed, only a man “made of stone”, i.e. inhuman, could withstand the revelation of the truth. Interestingly enough, Villiers makes direct reference to the model of the *aletheia*, alluding to

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<sup>45</sup> “Austin took the manuscript, but never read it. Opening the neat pages at haphazard his eye was caught by a word and a phrase that followed it; and, sick at heart, with white lips and a cold sweat pouring like water from his temples, he flung the paper down.

‘Take it away, Villiers, never speak of this again. Are you made of stone, man? Why, the dread and horror of death itself, the thoughts of the man who stands in the keen morning air on the black platform, bound, the bell tolling in his ears, and waits for the harsh rattle of the bolt, are as nothing compared to this. I will not read it; I should never sleep again.’” (Machen 35).

the Great God Pan as a symbol standing for the chaotic, telluric forces of nature, and a *veil* meant to protect man from a truth he is too weak to comprehend:

It was, indeed, an exquisite symbol beneath which men long ago veiled their knowledge of the most awful, most secret forces which lie at the heart of all things; forces before which the souls of men must wither and die and blacken, as their bodies blacken under the electric current. Such forces cannot be named, cannot be spoken, cannot be imagined except under a veil and a symbol, a symbol to the most of us appearing a quaint, poetic fancy, to some a foolish tale. (Machen 35).

The novel ends on the professional notes of a doctor Robert Matheson, and are a perfect proof of the necessity for mediation and distancing through written words in order to be able to articulate elements otherwise too fanciful. Just like Jekyll and Lanyon, Matheson considers destroying his notes to prevent future generations from accessing his personal records and picking up the quest for the truth that drove so many characters to death. While Matheson's case is an extreme example, it sheds light on the propriety and convenience of the publication of such tales in the name of science, and undermines the ideal of a free circulation of ideas through medical reviews:

Whether science would benefit by these brief notes if they could be published, I do not know, but rather doubt. But certainly I shall never take the responsibility of publishing or divulging one word of what is here written, not only on account of my oath given freely to those two persons who were present, but also because the details are too abominable. (Machen 37)

Moreover, it raises the question of the necessity for science to progress this far and to experiment for the sake of experimentation. Once more, the doctor's tale is very reminiscent of Jekyll's, as he relates the awful transformation that he beheld, and the shaking of the seemingly eternal boundaries of human identity.

This novel too ends with the moralistic conclusion to a cautionary tale, with the scientist renouncing his ungodly experiments and expressing remorse and guilt at the dark forces he has unleashed, and at the dire consequence of an experiment that cost so many lives<sup>46</sup>.

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<sup>46</sup> "It was an ill work I did that night when you were present; I broke open the door of the house of life, without knowing or caring what might pass forth or enter in. I recollect your telling me at the time, sharply enough, and rightly too, in one sense, that I had ruined the reason of a human being by a foolish experiment, based on an absurd theory. You did well to blame me, but my theory was not all absurdity. What I said Mary would see she saw, but I forgot that no human eyes can look on such a sight with impunity." (Machen 41).

This leads to the recognition of the limitations of human beings, both in the intensity of truth they are able to process, and in the failures of their moral judgement. *The Great God Pan* ends with the condemnation of the scientific project as a whole, ruled out as inhuman, disruptive, threatening and bearer of very few (if any) positive consequences. Science becomes “a foolish” game, and the hint of pride expressed by Raymond, while drowned out in a greater ensemble of lamentations, remains as a tragic reminder of the impossibility for scientists to cast their hubris aside even when faced with a desolation they are responsible for. The right path seems to be the one chosen by Clarke, since “the horrors that he witnessed in the dreary laboratory were to a certain extent salutary; he was conscious of being involved in an affair not altogether reputable, and for many years afterwards he clung bravely to the commonplace, and rejected all occasions of occult investigation.” (Machen 8). Doxa, opinion, and the refusal of the fantasy of the *aletheia* are the only viable course of action for any man worried about his mental health and happiness.

But while ignorance is a possible recourse on an individual scale, things are considerably different when it comes to dealing with the consequences of one’s action on a global scale. As the 19<sup>th</sup> century progressed, writers became increasingly aware of the necessity to take action against the global degradation of the living conditions of the lower classes and of that of the environment alike – and their works reflected this intellectual engagement.



c) “We murder to dissect”: an anti-Cartesian model of the Anthropocene

19<sup>th</sup> century intellectual thought is indebted to a Cartesian vision of nature that has man become its master and possessor through the exploitation of its resources. The model infused the philosophy of the Enlightenment and endures in the 19<sup>th</sup> century with the Industrial Revolution and towards the end of the century finds a philosophical, human-centred justification and legitimacy in the philosophy and history of Karl Marx.

The intellectual forefather of this position of man as master of nature is Descartes himself, who in his *Discourse on the Method of Rightly Conducting One's Reason and of Seeking Truth* clearly states what his views are and how they fit in his scientific manifesto.

But as soon as I had acquired some general notions respecting physics [...] by them I perceived it to be possible to arrive at knowledge highly useful in life; and [...] as distinctly as we know the various crafts of our artisans, we might also apply them in the same way to all the uses to which they are adapted, and thus *render ourselves the lords and possessors of nature*. And this is a result to be desired, not only in order to the invention of an infinity of arts, by which we might be enabled to *enjoy without any trouble the fruits of the earth* [...] but also and especially for the preservation of health [...] if any means can ever be found to render men wiser and more ingenious than hitherto, I believe that it is in medicine they must be sought for. It is true that the science of medicine, as it now exists, contains few things whose utility is very remarkable: but without any wish to depreciate it, I am confident that there is no one [...] who does not admit that all at present known in it is almost nothing in comparison of what remains to be discovered; and that we could *free ourselves* from an infinity of maladies of body as well as of mind, and perhaps also even from the debility of age, if we had sufficiently ample knowledge of their causes, and of all the remedies provided for us by nature.”<sup>47</sup> (italics mine).

Even though his belief in the eventual possibility of indefinitely prolonging man's life and avoiding death is an interesting feature in the way it relates to Frankenstein's project, the most important aspect of this passage is the redaction of a project seeking to aggrandise man and render him all-powerful over a nature perceived as a hostile element to be conquered and subdued. Tellingly enough, the insistence on the notions of liberation and domination expresses the reversal of a current state that pictures man as subjected to the laws of nature, his life being

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<sup>47</sup> Descartes, René. *Discourse on the method ; and Meditations on first philosophy*. Yale University Press, 1996, p.38.

determined and constrained by the bonds of physical ability and health as well as disease.

This description is especially fitting for the works of Jekyll, whose research seems to entail practical applications for the general happiness of mankind much more clearly than Frankenstein's, thus better fitting into the Cartesian ideal ("I believed that I could not keep them concealed without sinning grievously against the law by which we are bound to promote, as far as in us lies, the general good of mankind." Descartes 38). The former's aim seems to be consistent with the generalised belief in the possible redemption of mankind through the destruction of man's baser instincts. While Descartes here seems to be more concerned with natural sciences, Jekyll's work cannot be understood without first replacing him in the context of development of anthropology.

Discussing a male patient found guilty of assault on a little girl of his acquaintance as part of his speech for the 1885 Annual Meeting of the Medico-Psychological Association, alienist Hack Tuke argues that:

Such a man as this is a reversion to an old savage type, and is born by accident in the wrong century. He would have had sufficient scope for his bloodthirsty propensities, and been in harmony with his environment, in a barbaric age, or at the present day in certain parts of Africa, but he cannot be tolerated now as a member of a civilized society. But what is to be done with this man who, from no fault of his own, is born in the 19th instead of a long-past century? Are we to punish him for his involuntary anachronism?<sup>48</sup>

The criminal is a contextual abnormality, who would thrive in a different environment but is out of place. This comparison explains his contextual disruption, and classifies him anthropologically and developmentally through taxonomy, which frees the individual from his context.

As such, it is heavily implied that the individual cannot be held responsible for his actions since he is the product of a mistake of Nature. For Tylor, anthropology could assist history by sketching in an 'hypothetical primitive condition' of humankind, and also decipher the primeval 'in our midst'<sup>49</sup> 'to expose the remains of crude old culture ... and to mark these out for

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<sup>48</sup> Tuke, Hake. 'Case of Moral Insanity, or Congenital Moral Defect, With Commentary', *Journal of Mental Science*, No. 31, pp.361-5.

<sup>49</sup> Tylor, Edward Burnett, Pitt-Rivers, Augustus Heny, & Royal Institution of Great Britain. *On the survival of savage thought in modern civilization*. Royal Institution of Great Britain, 1869, p. 9.

destruction'. Anthropology, 'active at once in aiding progress and in removing hindrance ... is essentially a reformer's science'<sup>50</sup> seeking to correct the wrongs of nature.

The dream of a reformed human being, purged from his base instincts, is central to Dr Jekyll's enterprise, and justifies his experiments in view of their potential application and contribution to the general well-being of society, in a sort of scientific utilitarian justification. As he notes,

If each [half of the human psyche], I said to myself, could but be housed in separate identities, life would be relieved of all that was unbearable; the unjust might go its way, delivered from the aspirations and remorse of his more upright twin; and the just could walk steadfastly and securely on his upward path, doing the good things in which he found his pleasure, and no longer exposed to disgrace and penitence by the hands of this extraneous evil. (Stevenson 82)

In order to achieve this salutary aim, the scientist must if need be silence the voice of his moral conscience to be able to enter the right frame of mind to conduct his experiments. Unfortunately, the English translation of Descartes's text does not fully do justice to the subtle philosophical implications contained in this passage. Other translations of the same passage offer a vision of man as ready to "become masters and possessors of Nature"<sup>51</sup>, with the term "master" carrying different possible meanings. Indeed, it can be linked to a previous comparison between scientists and artisans, with the scientist being the master of nature i.e. understanding nature and being a specialist of the study of nature. The view therefore championed might not have been as thoroughly negative as that implied by the use of the term "lord", which implies ownership and rights over nature while not entailing a form of knowledge or responsibility towards it.

Descartes's explanation posits nature as a given to be used by man for the better good of the rest of humanity, but also for the satisfaction of his desires (to "enjoy without any trouble the fruits of the earth, and all its comforts"). In doing so, he breaks away from the Renaissance ideal of reverence towards nature, just like his followers, in the shape of the 19<sup>th</sup> century school of positivism, would break away from Romantic musings about the grandeur and sovereignty of nature. He thus heralds the beginning of what Michel Serres terms the "Modern

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid, p.410.

<sup>51</sup> Descartes, René. *A discourse of a method for the well guiding of reason, and the discovery of truth in the sciences*. Thomas Newcombe, 1649, p.32.

Constitution,” which severs the human from the nonhuman, while determining their relationship in terms of mastery and possession<sup>52</sup>.

The very construction of the concept of nature seems to entail a relation of human domination over the natural realm, under the guiding hand of reason. As ecofeminist scholars have noted,

The concept of reason provides the unifying and defining contrast for the concept of nature, much as the concept of husband does for that of wife, as master for slave. Reason in the western tradition has been constructed as the privileged domain of the master, who has conceived nature as a wife or subordinate other encompassing and representing the sphere of materiality, subsistence and the feminine which the master has split off and constructed as beneath him. The continual and cumulative overcoming of the domain of nature by reason engenders the western concept of progress and development. But as in other patriarchal reproductive contexts, it is the father who takes credit for and possession of this misbegotten child, and who guides its subsequent development in ways which continue to deny and devalue the maternal role.<sup>53</sup>

Not only is the resorting to ecofeminism valuable because Mary Shelley and her mother were proto-feminist authors, it is also helpful in that it underlines the construction of nature and assimilation between female, non-White and the natural as a means to justify natural and human exploitation alike. Throughout Western intellectual history, and especially with the philosophy of the Enlightenment, the intellectual and scientific enterprise has been defined in terms of an opposition between nature and reason.

The category of nature is a field of multiple exclusions, not only of non-humans, but of various groups of humans and aspects of human life which are cast as nature. Thus racism, colonialism and sexism have drawn their conceptual strength from casting sexual, racial and ethnic differences as closer to the animal and the body construed as a sphere of inferiority, as a lesser form of humanity lacking the full measure of rationality and culture. (Plumwood 4)

The result is the construction of a master mentality associated with reason and granted full authority, power and ownership over the natural, i.e. the feminine and passive. Early in his musings, Frankenstein identifies Nature as female (“I pursued nature to her hiding places”

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<sup>52</sup> Serres, Michel. *The Natural Contract*, trans. Elizabeth MacArthur and William Paulson. University of Michigan Press, 1995, pp. 31–32.

<sup>53</sup> Plumwood, Val. *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature*. Routledge, 2002, p.3.

(Shelley 55) ), contributing to a gendered construction of the universe. The exploitation of nature corresponds to “a more general cultural encoding of the female as passive and possessable, the willing receptacle of male desire” (Plumwood 355). It is all the easier to link such views to Frankenstein as his relation to the feminine and sexual reproduction is so complex (see part II of this work). His initial project entails an usurpation and confiscation of the female-centric human mode of reproduction, since from the beginning of his research he becomes estranged with the natural world and dreams of becoming the sole God of a new species, which implies finding a male-centric alternative to the natural mode of reproduction.

While the theme of female reproduction runs through the novel with recurrent allusions to Frankenstein’s dead mother, Judith Wilt adds that the Gothic is characterised by “a profound resentment of the sources of one's being, especially the female sources, stemming from the desire to be one's own source and one's own goal, to stand fixed and to hold-in life”<sup>54</sup>, in an extreme version of the Promethean desire for self-fashion characterising the Romantic hero. The logical conclusion to this desire is an intimation of immortality, with Frankenstein striving to live on through the legacy of this new race unleashed upon the Earth, but also through the seeming immortality of the creatures begotten. Indeed, the monster, “his creature/son, his hold on immortality, his dilated self, deliberately too gigantic to be overturned in the going-out of time and matter”<sup>55</sup> embodies this desire for a more-than-human existence and resistance to the elements, hunger, and all other physical needs that normally immure man within certain mundane limitations. Yet, while initially striving for recognition from his father, he eventually decides to suppress (i.e. murder) all those involved in the process of his creation, namely the whole Frankenstein household, and pre-eminently his master’s “more than sister” and almost-wife Elizabeth.

The dream sequence that immediately follows the creation of the monster is emblematic of Frankenstein’s association of femininity, sexual reproduction and death:

I slept, indeed, but I was disturbed by the wildest dreams. I thought I saw Elizabeth, in the bloom of health, walking in the streets of Ingolstadt. Delighted and surprised, I embraced her, but as I imprinted the first kiss on her lips, they became livid with the hue of death; her

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<sup>54</sup> Wilt, Judith. *Frankenstein as Mystery Play*, in Levine, George & Knoepfelmacher, U.C. (eds.) *The Endurance of "Frankenstein": Essays on Mary Shelley's Novel*. University of California Press, 1979, pp. 31-48, p.38.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid*, p. 39.

features appeared to change, and I thought that I held the corpse of my dead mother in my arms; a shroud enveloped her form, and I saw the grave-worms crawling in the folds of the flannel (Shelley 59).

By eliminating the female primary biological function and the source of women's cultural power in 19<sup>th</sup> century England, Frankenstein indulges in a male-centric fantasy that further isolates him from Nature, by depriving female entities of their agency. To Mellor, he holds the "implicit goal of creating a society for men only: his creature is male; he refuses to create a female; there is no reason that the race of immortal beings he hoped to propagate should not be exclusively male" (Mellor 15). And indeed, he is quick to destroy the female monster who he believes to necessarily be more dangerous, promiscuous and lethal than her male counterpart.

As was to be expected from Shelley's conservative and feminist perspective, such an aim can only lead to dire consequences, both for the environment and for the scientist himself. Frankenstein notes: "my eyes were insensible to the charms of nature. And the same feelings which made me neglect the scenes around me caused me also to forget those friends . . . whom I had not seen for so long a time" (Shelley 55). While travelling with Clerval, who cannot help but express admiration at the beauty of the landscape they are visiting, he remarks: "In truth, I was occupied by gloomy thoughts and neither saw the descent of the evening star nor the golden sunrise reflected in the Rhine." (Shelley 187). His ungainly studies lead to a sense of alienation from nature, but also from other men as the inherent solidarity between members of a same species is cut off, as "every self-estrangement of man from himself and nature is manifested in the relationship he sets up between other men and himself and nature."<sup>56</sup> This position is not tenable however, as a link to nature is strongly implied by Shelley to be a necessary condition for a healthy lifestyle; while rejecting the beauty of nature can only lead to a cult of death and desolation. As Marx notes, "The worker can create nothing without nature, without the sensuous external world. It is the material in which his labour realizes itself..."<sup>57</sup>. Cut off, self-separated from both his friends and the natural realm, Frankenstein acknowledges having "lost all soul or sensation but for one pursuit" (Shelley 55) whose goal, the benevolent and disinterested creation of life, seems from the start linked with a sinister dilation of himself: "A new species would bless me as its creator and source. No father could claim the gratitude of his child so completely as I should deserve theirs" (Shelley 54).

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<sup>56</sup> Marx, Karl. *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*. Penguin Books, 1992, p.331.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid*, p.325.

Shelley however seeks to reconcile an interest in the potentialities offered by nature and a sense of global responsibility towards the environment. The first means through which she alludes to the relation between man and nature is the dramatization of the relations her protagonists have to nature. Because of its Romantic legacy, *Frankenstein* is very much concerned with changes of scenery as it narrates a chase throughout Europe, and landscapes play an important metaphorical role and are often used to convey or mirror the character's feelings through the use of pathetic fallacy, defined by John Ruskin as a form of "emotional falseness"<sup>58</sup> and a useful literary device used to convey the feelings of the protagonist through the projection of his emotions unto the natural realm.

Frankenstein frequently finds solace in nature and addresses natural elements as though they mirrored and were able to comprehend his emotions. After his Alpine encounter with the monster, he still acknowledges the beauty of the landscape and how

The stars shone at intervals as the clouds passed from over them; the dark pines rose before me, and every here and there a broken tree lay on the ground; it was a scene of wonderful solemnity and stirred strange thoughts within me. I wept bitterly, and clasping my hands in agony, I exclaimed, 'Oh! Stars and clouds and winds, ye are all about to mock me; if ye really pity me, crush sensation and memory; let me become as nought; but if not, depart, depart, and leave me in darkness.' These were wild and miserable thoughts, but I cannot describe to you how the eternal twinkling of the stars weighed upon me and how I listened to every blast of wind as if it were a dull ugly sirocco on its way to consume me. (Shelley 179)

Once more, the emphasis is solely on his feelings, and the landscape becomes a pretext to indulge in self-centred fantasies, but the role of nature is still highlighted as one of consolation. While in Geneva, he notes that even in his "melancholy [...] the fresh air and bright sun seldom failed to restore me to some degree of composure, and on my return I met the salutations of my friends with a readier smile and a more cheerful heart". (Shelley 182-83). Tellingly enough, the monster takes the same stance on the restoring power of the sun, and after having been made to flee by the De Laceys, he concedes that "the pleasant sunshine and the pure air of day restored me to some degree of tranquillity" (Shelley 163), mirroring the feelings of his creator once more.

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<sup>58</sup> Ruskin, John. 'Of the Pathetic Fallacy', 1856, in Herbert, Robert L. (ed.) *The literary criticism of John Ruskin*, Da Capo, 1965, p.245.

Such a Cartesian, self-aggrandising vision is however subverted through the acknowledgment of responsibility and development of the notion of the Anthropocene, defined by the English Oxford Dictionary as “the period during which human activity has been the dominant influence on climate and the environment”. In Shelley’s novel, this tension is dramatized by the protagonist’s hesitation in his initial project of creating a new race that would look up to him as a father, and which is gradually cast aside as Frankenstein realises they might overpower the human race. Indeed, the monster’s request to make him a bride (“You must create a female for me with whom I can live in the interchange of those sympathies necessary for my being”, Shelley 174) implies the possibility of sexual reproduction as a means of propagating this new species. He initially the monster’s demand based on a feeling of moral responsibility towards the rest of the human race:

‘I do refuse it,’ I replied; ‘and no torture shall ever extort a consent from me. You may render me the most miserable of men, but you shall never make me base in my own eyes. Shall I create another like yourself, whose joint wickedness might desolate the world.’ (Shelley 174)

Once more, his argument is initially more concerned with himself than with his responsibility, however, as the monster’s argumentation progresses, his opinion seems to evolve because of what he comes to see as an obligation towards his creature:

I shuddered when I thought of the possible consequences of my consent, but I felt that there was some justice in his argument. His tale and the feelings he now expressed proved him to be a creature of fine sensations, and did I not as his maker owe him all the portion of happiness that it was in my power to bestow? (Shelley 176)

Frankenstein oscillates between his responsibility towards the monster and that towards the human race, and the two conflict for quite some time, before he eventually comes to a decision: “After a long pause of reflection I concluded that the justice due both to him and my fellow creatures demanded of me that I should comply with his request.” (Shelley 178).

Surprisingly enough, he appeals to the justice he owes other human beings to justify his decision. It would seem that at this point the boundaries between man and monster are blurred and that the sympathy that must naturally exist between two human beings ought to be extended to the creature which has given such a clear demonstration of its fine sentiments and rhetorical abilities. However, it is not long before he is seized by remorse and a sense of consciousness of the possible ill effects of his actions upon other human beings:

As I sat, a train of reflection occurred to me which led me to consider the effects of what I



was now doing. [...] Even if they were to leave Europe and inhabit the deserts of the new world, yet one of the first results of those sympathies for which the daemon thirsted would be children, and a race of devils would be propagated upon the earth who might make the very existence of the species of man a condition precarious and full of terror. Had I right, for my own benefit, to inflict this curse upon everlasting generations? I had before been moved by the sophisms of the being I had created; I had been struck senseless by his fiendish threats; but now, for the first time, the wickedness of my promise burst upon me; I shuddered to think that future ages might curse me as their pest, whose selfishness had not hesitated to buy its own peace at the price, perhaps, of the existence of the whole human race (Shelley 201-02)

Frankenstein's care for future generations is subdued by his concern for the reputation he might leave in his trail as a curse for humanity. His vision of the possibly apocalyptic future of the human race leads him to the destruction of the bride, a decision that is however not entirely rooted in reason ("I thought with a sensation of madness on my promise of creating another like to him, and trembling with passion, tore to pieces the thing on which I was engaged." (Shelley 203). Throughout the second part of the novel, it remains unclear to which extent his decisions are motivated by self-interest or concern for his already heavily charged conscience and to which extent they depend upon a clear sense of responsibility, as he argues later on: "Shall I, in cool blood, set loose upon the earth a daemon whose delight is in death and wretchedness?" (Shelley 205)- an irresolution he is ready to acknowledge when alone: "I had resolved in my own mind that to create another like the fiend I had first made would be an act of the basest and most atrocious selfishness, and I banished from my mind every thought that could lead to a different conclusion" (Shelley 208).

Either way, Frankenstein's decision to destroy the bride is at least partly motivated by a feeling of responsibility towards the human race and by the realisation that his actions might have an influence on a larger, environmental scale, and that his creation might escape his control, a concern that resonated well with early 19<sup>th</sup> century gradual awareness and realisation of the suddenness of change in the countryside landscape due to the rampant progression of industrialisation. The Shelleys were especially aware of the debate surrounding industrialisation and the role of man in the changing climate; as were other members of the intelligentsia and cultural elite, such as William Wordsworth. For the next twenty five years, Wordsworth would become the spokesman for a minority of wealthy intellectuals who fought against a projected extension of rail lines into the Lake District in the name of the preservation of the landscape. The length of the debates over the issue is enough proof of their ultimately inextricable nature, and all the resources afforded by poetry were mobilised in public discussion: "Is there no nook

of English ground secure from rash assault? [...] And must he too his old delights disown / Who scorns a false utilitarian lure / 'Mid his paternal fiends at random thrown"?<sup>59</sup>

Wordsworth's position is characteristic of this early ecological consciousness, and can be understood as a conservative and ecological attempt to disqualify utilitarianism, a political philosophy denounced as a fallacy ("Utilitarianism, serving as a mask for cupidity and gambling speculations"<sup>60</sup>). Instead of supporting capitalist interests, he argues for the preservation of nature perceived as a sacred entity and compared to a temple that might be defiled or desecrated by the flow of tourists brought by the railway and defaced by the necessary arrangements to landscapes made in order to facilitate the installation of the railway. He thus urges politicians to "Let then the beauty be undisfigured and the retirement unviolated"<sup>61</sup>, as "there are temples of Nature, temples built by the Almighty, which have still higher claim to be left unviolated" (Selincourt 162).

Unsurprisingly, the attempt at usurping and subjugating nature finds its logical conclusion in nature fighting back, through the figure of the monster. As he embodies and overcomes the difference between the natural and the cultural, he is closely linked to nature and able to survive in the most inhospitable of climates ("I was not even of the same nature as man. I was more agile than they and could subsist upon coarser diet; I bore the extremes of heat and cold with less injury to my frame; my stature far exceeded theirs" (Shelley 141), "I seek the everlasting ices of the north, where you will feel the misery of cold and frost, to which I am impassive." (Shelley 253)), which indicates a greater degree of symbiosis with the natural realm. This proximity is further implied by the constant assimilation between the monster and the moon: as Frankenstein is toiling over his project, "the moon gazed on my midnight labours" (Shelley 55); and after the monster is created, Frankenstein awakes to behold his room "by the dim and yellow light of the moon, as it forced its way through the window shutters, I beheld the wretch—the miserable monster whom I had created" (Shelley 59). It should be noted that the two are linked through their characterisation by the colour yellow. Eventually, the monster himself credits the moon as an object of beauty and worship: "Soon a gentle light stole over the heavens and gave

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<sup>59</sup> *The Morning Post*, 16<sup>th</sup> October 1844.

<sup>60</sup> Mulvihill, James. *Consuming Nature: "Wordsworth and the Kendal and Windermere Railway Controversy"*, in *Modern Language Quarterly*. 56(3) 1995:305-26, p.312.

<sup>61</sup> Selincourt, Ernest de. *Wordsworth's Guide to the Lakes: The Fifth Edition*. Oxford University Press, 1970, p.156.

me a sensation of pleasure. I started up and beheld a radiant form rise from among the trees. I gazed with a kind of wonder. It moved slowly, but it enlightened my path” (Shelley 119) which guides him towards much needed food.

The embodiment of the Rousseauistic idea that natural man was not spoiled by education and society and lived in harmony with nature, it makes sense that he should be the perfect representative for the fear of the non-human defeating Man. Val Plumwood notes that in normal circumstances,

To be defined as ‘nature’ [...] is to be defined as passive, as non-agent and non-subject, as the ‘environment’ or invisible background conditions against which the ‘foreground’ achievements of reason or culture (provided typically by the white, western, male expert or entrepreneur) take place. It is to be defined as a terra nullius, a resource empty of its own purposes or meanings, and hence available to be annexed for the purposes of those supposedly identified with reason or intellect, and to be conceived and moulded in relation to these purposes. It means being seen as part of a sharply separate, even alien lower realm, whose domination is simply ‘natural’, flowing from nature itself and the nature(s) of things. Such treatment, standard in the west for nature since at least the Enlightenment, has since that time been opposed and officially condemned for humans (Plumwood 4)

Yet it is now only beginning to be challenged and condemned for the non-human as well as environmental awareness progresses. At this point, no reconciliation seems possible, and the relation between human beings and nature appears as radically antagonistic and confrontational.

Pessimism seems inherent to Shelley’s fictional depiction of the interactions between man and nature. on his deathbed, Frankenstein insists on the importance of remembering his story as a cautionary tale, and his confession assumes a moralistic tone as he urges Walton to reconsider his ambitions in life:

If the study to which you apply yourself has a tendency to weaken your affections and to destroy your taste for those simple pleasures in which no alloy can possibly mix, then that study is certainly unlawful, that is to say, not befitting the human mind. If this rule were always observed; if no man allowed any pursuit whatsoever to interfere with the tranquillity of his domestic affections, Greece had not been enslaved, Caesar would have spared his country, America would have been discovered more gradually, and the empires of Mexico and Peru had not been destroyed. But I forget that I am moralising in the most interesting part of my tale, and your looks remind me to proceed. (Shelley 56-7)

To Shelley, it would seem that a number of great enterprises, whether scientific as

Frankenstein's, or political as those alluded to in this passage, were not actually driven by the desire to better one's conditions, but solely by reckless ambition and unchecked passion. Great historical conquests are reduced to the mere expression of narcissism, and the narrative of civilisation and progress is debunked as the author reminds us of the numerous bloodbaths that accompanied them. Moreover, while Frankenstein accuses himself of deviating from the story he is supposed to tell and "moralising", he is actually developing a very Shelleyan notion of "lawfulness", which must be understood as that which is in adequation with the nature of man as a domestic, gentle being, meant to live in harmony with nature. Between the great disruptions brought on by the French Revolution and the subtle changes already visible through the Industrial Revolution, it is unsurprising that Shelley should have endorsed such a pessimistic viewpoint.

This pessimism might also be due to a generalised feeling of urgency and responsibility due to the 1816 eruption of an Indonesian volcano which led to the "Year Without A Summer"<sup>62</sup>. Not only did the bad weather and incessant rain lead the Romantics to engage in the ghost story writing competition that saw the creation of Frankenstein "at Geneva, when there was a celebrated dark day, on which the fowls went to roost at noon, and the candles were lighted as at midnight"<sup>63</sup>; it also served as a direct reminder of the global effects of environmental phenomenon and of the frailty of Man when faced with natural phenomena. While the best illustration of this feeling of vulnerability is Byron's 'Darkness', an apocalyptic vision of the fate of the last man on Earth, the feeling of imminent doom was not restricted to the intellectual and literary circles of the period, and reports of incidents in the newspapers abounded, contributing to a general feeling of uneasiness.

In spite of this global environmental anxiety, it would seem that Shelley's vision wasn't entirely as pessimistic as it might appear at first sight, as two of her novels address the relation between man and nature and subtly offer solutions to the seemingly irreconcilable dichotomy between the two, so that it does not have to be resolved through conflict and destruction.

Indeed, she also dramatized the consequences of human actions and the subsequent destruction of the human race in her 1826 apocalyptic novel *The Last Man*, in which, in the 22nd century,

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<sup>62</sup> Stothers, Richard. 'The Great Tambora Eruption in 1815 and Its Aftermath' (1984) *Science*. 224, pp. 1191–1198.

<sup>63</sup> Paley, Morton. "Envisioning Lastness: Byron's 'Darkness,' Campbell's 'the Last Man,' and the Critical Aftermath." *Romanticism: The Journal of Romantic Culture and Criticism* 1 (1995): 1–14, p.3.

a plague come from Africa slowly decimates the entire population from the face of the earth, leaving her main character, Verney, as the last man standing. Ben Hutchinson identifies the two main components influencing the novel as the *Zeitgeist*, and a sense of personal loss (“The Last Man! Yes, I may well describe that solitary being’s feelings, feeling myself as the last relic of a beloved race, my companions extinct before me”<sup>64</sup>, she writes in her diary in May 1824). The pest outbreak of Asian cholera in India in 1817-18 that arrived in Britain in 1831 also contributed to her inspiration through reports creating a sense of fear throughout the 1820s. Finally, the last component of this metaphorical network is the Burkean notion of revolution as a pestilence threatening to spread across Europe. Instead of reusing the Romantic theme of nature as nurturing, “Mary Shelley, brought up on Godwin’s and Shelley’s optimistic assessments of human potentialities, rejects their perfectibilian philosophies and drives her story to an inexorably pessimistic conclusion”<sup>65</sup>, in a conflation of lastness as biological, political and socio economic.

In this novel, Shelley insists on human responsibility in the events seemingly occurring beyond their control. Even though the futuristic society depicted in the novel is not characterised by advanced technological innovation that might hint at the environmental consequences of industry and manufacture, it is still held accountable for the propagation of the plague through imperialism, which is subtly criticised in the novel. Africa is presented as the cradle of the disease, and the reader is expressly told that England is so rapidly infected because of its commercial ties to it, namely, because of the “busy spirit of money-making, peculiar to our country”. This specific phrase might veil a twofold criticism of the commercial system of the British Empire. First, a colonial critique. Even though the Parliament had already passed its 1807 Slave Trade act to outlaw slave trade, and then reinforced the measure through the passing of the 1811 Slave Trade Felony Act which by requalifying slave trade as a felony was intended as a stronger deterrent, commercial trades to Africa still relied on unpaid labour, and Britain would have to wait until 1833 to pass the Slave Abolition Act which finally banned enslavement in the empire. Shelley seems to draw an obvious link between the exploitation of nature and

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<sup>64</sup> Shelley, Mary. *The Journals of Mary Shelley 1814-1844*, eds. Paula R. Feldman and Diana Scott-Kilvert (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), vol.II, pp.476-7. Cited in Hutchinson, Benjamin. (2016). *Lateness and modern European literature*. Oxford University Press, 2016.

<sup>65</sup> Sambrook, Anthony. ‘A Romantic Theme : The Last Man’, in *Forum for Modern Languages Studies vol. II* (1966), pp. 25-33, p.32.

that of other men, anticipating the theoretical tradition of an Horkheimer, who notes that “the history of man’s efforts to subjugate nature is also the history of man’s subjugation by man”<sup>66</sup>. Secondly, the passage also reads as a denunciation of the spirit of industry and capitalist investment that eventually leads the empire to its ruin, since merchants will not interrupt their trading despite the pest in order to profit from a lucrative system. Therefore, the “spirit of money-making” becomes directly responsible for the decimation of the British population.

Moreover, the spreading of the plague from the East into Europe can be blamed on the of army general Lord Raymond, who in spite of his awareness that Constantinople has fallen victim to the plague insists on taking the city to pursue the glory of military achievements and reclaim the city as part of the civilised West. By doing so, not only does he meet an early death because of an explosion, he also unleashes the plague and opens wide the gates of Europe to infection. The open critique of Western hubris as responsible for a medical and sanitary catastrophe is made even more explicit as Verney eventually comes to the conclusion that man displays excessive “arrogance” by calling himself “lords of creation, wielders of the elements, masters of life and death”, and acknowledges that such immature and self-centred behaviour can only result in disaster.

A symbolic reading could perceive the transmission of the disease through the atmosphere as the expression of both the rising fears due to rampant industrial growth, since

As the manufacturing cities of England disappeared into a thick haze of photochemical smog, it becomes possible to imagine that human activities might alter the climate and eventually destroy the Earth’s ability to sustain human life.<sup>67</sup>

in keeping with early 19<sup>th</sup> century medical speculation about the atmospheric transmission of diseases but also with the intellectual atmosphere justifying the subjugation of nature and other human beings, especially as the novel dramatizes a catastrophe which, by overthrowing traditional structures of power rendered useless by the enormity and scale of the contagion, grants Shelley the opportunity to study and list different political reactions to the apocalypse. They range from a form of opportunistic looting and apocalyptic hedonism with racial prejudice

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<sup>66</sup> Horkheimer, Max. “The Revolt of Nature”, in *The Eclipse of Reason*. The Continuum Publishing Company, 2004), p. 72.

<sup>67</sup> McKusick, James. *Green Writing: Romanticism and Ecology*. St. Martin’s Press, 2000, p. 109.

at its core to pragmatic self-organization on the part of communities and selfless kindness among some individuals, who discard prejudices through the recognition of a common humanity and the emergence of new structures of leadership, either with the reign of the philosopher-king Adrian acting as a moral guide rather than a political ruler or with adaptive governance on the local scale with power being delegated to patriarchs and women, i.e. people who would normally be excluded from positions of power.

It would thus appear that far from limiting her environmental concerns to their ecological dimension, Shelley instead develops a system encompassing ecological concerns, politics and philosophical reflections on the nature of man and society, and puts forwards a vision that Anne Mellor calls a form of “ethics of care”. According to feminist ecocriticism the answer to the fact that “Cartesian thought has stripped nature of the intentional and mindlike qualities which make an ethical response to it possible”<sup>68</sup> is the revaluation of both the intrinsic value of the natural world and the subsequent change in our attitude towards it. Val Plumwood expressed the hope that

Once nature is reconceived as capable of agency and intentionality, and human identity is reconceived in less polarised and disembodied ways, the great gulf which Cartesian thought establishes between the conscious, mindful human sphere and the mindless, clockwork natural one disappears. (Plumwood 5)

The end of Shelley’s novel seems to hint at the possibility for such a reconciliation of man and nature through the various hypotheses left pending by its open ending, and more particularly by the unspecified fate of two secondary characters: Ernest and Waldon.

Frankenstein’s little brother Ernest, who barely gets mentioned apart from an occasional remark on his poor health, is a great object of care for Elizabeth, who acts towards him as a mother figure. Discussing her hopes for his future, she

proposed that he should be a farmer... A farmer’s is a very healthy happy life; and the least hurtful, or rather the most beneficial profession of any. My uncle [wanted him] educated as an advocate... but... It is certainly more creditable to cultivate the earth for the sustenance of man, than to be the confidant, and sometimes the accomplice, of his vices (Shelley 1831 52, cited in Mellor 366)

This project delineates the vision of a mutually enriching relationship between man and Nature,

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<sup>68</sup> Plumwood, p.5.

characterised by reciprocal care and benefit. As a result, Ernest, one of the only males in the novel to never have offended nature, is the only one of the Frankenstein family to survive. The focus on the notion of a family line is also capital. Not only does Mary Shelley subvert the trope of mother nature by having nature destroy a bloodline, she presents a counter-model of ecological awareness and community with nature through the close knit family of the De Laceys.

Carol Gilligan separates between male and female ethics, characterising them as follow: “men have tended to identify moral laws as abstract principles that clearly differentiate right from wrong, women have tended to see moral choice as imbedded in an ongoing shared life”<sup>69</sup>. The male “ethic of justice proceeds from the premise of equality – that everyone should be treated the same” while a female “ethic of care rests on the premise of nonviolence- that no one should be hurt”<sup>70</sup>. The former would promote a male centric, individualistic vision of man and ethics, while the latter insists on empathy and connection, and is repeatedly favoured throughout the novel. For instance, Clerval displays his chivalrous, self-sacrificing nature by renouncing attending university to nurse Frankenstein back to health, and Elizabeth released him from their engagement when she suspected his delayed return was due to his having fallen in love with another woman. Those two eminently good characters embody an ethic of cooperation and self-sacrifice, but their actions are counteracted by Frankenstein’s destructive influence.

On the contrary, the De Laceys strive because of their respectful and loving attitude towards nature and one another. Noblemen reduced to the condition of peasants, their survival is dependent on the fruit of their agricultural labours and one the links they share; as such, they seem to embody a more feminine, interpersonal vision of ethics. While Frankenstein feels free to abandon his familial obligations for two years to fulfil his ambitions, the De Laceys strive in the familial sphere; while Frankenstein’s friends and family repeatedly sacrifice their well-being for his sake, the De Laceys revel in prioritising the well-being of other family members before their own, and the monster observes their nobility as Agatha and Felix willingly starve themselves so their father may eat. Such a behaviour, Mellor points out, hints at the “grounding of moral virtue in the preservation of familial bonds” (367), which can be extended to include

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<sup>69</sup> Mellor, p.366.

<sup>70</sup> Gilligan, Carol. *In a Different Voice : Psychological Theory and Women’s Development*. Harvard University Press, 1982, p.174.



nature. As she phrases it, “Nature requires the submission of the individual ego to the welfare of the family and the larger community” (366), a surrendering Frankenstein was unable to undertake.

By the end of the novel, Frankenstein’s fold Walton seems to understand the lesson underlying his friend’s story, and willingly renounces his dreams of glory to take into account the reality of pre-existing duties (the family he has left behind, the fear and anger of his crew, and the sacredness of the Nature he was so eager to violate and instrumentalise earlier in the novel). The novel thus concludes with the victory of a realist, pragmatic vision of interpersonal care rather than that of the egoistic self-aggrandising tendencies of idealism.

As Jesse Oak Taylor notes, the “conceiving of human beings as climatological agents means radically expanding our conception of the human, and acknowledging that the collectives into which individuals are incorporated are ecosystems rather than purely social entities such as nations, classes, or cultures.”<sup>71</sup>. Such claims not only emphasise the liminal nature of human beings as both agents and passive recipients, and civilised creatures acting upon nature while simultaneously being animals dependent on the preservation of the ecosystem; they also have a prescriptive value that becomes all the more obvious as the century progresses and the consequences of human actions upon the environment become impossible to ignore.

“Hell is a city much like London / A populous and a smoky city”<sup>72</sup>. By the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, London had become the epitome of a novel ecosystem, a completely manufactured environment. Oscar Wilde noted “the extraordinary change in the climate of London that has taken place during the last ten years”<sup>73</sup>, while as early as 1864 Georges Perkins March published the first modern environmental treatise (*Man and Nature, or Physical Geography as Modified by Human Action*) as a warning about the increasingly visible and harmful consequences of industrialisation. During the 1880s the Parliament had commissioned reports and fielded debates on the smoke nuisance, which would later on (1905) become known as the “smog” problem, with the term being coined in 1905 by Dr. H.A. Des Voeux, the treasurer of the coal Smoke Abatement Society, during a speech delivered before the Public Health Congress and

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<sup>71</sup> Taylor, Jesse. *The Sky of our Manufacture : The London fog and British fiction from Dickens to Woolf (Under the sign of nature: explorations in ecocriticism)*. University of Virginia Press, 2016, p.9.

<sup>72</sup> Shelley, « Peter Bell the Third », pt 3, ll. 1-2.

<sup>73</sup> Wilde, Oscar. « The Decay of Lying » in *The Decay of Lying and Other Essays*. Penguin, 2010, p.312.

titled “Fog and Smoke”<sup>74</sup>.

Parliamentary regulation proposals however failed because of the domestic origin of the smoke nuisance, meaning that the growing population was ambiguously perceived as both a threat to the natural resources of the country, but also as a necessity to keep up with the life-consuming industries that granted the country its commercial strength. As such, the smog started to be seen as a fatality against which there was no viable course of action, to the point where it became constitutive of the very identity of the city, if not the whole country. To quote Kipling, England had become “a dark land, and a darker room full of cold, in one wall of which a white woman made naked fire, and I cried aloud with dread, for I had never before seen a grate”<sup>75</sup>.

The development of industry went hand in hand with concerns about the seemingly ever-increasing moral depravity in London. *The Strange Case* has Mr Utterson and Enfield agreeing on the importance of discretion when it comes to most men’s activities in London, as illustrated by the following exchange:

‘And you never asked about the — place with the door?’ said Mr. Utterson.

‘No, sir: I had a delicacy,’ was the reply. ‘I feel very strongly about putting questions; it partakes too much of the style of the day of judgment. You start a question, and it’s like starting a stone. You sit quietly on the top of a hill; and away the stone goes, starting others; and presently some bland old bird (the last you would have thought of) is knocked on the head in his own back-garden and the family have to change their name. No, sir, I make it a rule of mine: the more it looks like Queer Street, the less I ask.’

‘A very good rule, too,’ said the lawyer. (Stevenson, 8-9)

To both men, the discovery of the double life of Jekyll is part of the routine of life in their social circle, and they may have remained radically uninterested in the issue had not Hyde been so puzzling to them. A lawyer, Utterson agrees that the best course of action when confronted to mysterious elements from another gentleman’s private life is not to try and inquire about their activities- indeed, he does not even question his own cousin when the latter begins to tell him the story of the house they are walking by, stating that “I was coming home from some place at the end of the world, about three o’ clock of a black winter morning, and my way lay through a part of town where there was literally nothing to be seen but lamps.” (Stevenson 5-6). What

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<sup>74</sup> Des Vœux initially proposed the term in a letter to the editor of *The Times* on December 27, 1904.

<sup>75</sup> Kipling, Rudyard. *Something of Myself*. Macmillan, 1937, p.4.

business a gentleman of his rank may be engaging in at three o'clock in a disreputable neighbourhood is not addressed, even though the phrasing is remarkably similar to that used by Jekyll to describe his nightly excursions as Hyde: "Some two months before the murder of Sir Danvers, I had been out for one of my adventures, had returned at a late hour" (Stevenson 82), hinting at the prevalence of morally dubious behaviour in upper-class men that was part and parcel of their social identity. In the same fashion, it remains unclear what Danvers Carew's intentions were in addressing Hyde in the middle of the night. The very description the maid gives of the scene places it under the sign of uncertainty and moral dubiousness:

...she became aware of an aged and beautiful gentleman with white hair, drawing near along the lane; and advancing to meet him, another and very small gentleman, to whom at first she paid less attention. When they had come within speech [...] the older man bowed and accosted the other with a very pretty manner of politeness. It did not seem as if the subject of his address were of great importance; indeed, from his pointing, it sometimes appeared as if he were only inquiring his way; but the moon shone on his face as he spoke, and the girl was pleased to watch it, it seemed to breathe such an innocent and old-world kindness of disposition, yet with something high too, as of a well-founded self-content. (25-26)

The insistence on the old man's beauty and on the innocuity of his behaviour might be indicative of a deeper, hidden meaning to their interaction, in the same way that the trampling of the young girl is reminiscent of a form of violation of her body that may link it to child prostitution, a theme indirectly evoked by the woman approaching Hyde during his nightly wanderings for a seemingly innocuous matter ("Once a woman spoke to him, offering, I think, a box of lights. He smote her in the face, and she fled", Stevenson 91-92), but which reads as a sexual offer. In the case of the young girl, the settling of the matter with a plea to his reputation and through monetary reparation further deepens the connection to child prostitution ("No gentleman but wishes to avoid a scene,' says he. 'Name your figure.' Well, we screwed him up to a hundred pounds for the child's family" Stevenson 7).

Moral decay finds its pinnacle with the indecorous practice of blackmailing, which to Enfield is the most plausible explanation for the connection between so reputable a man as Jekyll and the uncanny Hyde; with the latter blackmailing the former for some secret or misconduct in the his youth, potentially sexual misconduct (with Hyde being Jekyll's illegitimate offspring, or a male prostitute):

'Yes, it's a bad story. For my man was a fellow that nobody could have to do with, a really damnable man; and the person that drew the cheque is the very pink of the proprieties,

celebrated too, and (what makes it worse) one of your fellows who do what they call good. Black-mail, I suppose; an honest man paying through the nose for some of the capers of his youth. Black-Mail House is what I call that place with the door, in consequence. (Stevenson 8).

The fact that he should lightly joke about the issue by dubbing the house “Black mail house” is telling of how common a practice blackmailing was. In a society so focused on reputation, blackmail proved a particularly potent force- thus, when Hyde tramples the little girl, Enfield and the crowd can blackmail him into paying off her family; Hyde’s access to a respectable man’s bank account leads Enfield to leap to the conclusion that Hyde is blackmailing his benefactor. He dreams of the latter lurking at Jekyll’s bedside while he himself tries to sleep in his own "great, dark bed" but thinks of the trampling of the child and imagines a threatening figure approaching Jekyll's bedside :

he would see a room in a rich house, where his friend lay asleep, dreaming and smiling at his dreams; and then the door of that room would be opened, the curtains of the bed plucked apart, the sleeper recalled, and lo! there would stand by his side a figure to whom power was given, and even at that dead hour, he must rise and do its bidding. The figure in these two phases haunted the lawyer all night (Stevenson 15)

While the issue of boy prostitution never received the widespread public attention devoted to girl prostitution, scholars and historians note that "there was a flourishing trade in male prostitution" in London<sup>76</sup>, and a 1881 pornographic work published under the title *The Sins of the Cities of the Plain: or the Recollections of a Mary Ann*, with Mary Ann being a young male prostitute whose actual name is Jack Saul, seems indicative of "the extent to which pederasty is carried on in London between gentlemen and young fellows is little dreamed of by the outside public" (Hyde 123). The 1889 Cleveland street scandal, linked to the exposition of a male brothel, still heightened the stakes by sharpening the public conception about male prostitution as an aristocratic vice preying upon destitute lower class boys, whose sole means of existence apart from prostitution was blackmail (there was "more than a hint of blackmail about the place" (Hyde 123). Since Parliament was in the process of criminalising male homosexual activity in early August 1885 with the passage of the Criminal Law Amendment Bill and the publication of the Maiden Tribute was a wake-up call to many middle-class newspaper readers, the association between homosexuality and criminal behaviours became all the more automatic.

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<sup>76</sup> Hyde, H. Montgomery. *The Other Love: An Historical and Contemporary Survey of Homosexuality in Britain*. Heinemann, 1970, p.120.

"Even more than prostitutes or child rapists, whom parliament voted against flogging, homosexuals were to suffer agony from the moral panic"<sup>77</sup>, meaning that the "campaign to protect innocents could not be kept separate from the urge to punish vice" (Bristow 93).

As such, the theme of blackmailing due to homosexual behaviour that permeates the novel is linked to the urge to preserve a sense of moral purity and prevent decay. As Jesse Taylor notes, "conceptualising the animation of modernity's incorporable remainder in ghostly terms also highlights the extent to which the idea of environmental pollution retains its residual connotations of spiritual taint or moral impurity" (Taylor 97). Environmental pollution appears as the evolution and natural consequence of the spiritual taints of unclean acts, often rooted in sexual or societal misconduct (ranging from masturbation and incest to murder or theft), revealing that "people had to learn to hate their detritus... indicating the deep cultural roots of the fear attaching to such immoral emission"<sup>78</sup>.

As Mary Douglas notes in *Purity and Danger*, pollution can be described as that which is "out of place". As such, there is no such thing as absolute pollution or dirt, but it is the venturing into another realm that is the essence of pollution. Douglas closely links the concept of pollution with that of sacredness, a gesture that is echoed in the novel by Hyde's blasphemous scribbles over Jekyll's Bible: by desecrating religious texts in "a gesture that recalls the origin of pollution as defacement of the sacred" (Taylor 115), Hyde acknowledges the existence of a superior realm from which he is excluded and which he tries to penetrate. The notion thus "provides a way for conceptually managing rather than eradicating the production of waste. It describes that which we shun but cannot actually do away with – the dirty secrets we live with in the shadows" (Taylor 109).

It would thus seem that the Gothic seeks to give form to the unsubstantial acts and moral (mis)deeds, with Hyde perfectly fitting the trope as Jekyll creates him to expel those elements of his character which he feels are out of place, to hide them from view. With the theme of moral pollution and hypocrisy prevailing in Jekyll's social circle, the recurrent insistence on the presence of fog or mist in the novel takes on a symbolic dimension that discloses the moral failures of a society marked by hypocrisy in which undisclosed desires lurk everywhere. Even

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<sup>77</sup> Bristow, Edward. *Vice and Vigilance: Purity Movements in Britain since 1700*. Gill and MacMillan, 1977, p.115.

<sup>78</sup> Garrard, Greg. *Ecocriticism*. Routledge, 2012, p.8

as Utterson strives to enjoy a quiet evening alone by the hearth, the ultimate symbol of Victorian domestic comfort, he cannot help but mention that “The fog still slept on the wing above the drowned city” (Stevenson 35), while the wine bottle seems to hold “the glow of hot autumn afternoons on hillside vineyards was ready to be set free and to disperse the fogs of London.” (Stevenson 36). It is fairly tempting to read the scene as an echo to the initial concoction of the potion that is supposed to help Jekyll escape his dark, foggy tendencies and enter a solar life of innocence and moral goodness. The description of Soho on a morning is also telling of the extent to which the moral taint pervading the neighbourhood alters its very atmosphere as Utterson drives in:

A great chocolate covered pall lowered over heaven, but the wind was continually changing and routing these embattled vapours; so that as the cab crawled from street to street, Mr. Utterson beheld a marvellous number of degrees and hues of twilight; for here it would be dark like the back-end of evening; and there would be a glow of rich, lurid brown, like the light of some strange conflagration; and here, for a moment, the fog would be quite broken up, and a haggard shaft of daylight would glance in between the swirling wraths... lamps, which had never been extinguished or had been kindled afresh to combat this mournful reinvasion of darkness, seemed, in the lawyer's eyes, like a district of some city in a nightmare (Stevenson 22)

The passage, which reads like a fine instance of catabasis, insists on the area as a place of moral dangers and pleasures (the allusion to vapours, to strangeness, the hypallage around the word “haggard” which would better describe the men seen leaving those houses of pleasure, and the allusion to the lamps that burnt all night yet failed to fight off the “mournful darkness” which acts as a reminder of the mortal dangers awaiting lost souls) also puts emphasis on the profound duplicity of life in London, through the insistence on the “hues of twilight”, echoing the theme of the uncertainty of shifting identities and plurality of interpretations in the novel. And yet, it remains unclear to which extent this status quo seems to have been interiorised by all characters. Explaining his original line of thought about the creation of Hyde, Jekyll notes that

If each, I told myself, could but be relieved of all that was unbearable; the unjust might go his way, delivered from the aspirations and remorse of his more upright twin, and the just could walk steadfastly and securely on his upward path, doing the good things in which he found his pleasure, and no longer exposed to disgrace and penitence by the hands of this extraneous evil

This passages intertwines both themes of moral repentance (“aspirations, remorse, penitence”) that hint at a genuine desire to better oneself and the theme of social reputation (“exposed to

disgrace”) so intimately that it is quite impossible to determine which concern prevails. Even seemingly pure moral considerations are infected, one might say polluted, with concerns for social credit and reputation.

In Stevenson’s romance, then, human economy and industry lead to environmental consequences that become a source of anxiety. Hyde becomes the embodiment of all the dangers lurking in the city (the Whitechapel murders, pollution, moral decay) that are endemic to the specific urban environment. “The modern subject begins to appear a manufactured being that is, like Frankenstein’s creature, reviled as an inhuman monster by the very system that created it” (Taylor 113). Hyde is the literal product of pollution at his very core, a discovery Jekyll makes when, after having searched in vain to replicate the original formula of his potion to go back to his “normal” self, Jekyll acknowledges that some “impurity” was a key element to the potion which cannot work without it: “I am now persuaded that my first supply was impure, and that it was that unknown impurity which lent efficacy to the draught.” (Stevenson 95). By allowing for both the social conditions that make the use of such a potion necessary and for the key ingredient to its working, pollution becomes “the source of an otherwise impossible novelty that realigns the conditions of possibility within the fictive world” (Taylor 114).

The first victim of the transgression of boundaries and embodiment of seemingly impossible physical realities is Lanyon, who is found guilty of having dismissed Jekyll’s research as “unscientific balderdash” (12). Lanyon dies because of his exposition to the paradox of Hyde’s existence: he should not be able to exist, but he does and cannot be ignored. Douglas argues that phenomena perceived as impure or otherwise dangerous within a culture are those violating the classificatory systems through which the culture is able meaningfully to organize experience: “Hybrids and other confusions are abominated . . . Holiness requires that individuals shall conform to the class to which they belong. And holiness requires that different classes of things shall not be confused...” (Douglas 53). Precisely, Hyde does not conform to the established classifications, in various ways.

First, in terms of social class. Stephen Arata ties Hyde’s degeneration to class, suggesting that throughout the novel Hyde learns to act more like a gentleman while simultaneously

degenerating, making degeneration a function of middle-class “virtue”<sup>79</sup>, with the implication that degeneration theories cannot be confined to the lower classes but might apply to upper classes as well. This social class anxiety is rendered visible by the insistence of the topography of London, remarked upon by Robert Mighall. Speaking about the Jekyll / Hyde geographical duality, Alex Clunas writes that “Jekyll and Hyde begins with two house fronts and two doors, both of which initially are read with a presumption of isomorphic, thematizable space, whereby one might move from the external signs to a characterization of the life within” (Clunas 176), implying that there should be a high degree of continuity and consistency between outwards appearances and individuals’ values. And yet the respectable neighbourhood is sinking into depravity as the houses on Jekyll’s street are “for the most part decayed from their high estate, and let in flats and chambers to all sorts and conditions of men”, some of who might belong to much lower classes than their dwelling in the neighbourhood should allow for. The dichotomy between the respectable townhouse and the dubious Soho apartment cannot be preserved. A topography of the body and the body politic is mapped out on the geography of the city. Jekyll lamented his divided nature by wishing that each side of him could be 'housed in separate identities' (82); with his potion he achieves this, 'housing' his lower element in a low district of the city, Soho. The discourse of urban exploration is evoked in the narrative when Utterson, accompanied by a police officer, goes in pursuit of Hyde into this ‘district of some city in a nightmare’ (48). Soho's relation to respectable London resembles Hyde's relation to his more upright twin Dr Jekyll. Surrounded by the higher districts of May Fair and Pall Mall, Soho's relation to respectable London is therefore a topographical replication of the Hyde within the Jekyll. With the theme of duality and opposition constantly echoing descriptions of the cityscape, Ackroyd describes the novella as “the fable of changing identities and secret lives takes place within the medium of the city’s shifting insubstantial mists”<sup>80</sup>.

The second way in which Hyde transgresses the boundaries of liminal experience is the way he interacts with the concept of humanity. Atavistic theories would link him to savage, criminal survival at the heart of London and imply that he might not be as civilised as other “normal” contemporary human types. But more interestingly, he comes to life as the embodiment of a pure “type”, evil made man. The key to his identity and to the secret repulsion that other

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<sup>79</sup> Arata, Stephen. ‘The Sedulous Ape: Atavism, Professionalism, and Stevenson’s Jekyll and Hyde’, *Criticism*, No.37, 1995.

<sup>80</sup> Ackroyd, Peter. *London : The Biography*. Chatto & Windus, 2000, p.453.



characters cannot suppress when they approach him is that “all human beings, as we meet them, are commingled out of good and evil: and Edward Hyde, alone in the ranks of mankind, was pure evil.” (Stevenson 78). The subversion of the idea of purity, which should normally be associated with wholesomeness and goodness, here comes associated to a thoroughly evil individual who escapes all possibility of redemption through a common shared humanity. Indeed, his very body is marked by his evil nature, in a reversal of the Greek concept of *kalos kagathos*:

Even as good shone upon the countenance of the one, evil was written broadly and plainly on the face of the other. Evil besides (which I must still believe to be the lethal side of man) had left on that body an imprint of deformity and decay (Stevenson 78).

The Greek ideal of *kalos kagathos* occurs from the fifth century to operate the conflation between the idea of beauty and that of goodness, “the ideal of the marriage of the beautiful and the good”<sup>81</sup>. While originally the concept emerged in a political and social context, it has since been mistakenly interpreted as expressing the equation between physical beauty and moral goodness, indicating the possibility to infer a person’s moral disposition from their beauty. While such a notion may seem incredulously backwards, it observed a revival and actualisation through Darwinian philosophy and the 19<sup>th</sup> century belief in physical characteristics as indicative of degenerate traits and tendencies. *The Strange Case* is no exception to the rule, since the narrator insists on “the large handsome face of Dr. Jekyll”(Stevenson 24) while Danvers Carew is “an aged and beautiful gentleman” (Stevenson 26). While seemingly a morally and literarily naïve rhetorical device, the concept of *kalos kagathos* and its atavistic pendant (the belief that the evil protagonist’s features are a reflection of his primitive nature and animalistic tendencies) also serves to mark the body as a site that is reclaimed by moral ideas that go beyond the controllable human realm.

Stacy Alaimo expatiates upon the concept of a “‘trans-corporeality’ in which the human is always intermeshed with the more-than-human world” which “underlines the extent to which the substance of the human is ultimately inseparable from ‘the environment’”<sup>82</sup>. There are two ways of defining the core or essence of this “more-than-human” world, either as a world of

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<sup>81</sup> Scott, Gary A. *Plato's Socrates as Educator*. Suny Press 2000, p.201.

<sup>82</sup> Alaimo, Stacy. *Bodily Natures: Science, Environment and the Material Self*. Indiana University Press, 2010, p. 2.

moral principles and notions that find their correlation in the physical world through corporal embodiment, or as the environment understood in a wider sense; in which case the Gothic body becomes trans-corporal as through the Anthropocene it becomes infected with the environment that strikes within the individual body and psyche. Taylor writes that

The Abnatural ecology of the fin de siècle Gothic stages the precariousness of bodies, organisms, and habitats in the flux of Hurley's "morphic variability" produced by exposure to environmental disturbance or pollution: objects, animals, acts, substances, that appear to violate the laws of nature tale on forms of agency ordinarily accorded only to the human subject. The Anthropocene renders *Homo sapiens* abhuman. (Taylor 99)

The very nature of what it means to be human becomes porous and unstable, as the conditions in which one lives can considerably affect one's moral and physical life. While this idea was developed at length by academics or journalists discussing the London poor and their degeneration due to the high levels of pollution, the fear of a contagion to the higher classes thought to embody human nature was a more concerning issue. Garrett comments on Hyde's almost contagious effect on those who come across him, observing that "Those who confront and oppose Hyde seem to turn into his doubles" becoming just as hateful and desirous of violence as him, a phenomenon he describes as a form of "contamination"<sup>83</sup>. Therefore, the birth of an ecological concern goes hand in hand with a necessary reconceptualising of the concept of human nature, especially as Darwinism further sets Man as part of a network of co-dependent species depending on their environment and fellow creatures. It would seem that 19th century Gothic novels operate the shift from a Romantic sense of individualism and independence of a self-sufficient hero to an awareness and affirmation of social and environmental solidarity that reveals its dependence on the binding force of exclusionary violence through the scientific designation of specific bodies as polluted and corrosive, ie "abnormal".

If we follow Taylor and agree that "abnormal supernaturalism reveals the profound weirdness of the Anthropocene, in which nature is not merely diminished or domesticated but also resurgent, uncanny, often terrifying as it takes the form of a superstorm..." (100); it must be said that the ultimate form of the abnormal is the nearly human, in the shape of an anthropomorphous monster, quite clearly in the case of Frankenstein's creature but perhaps

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<sup>83</sup> Garrett, Peter. *Gothic reflections : Narrative force in nineteenth-century fiction*. Cornell University Press, 2003, p.68.

more clearly so in the case of Hyde. An "abomination" is a border entity, existing at the interstices of oppositional categories which "impose system on an inherently untidy experience" by "exaggerating the difference between within and without, above and below, male and female, with and against"<sup>84</sup> (Douglas 4). The Gothic depicts the abhuman in order to reaffirm paradoxically, the "fully human" identity to which abhumanness is opposed, so that human identity is reconfigured at the very moment it is undone, yet constantly under threat of being modified by the environment, which becomes increasingly synonymous with human activity, rendering man the agent of his own demise.

The corrupting influence of London is also rendered visible on Wells's *The Island of Dr Moreau*, in which Prendick ponders at Montgomery's fate. Montgomery himself hints at the immoral nature of the actions leading to his coming to the island, implying he might have had to flee from London: "Why am I here now, an outcast from civilisation, instead of being a happy man enjoying all the pleasures of London? Simply because eleven years ago— I lost my head for ten minutes on a foggy night." (Wells 21). At this point Prendick seems to suspect forbidden medical experimentations or some similar crime: "to tell the truth I was not curious to learn what might have driven a young medical student out of London. I have an imagination. I shrugged my shoulders and turned away." (Wells 22), casually dismissing the need for further explanations, ie hinting at the fact that Montgomery's tale is nothing out of the ordinary in late 19<sup>th</sup> century London. Later on in the novel, Montgomery implies that his demise was brought on by his indulging in the finer pleasures that London has to offer, as he offers Prendick a drink:

Whiskey?'

'No, thanks; I'm an abstainer.'

'I wish I'd been. But it's no use locking the door after the steed is stolen. It was that infernal stuff which led to my coming here,—that, and a foggy night. I thought myself in luck at the time, when Moreau offered to get me off. It's queer—' (Wells 41)

This exchange seems to imply that Moreau offered Montgomery an escape from the turmoil and potentially dreadful consequences of his actions – a bargain he has now come to regret. His insistence on the presence of the fog on that fateful night hints at the equation drawn between

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<sup>84</sup> Douglas, Mary. *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of the Concepts of Pollution and Taboo*. Kegan Paul, 1966.

the metropolitan smog and the dark spaces of the human psyche, which was accompanied by a resurgence in medical literature about racial degeneration due to urban existence. According to Taylor, the late Victorian degeneration theory “focused explicitly on the consequences for human life posed by exposure to unnatural circumstances, and thus can be understood as an exercise in, or perhaps more accurately a cautionary tale about, unnatural ecology.” (112). The rampant degradation of the living conditions in London and other big cities thus leads to the degeneration of the species, a theory Wells seemed to fully endorse as he wrote in *The Time Machine* “Does not an East-End worker live in such artificial conditions as practically to be cut off from the surface of the Earth?”<sup>85</sup>.

In its most extreme form, this alienation leads to the constitution of a class of urban degenerates, “understood to be a new or emergent species, produced by a genuinely novel habitat notable above all for its modernity – the metropolis.” (Taylor 112). But in its tamer version, the unnatural living conditions of English industrial cities alter the moral compass of men and encourage them to evil deeds. Both are products of their environment in a twisted understanding of the phrase “survival of the fittest”, understood the following way:

Survival of the fittest does not mean always the survival of the best in the sense of the highest organism; it means only the survival of that which is best suited to the circumstances, good or bad, in which it is placed – the survival of a savage in a savage social medium, a rogue among rogues, a parasite where a parasite alone can live,<sup>86</sup>

With the living condition of men the primary means through which the species evolves, reverts, or goes extinct altogether, as 200 % spike in deaths during periods of dense fog<sup>87</sup> triggered anxieties regarding the possible destruction of the environment and generalised death through the slow violence of environmental poisoning.

It would thus seem that 19<sup>th</sup> century Gothic novelists had an intuition of the fact that “in the Anthropocene, the divide between the external world of nature and the constructed world of human affairs can no longer be sustained. Climate, like history, is tangled up with human action

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<sup>85</sup> Wells, Herbert George. *The Time Machine*. Penguin, 2012, p. 62.

<sup>86</sup> Maudsley, Henry. *Body and Will : Being an essay concerning will in its metaphysical, physiological & pathological aspect*. Kegan Paul, 1883, p. 237.

<sup>87</sup> Wohl, Anthony. *Endangered lives : Public health in Victorian Britain*. J.M. Dent, 1983, p.213.

and (at least in part) is the product of a cultural system”<sup>88</sup>. But the intellectual climate of the period did come up with solutions that might prove able to sort both the problem of the destruction of the environment and the threat of degeneracy of the species; solutions with which the modern ecological sensibility might however not necessarily agree.

Miller writes about *The Strange Case* and *The Island* that

in another fable of the time, Well’s Dr Moreau uses surgery on beasts in order to ‘urn out’ the animal in them. Such attempts are the backward looks of advanced writers the superstitions of such writers are a feature of the romantic tradition, where hellfire casts a sunset glow – as on the burning, blushing sensorium of the early nineteenth century – and there is a talk of pain and punishment and purification<sup>89</sup> (Miller 211-12).

Since as we have shown before the themes of pollution and moral degradation were closely intertwined, it would make sense to assume that an appropriate answer to the perceived degeneration of the species would have been through education and social reform. However, the surge of Darwinism and conservative politics meant that a world view positing man as predetermined to a large extent by his physiology and heredity came to prevail, in which only decisive scientific measures could be taken to prevent the downfall of the species. As tragic beauty Ollala notes, in a prefiguration of themes *The Strange Case* would develop, “Man has risen; if he has sprung from the brutes, he can descend again to the same level”<sup>90</sup>. Therefore, the attempts to free the civilised self from the degenerative tendencies that threatened the very fabric of society (dramatized in the novel by Ollala’s refusal to marry the protagonist and decision to remain a virgin in order for the family curse to die with her) had to take integrate a form of fatality through the acceptance that some could not be saved, but should be dealt with appropriately.

A very interesting feature of Jekyll’s work resides in the links that can be drawn between his ambitions to create a redeemed human being and allow the human race to purge its darker sides and eugenics, a theory rapidly gaining popularity in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century thanks to the

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<sup>88</sup> Taylor, Jesse Oak. *The Sky of our Manufacture : The London fog and British fiction from Dickens to Woolf*. University of Virginia Press, 2016, p.15.

<sup>89</sup> Miller, Karl. *Doubles : Studies in Literary History*. Oxford University Press, 1985, pp.211-12.

<sup>90</sup> Stevenson, Robert Louis. *Ollala*, in *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde and Other Tales of Terror*. Penguin Classics, 2002, p.127.

publication of Max Nordau's *Degeneration* and to influential circles (Wells, Beatrice and Sidney Webb of the Fabian Society, and other similar circles such as The Eugenic Education Society, which attracted many intellectuals of the period). Even though theories of population and its control had been a preeminent feature of the intellectual debates from the 18<sup>th</sup> century onwards (PB Shelley himself expressed an interest in theories of the population and wrote an answer to Malthus on the topic), Stevenson goes further by addressing a readership well-acquainted with theories of atavism and degeneracy (Stephen Arata writes that "Stevenson's first readers could easily discern the lineaments of Cesare Lombroso's atavistic criminal"<sup>91</sup>) and being able to suggest that science might become able to rid humanity of its undesirable elements, although admittedly in a way that is tamer than most eugenics theoreticians would put forward. Indeed, as Jekyll does exert considerable symbolic and psychological violence by amputating his self of part of his soul and identity, most tenants of eugenics policies were in favour of more radical methods, including forced sterilisation.

The concern with moral purification still prevails in the discourse of most real-life scientists of the period, such as Havelock Ellis (1859-1937), a good friend of Huxley's and strong believer in the power of science to be a source of demystification, who in 1890 writes that "we know that wherever science goes, the purifying breath of spring has passed and all things are re-created". Not only can science debunk stifling superstitions and beliefs that thwart the happiness of men, it has the ability to "purify" the species and "re-create" the universe, equally by translating it into a scientific language of chemical elements and measures that allow man more control over it, but also by discovering and unveiling the inner workings and mechanisms ordering the world, and potentially exerting control over them as well. As it can reveal truth by stripping off "the garment of make-believe by which pious hands have hidden its [the world] uglier features"<sup>92</sup> in order to solve underlying issues, it can also allow for direct intervention into the mechanism of natural selection as it was then understood by a non-specialist audience. To Ellis, eugenics is simply a way of scientifically suppressing qualities "that everyone except "cranks" would take into account when picking out specimens of his class"<sup>93</sup>, i.e. elements that

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<sup>91</sup> Arata, Stephen. 'The Sedulous Ape: Atavism, Professionalism, and Stevenson's *Jekyll and Hyde*', *Criticism*, 37 (1995), p.233.

<sup>92</sup> Ellis, Havelock. *The New Spirit*. 4<sup>th</sup> ed, Constable and Co., 1926, p.8.

<sup>93</sup> Galton, Francis. 'Eugenics, its Definitions, Scope and Aims', read before the Sociological Society, 16 May 1904, in *Sociological Paper*, Vol.& (1904), p.45.

make an individual unfit for reproduction or to become an active member of society. Once again, the focus is very much on the greater good and future of society rather than on individual well-being, which implies that personal interest and individuals can be suppressed in the name of the preservation of the species. The aim is openly to read and use Darwinism in order “to see what the theory of heredity, of variations and the principle of natural selection mean when applied to man”<sup>94</sup>.

Even though such views prompted a certain amount of public unease and protest and misconceptions about the movement started almost from the beginning, the main argument and line of thought evolved remarkably little over the course of twenty years. In his article on ‘Eugenics, Euthenics, And Eudemics’<sup>95</sup>, Lester F. Ward of Brown University opens the second section regarding euthenics lamenting:

Is there, then, nothing to do? Are we to accept that modern scientific fatalism known as *laissez faire*, which enjoins the folding of the arms? Are we to preach a gospel of inaction? I for one certainly am not content to do so, and I believe that nothing I have thus far said [about eugenics] is inconsistent with the most vigorous action, and that in the direction of the betterment of the human race. The end and aim of the eugenists cannot be reproached. The race is far from perfect. Its condition is deplorable. Its improvement is entirely feasible, and in the highest degree desirable. Nor do I refer merely to economic conditions, to the poverty and misery of the disinherited classes. The intellectual state of the world is deplorable, and its improvement is clearly within the reach of society itself. It is therefore a question of method rather than of principle that concerns us.<sup>96</sup>

Just like Jekyll, Ward quickly does away with moral controversy and dilemmas in the name of the “betterment of the human race”, and the eugenic discourse finds justification in the spreading fear of racial degeneration previously expressed in Nordau and apparently still a cause for concern ten years later. As in *Frankenstein*, the position of the scientist as the potential redeemer of mankind is clearly identified and unapologetically expressed. Social reform is cast aside as necessarily insufficient granted the prevalence of the biological imperative and influence. Various strategies of coping mechanisms can be identified, each on a different scale to answer different types of degenerative tendencies, but on a planetary scale, the only long

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<sup>94</sup> Cited by Jones, *Social Darwinism and English Thought*. Harvester Press, 1980, p.99.

<sup>95</sup> Ward, Lester F.. ‘Eugenics, Euthenics, And Eudemics’ in *American Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 18, No. 6, May 1913.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*

lasting solution appeared to be eugenics and the elimination of the “degenerates”, either actively through internment or confinement to mental institutions and asylums or through “extinction” via forced sterilisation: “The feeble, the degenerate will perish. [They] must be abandoned to their inexorable fate. They are past cure or amelioration.” (Nordau 254). However, a sense of urgency still permeates these works, as the "misguided" masses, who were only "victims to fashion and certain cunning impostures," would be led further astray, and the recovery of "civilized humanity" proceed much more slowly, if degenerates were not actively suppressed (Nordau 550-1).

Degeneracy, understood within this model as a phenomenon affecting both the race and the environment, could be described as ultimately "a positive force as it moves humanity to the necessary changes in forms of human interaction. Society thus benefits from its own repression as it dialectically causes changes within itself"<sup>97</sup>, since the acknowledgement of human responsibility becomes a moving force towards a more sustainable vision of the future.

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<sup>97</sup> Gilman, Sander L. "Sexology, Psychoanalysis, and Degeneration." *Difference and Pathology: Stereotypes of Sexuality, Race, and Madness*. Cornell University Press, 1985, p.198.





## II. Splendours and Miseries of Scientists

The Enlightenment constructed an ideal of the scientist as the objective natural physicist, ready to venture beyond the limits of moral good and evil through elaborate experiments and to conquer nature for the greater good. If such a model got under scrutiny as part of a modern, feminist and ecological wave of literary criticism, it initially stood as a rational deviation from the character type that had been predominant before, i.e. a series of negative archetypes of the scientist can be identified that insisted on the morally suspect figure of the alchemist, the unemotional, calculating scientist, and the mad, bad, dangerous lunatic whose knowledge could turn into a weapon at any given moment.

It is therefore unsurprising that a 19<sup>th</sup> century critical stance upon scientific utopias would harken back to previous models of representation of the figure of the scientist in order to reveal as fallacious the ideals of objectivity and benevolence heralded by Enlightenment philosophers. This critique is twofold: first, it strives to expose the endurance of fear surrounding those men who pretended to conquer and appropriate the powers of nature; secondly, it uses newfound discoveries and scientific theories about individual and intellectual development against scientists themselves.

### a) *“Patient and watchful as a prophet”: the scientist as an alchemist and prophet*

The arts have a long standing interpretative tradition of seeking to recognise a prefiguration of the modern scientist or philosopher in a variety of mythological figures. As Roslynn Haynes notes, “myths are the signature of cultures: they express in enduring form, across many generations, the hopes, fears, values, transgressions, and punishments that underpin the social fabric”<sup>98</sup>. The recurrence of the association between the figure of the scientist and the sin of hubris is telling of a Western “fear of specialized knowledge and the authority that powerful knowledge confers in the few, leaving the majority ignorant and impotent”, in a complete reversal of 18<sup>th</sup> century views of science as a beacon of hope for the masses. However, the

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<sup>98</sup> Haynes, Roslynn D. *From Madman to Crime Fighter: the Scientist in Western Culture*. Johns Hopkins University Press, 2017, p.2.

development of vulgarised press and public conference at the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century meant a shift in paradigm and perception as opposed to the Middle-Ages during which men of science were often regarded as alchemists that might re-enact Adam's sin. Indeed, the early 19<sup>th</sup> century sees the gradual popularisation of public lectures: as early as January 1803, Giovanni Aldini conducted a series of public experiments in London, whose aim was body reanimation through the use of a voltaic battery. He notably experimented on the body of Thomas Forster, a murderer who had been hanged six hours earlier<sup>99</sup>:

On the first application of the electrical arcs, the jaw began to quiver, the adjoining muscles were horribly contorted, and the left eye actually opened... the conductors being applied to the ear, and to the rectum, excited muscular contractions much stronger... the arms alternatively rose and fell... the fists clenched and beat violently the table on which the body lay, natural respiration was artificially established... a lighted candle placed before the mouth was several times extinguished... Vitality might have been fully restored, if many ulterior circumstances, had not rendered this – inappropriate<sup>100</sup>

The grotesque description of the attempt fits the criteria of Vitalist thought and experimentation in regard to electricity as the force animating all living bodies. Articles written in the press are revealing of the great impact those experiments had on the middle and lower classes of London. The *Quarterly Review* for instance embarked on an intellectual crusade against Aldini and the proponents of Vitalist theory:

We ... would ask what it is that Mr Lawrence... modestly requires us all to believe? That there is no difference between a man and an oyster, other than the one possesses bodily organs more fully developed than the other! That all the eminent powers of reason, reflexion, imagination, and memory – the powers which distinguish a Milton, a Newton, and a Locke, - are merely the function of a few ounces of organized matter called the brain! Mr Lawrence considers that man, in the most important characteristics of his nature, is nothing more than an orang-outang or an ape, with “more ample cerebral hemispheres”! Mr Lawrence strives with all his powers to prove that men have no souls! Mr Lawrence has the sublime confidence to tell us that it is only “the medullary matter of the brain” that thinks or has spiritual

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<sup>99</sup> Holmes, Richard. *The Age of Wonder : How the Romantic Generation discovered the Beauty and Terror of Science*. Harper Press, 2008, p.317.

<sup>100</sup> Aldini, Giovanni. *An Account of the Late Improvements in Galvanism... Containing the Author's Experiments on the Body of a Malefactor Executed at Newgate*, London 1803, in Fred Botting (ed) *New Casebooks: Frankenstein*, Palgrave 1995, p.125.

consciousness!”<sup>101</sup>

Due to the public outcry, Aldini was forced to renounce his experiments and leave the country in 1805; but the press (especially the *Edinburgh Review* and the *Quarterly Review*) would keep an account of the various elements added to his theories through the Abernethy and Lawrence debates of the early 19<sup>th</sup> century<sup>102</sup>. The tradition of scientific public lectures went on with Humphry Davy’s 1812 lectures on chemistry, which William Godwin and Mary Shelley attended<sup>103</sup>. Shelley even reworked some of Davy’s material, especially his “*Introductory Discourse*” in which he spoke of the future experiments with which man would “interrogate Nature with Power... as a master, active, with his own instruments”<sup>104</sup>, in order to craft the character of Frankenstein’s professor Waldman and his classes on electricity.

As scientific endeavours gain in legitimacy and transparency in relation to a wider, better informed public, the literary representation of men of science transforms from an expression of cultural fear to an enactment of them, a vindication against the plea to trust those in possession of such power. As Haynes goes on to defend,

Parody becomes a mode of defense, of “writing back” to power, and in this process the mad scientist plays a major part. He exists to protest against the “great men” account of science, which tells us we have nothing to fear because these good and brilliant people are in control and trustworthy. The mad scientist of books and movies confirms our suspicion that this is not so. He enacts our nightmares that new, experimental knowledge, unknown to the rest of society, may misfire or be deliberately misused, impacting on individual lives or humankind (p.4)

Philology also grants us hindsight into the initial rejection of the figure of the scientist. The very word is a neologism coined by William Whewell, and was greeted with a certain dose of acrimony. Haynes notes that “by analogy with dentists, it was thought to have connotations of specialisations and professionalism distasteful to heirs of the amateur tradition of British

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<sup>101</sup> Quarterly Review, 1819, from *Frankenstein; or, The Modern Prometheus*. Oxford World Classics, 2008, pp.243-50.

<sup>102</sup> Holmes, Richard. *The Age of Wonder : How the Romantic Generation Discovered the Beauty and Terror of Science*. Harper Press, 2008, p.319.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid, p.312.

<sup>104</sup> Davy, Humphrey. ‘Discourse Introductory to Lectures on Chemistry’, in Davy, John (ed.) *The Collected Works of Sir Humphry Davy*. Smith, Elder and Co., 1839, pp.307-26, p.311.

science". The elite ideal was

that of a man liberally educated, whose avocation was science as an intellectual cum philanthropic recreation, to which he might indeed devote most of his time without ever surrendering his claim to be a private gentleman of wide culture. In particular, to be thought to be pursuing science for money was distasteful<sup>105</sup>.

This attitude only changed as science became one of the learned disciplines alongside medicine, theology and the law. However, the suspicion that a number of men of science were nothing but a 19<sup>th</sup> resurgence of earlier scams and alchemists is barely veiled in the literature of the period, including in the aforementioned quotation from the *Quarterly Review*, which, by complaining that "Mr Lawrence strives with all his powers to prove that men have no souls!", harkens back to medieval beliefs on the opposition between science and religion and the vision of alchemists as dangerous individuals to be feared.

The teachings of Waldman are particularly evocative of the ambiguity and possible conflation between the scientist and the alchemist.

The Ancient teachers of the past promised impossibilities, and performed nothing. The modern masters promise very little; they know that metals cannot be transmuted, and that the elixir of life is a chimera. But these philosophers, whose hands seem only made to dabble in dirt, and their eyes to pour over the microscope or crucible, have indeed performed miracles. They penetrate into the recesses of nature, and shew how she works in her hiding places. They ascend into the heavens; they have discovered how the blood circulates, and the nature of the air we breathe. They have acquired new and almost unlimited powers; they can command the thunders of heaven, mimic the earthquake, and even mock the invisible world with its own shadows. (Shelley 45-46)

Through hyperbolic praise of the advancements achieved by science so far, Waldman hints at the potential absolute mastery of nature by using a lexical field bordering on the mystical or the religious. The allusions to new "powers", to the "thunders of heaven" and "invisible world" all suggest a supernatural knowledge and power over matter which turns the scientist into a being that is more than human and no longer subjected to the laws of nature. This should come as a surprise given that the passage opens with the repudiation of alchemy and its most well-known aim, namely the transmutation of lead into gold. However, and in spite of the claim that eternal life cannot be obtained, the insistence on the working of the body can also express a keen

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<sup>105</sup> Ross, « Scientist », 66; cited in Haynes, p.10.

interest in the human body and perhaps in the possible conflation of the sciences of physics and biology. As such, it might prefigure the desire to transcend the limits between life and death through alchemical procedures, such as palingenesis.

The 1910 silent film *Frankenstein* (J. Searle Dawley) features a scene of monster's creation that is highly relevant to alchemical procedures, especially the concept of palingenesis, i.e. the re-formation of a once-living organism from its ashes or from its severed parts by heating. Palingenesis was a well-known operation in certain intellectual circles, and several descriptions of it can be found in the works of influential writers.

They (the scientists) take a flower, they burn it and from its ashes they extract its juices through calcination. These salts are placed in a glass vial in which, by mixing certain compositions in state of movement by heating, all these materials form a powder of a bluish color. From this ash, set in motion by a low heat, a trunk, leaves and a flower rise; in one word one can see the appearance of a plant that rises from the ashes. Once the heat stops, the plant evaporates, the matter spreads and settles on the bottom of the vile to form a new chaos. A new heating always revives this vegetable phoenix hidden in the ash and, as the presence of heat gives it life, its absence induces its death<sup>106</sup>.

In the film, Frankenstein uses a heating box to heat the monster into life. The Edison Kinetogram film catalogue describes the scene as follows:

We see his experiment commence and the development of it. The formation of the hideous monster from the blazing chemicals of a huge cauldron in Frankenstein's laboratory is probably the most weird, mystifying and fascinating scene ever shown on a film.<sup>107</sup>

Alchemical imagery is thus a key feature to Frankenstein's aesthetic, both in the novel and in the popular culture associated with it. But Waldman's insistence on linking biology and the mastery of electricity instils in Frankenstein's mind another idea that can also be traced back to the original aims of European alchemists, the creation of the homunculus.

The homunculus is a small-sized human that was made popular by 16<sup>th</sup> century alchemy and 19<sup>th</sup> century fictional representation of it. Tellingly enough, Paracelsus, whose works Frankenstein greatly admires, is the first alchemist credited with discussion of the homunculus. In his *De natura rerum* (1537), he outlines his method for creating homunculi:

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<sup>106</sup> Calmet, Augustin. *Treatise on the Apparitions of Spirits and on Vampires or Revenants: of Hungary, Moravia, et al.* in Warren, Brett R. (ed.) *The Complete Volumes I & II*. Routledge, 2015, p.312.

<sup>107</sup> Ackerman, Forrest J, ed. (January 1964). "The Return of Frankenstein". *Famous Monsters of Filmland*. No. 26. Philadelphia: Warren Publishing Co. p. 57.

That the sperm of a man be putrefied by itself in a sealed cucurbit for forty days with the highest degree of putrefaction in a horse's womb, or at least so long that it comes to life and moves itself, and stirs, which is easily observed. After this time, it will look somewhat like a man, but transparent, without a body. If, after this, it be fed wisely with the Arcanum of human blood, and be nourished for up to forty weeks, and be kept in the even heat of the horse's womb, a living human child grows therefrom, with all its members like another child, which is born of a woman, but much smaller<sup>108</sup>

While references to homunculi can also be found in Islamic alchemy, Paracelsus remains the main source for European folklore surrounding those creatures – to the extent that 17<sup>th</sup> century author Thomas Browne could write “I am not of Paracelsus minde that boldly delivers a receipt to make a man without conjunction”<sup>109</sup> while being understood by an educated readership.

Unsurprisingly, such doctrines were severely condemned by the Church (notably by the Homilies of Clement of Rome ca 250 CE, following alleged conjuring up of such a being by the sorcerer Simon Magus<sup>110</sup>) both on account of hubris for attempt at bypassing the Creator and the divinely ordained method of reproduction – two notions that are absolutely central to the understanding of Frankenstein. This passage in particular is telling:

Once on a time, I, by my power, turning air into water, and water again into blood, and solidifying it into flesh, formed a new human creature —a boy—and produced a much nobler work than God the Creator. For He created a man from the earth, but I from air — a far more difficult matter ; and again I un- made him and restored him to air<sup>111</sup>.

The aim of creating a human being in the image of the creator is explicit, as is the open challenging of God's creating power. It has been suggested<sup>112</sup> that Mary Shelley may have found inspiration for her novel during her travels on the Rhine with Percy Shelley, and was made aware of legends surrounding Castle Frankenstein while meeting students and locals. Indeed, the castle was home to German theologian and alchemist Johann Conrad Dippel (1673–1734), who was rumoured to have it as a laboratory in which he conducted experiments in

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<sup>108</sup> Grafton, Anthony. *Natural Particulars: Nature and the Disciplines in Renaissance Europe*. MIT Press, 1999, pp. 328–329.

<sup>109</sup> Browne, Thomas. *Religio Medici*. Christian Classics Ethereal Library, 1926, p.35.

<sup>110</sup> Haynes, Roslynn D. *From Madman to Crime Fighter: the Scientist in Western Culture*. Johns Hopkins University Press, 2017, p. 12.

<sup>111</sup> Magus Simon, cited in Roberts, Alexander Rev. & Donaldson, James (eds.). *The Anti-Nicene Fathers : Translations of The Writings of the Fathers down to A.D.*, vol. VII. Charles Scribner's Sons, 1916, p.101.

<sup>112</sup> Florescu, Radu. *In Search of Frankenstein*. New York Graphic Society, 1975.

alchemy and anatomy; using cadavers and dissections<sup>113</sup>. Moreover, he claimed to have discovered an elixir of life<sup>114</sup>, as well as the means to transfer souls from one body to another. However, 19<sup>th</sup> century engagements with and renditions of such legends took an alternative, even contrary stance. Mary Shelley comically took the opposite stance on the reductive nature of the human being thus obtained, since she makes her monster comically tall (8 foot-tall) and therefore harder if not impossible for a human being to control, physically illustrating the theme of creation gone out of hands. She did, however, place much emphasis on the notion of transgression of biological, reproductive laws by making Frankenstein enamoured with the fantasy of becoming the maker of a new species that would worship him as a father.

But Stevenson's take on the legend might be even more complex and interesting. As Jekyll is a chemist, it is all the more tempting to link him to the figure of the alchemist; moreover, he seems to enact more explicitly part of the reformatory project inherent to alchemy, which Haynes describes as follows:

The pursuit of alchemy was not originally focused on desire for gold and wealth. Rather, in the earliest alchemists were inspired by a vision of man made perfect and immortal, man freed from mental and physical illness and reflecting the One Divine Mind in its Perfection, Beauty and Harmony.<sup>115</sup>

It would thus seem that Stevenson strives to reconcile the reformatory aims of both medieval alchemy and 19<sup>th</sup> century science and newfound interest in eugenics. In doing so, however, he partially reverts the tropes surrounding the homunculus. Many characters make reference to the surprisingly short stature of Hyde (the maid who witnesses the Carew murder mentions "another and very small gentleman" (26), while the exchange between Utterson and the police officer he interrogates insists upon this physical trait:

‘Is this Mr. Hyde a person of small stature?’ he inquired.

‘Particularly small and particularly wicked-looking, is what the maid calls him,’ said the officer. (Stevenson 28)

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<sup>113</sup> Christman, Jared. *Grave Pawns*. Tier Books, 2010, p. 48.

<sup>114</sup> Dippel Joseph Konrad (writing as Christianus Democritus). *Maladies and Remedies of the Life of the Flesh*. Originally published in German in 1736.

<sup>115</sup> Haynes, Roslynn D. *From Madman to Crime Fighter: the Scientist in Western Culture*. Johns Hopkins University Press, 2017, p.12.



Even though he never paid much thought to the physical appearance his second body would assume after the ingestion of the potion, Jekyll soon finds an hypothesis that might explain Hyde's built:

I must here speak by theory alone, saying not that which I know, but that which I suppose to be most probable. The evil side of my nature, to which I had now transferred the stamping efficacy, was less robust and less developed than the good which I had just deposed. Again, in the course of my life, which had been, after all, nine-tenths a life of effort, virtue, and control, it had been much less exercised and much less exhausted. And hence, as I think, it came about that Edward Hyde was so much smaller, slighter, and younger than Henry Jekyll.  
(Stevenson 77-78)

Here, Hyde's small stature is not linked to the nature of Jekyll's experimentations as with the homunculus, instead, it is related to the moral nature of both characters and the fact that Hyde is the embodiment of pure evil as opposed to a smaller version of man. As such, he appears as a truncated, mockery version of a human being in two ways: first, literally, as a man whose height has been reduced, and then morally, as a man whose complex moral character has been annihilated and simplified to a pure, evil type, and a man incapable of nobility of thought or heart. Interestingly enough, the word "mutilated" is precisely the one which Carl Jung uses to refer to the character of the homunculus in the *Visions of Zosimos*, with Zosimos meeting a priest who changes into "the opposite of himself, into a mutilated anthroparion"<sup>116</sup>, in the same way that Hyde is a diminutive, mutilated version of Jekyll.

As such, Hyde appears as the result of a failed alchemical transfiguration intending to go from a divided moral consciousness to a thoroughly noble mind. He comes to embody the Greek concept of the *pharmakon* as studied by Jacques Derrida, being at once a poison and its remedy, as he notes that "the regular, ordered polysemy that has, though skewing, indeterminacy, or overdetermination, but without mistranslation, permitted the rendering of the same word by "remedy", "recipe", "poison", "drug", "philter", etc"<sup>117</sup>. Michael Nass argues that in "Plato's Pharmacy",

the question posed [...] is whether *pharmakon* does indeed mean remedy in one place and poison in another, depending on the circumstances, on the context, or whether *pharmakon* - as what would escape, yet remain unthinkable outside of, any particular context - can never

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<sup>116</sup> Jung, Carl. *Alchemical Studies*. Routledge and Keegan Paul, 1967, p. 60.

<sup>117</sup> Derrida, Jacques. "Plato's Pharmacy", in *Dissemination*. University of Chicago Press, 1981, pp. 63-171.

in fact be mastered in this way, reduced to an either / or<sup>118</sup>.

Similarly, the potion that turns Jekyll into Hyde is thought of as a remedy to the moral struggle the individual faces and a way of disposing with his moral consciousness. While Jekyll is initially pleased with the results, the potion eventually turns into a poison and a curse that leads to his death. It is thus actually neither a remedy nor a curse, but both at once, in the same way that the pharmakon is characterised by its constantly shifting nature and profound indeterminacy: “the drug had no discriminating action; it was neither diabolical nor divine” (Stevenson 75). Moreover, Derrida describes the pharmakon as that which “substitutes the breathless sign for the living voice, claims to do without the father (who is both living and life-giving) of logos, and can no more answer for itself than a sculpture or inanimate painting” (Derrida 75). The importance of the “breathless sign” as opposed to the “living voice” is also present in Stevenson’s novel. While Hyde’s voice is partially determined by the necessity to link him more closely to an ape or an atavistic criminal, it is also a sign of his relation to Jekyll. After his first encounter with Hyde, Utterson is puzzled by his “murderous mixture of timidity and boldness” as “he spoke with a husky, whispering and somewhat broken voice”, and he remembers how Hyde “snarled aloud into a savage laugh” (Stevenson 19). That broken voice, akin to an animal cry, is that of a being which is not entirely human, and possibly the mark of the unfinished nature of Hyde (already visible in his short stature and youth). Throughout the novel, Hyde seems to have issues controlling his voice to sound more composed, as during his encounter with Lanyon, who urges him to check his behaviour, resulting in Hyde answering him “in a voice that was already fairly well under control” (Stevenson 70). The unspoken implications are two-fold: first, that a gentleman should be able to remain collected and dignified at all time; then, that this calmer voice might be Jekyll’s, momentarily struggling not to compromise his only chance to regain his previous form.

After the murder of Danvers Carew, which marks the first serious attempt Jekyll makes to free himself from the nefarious influence of Hyde, Utterson pays him a visit and notices that “Dr. Jekyll [was] looking deadly sick. He did not rise to meet his visitor, but held out a cold hand and bade him welcome in a changed voice.” (Stevenson 33). At this point, there are two main interpretations: either Jekyll’s voice is altered by emotion because of the crime he has

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<sup>118</sup> Nass, Michael. *Taking on the Tradition: Jacques Derrida and the Legacies of Deconstruction*. Stanford University Press, 2003, p.10.

committed, or his changed countenance is the outer manifestation of the internal struggle within his soul; in which case the “changed voice” would be due to the intermingling of Jekyll’s and Hyde’s voices, each trying to overpower the other. At this point, the pharmakon-Hyde perfectly illustrates Nass’s claim that it cannot be “reduced to an either / or”: it is neither Hyde nor Jekyll who is talking through this strangled voice, but an indeterminate being.

Interestingly enough, this vocal ambiguity seems contagious, as all the other characters who come into contact with Hyde see their voice altered: Utterson remarks upon Lanyon’s “loud, unsteady voice” (Stevenson 40) when evoking his meeting with Jekyll; and later in the novel, when Poole comes to him for help, “his voice, when he spoke, [was] harsh and broken” (Stevenson 49), strangled by emotion and fear. In all the instances above, the main characteristic of the voices heard is the wavering between boldness and timidity or fear, an uncertainty at the core of the character.

This voice exists in contradiction to the “living voice” of the doctor before he conducted this experiment. The culmination of narrative tension occurs when Utterson and Poole resolve to confront Hyde, who they believe to be responsible for the murder of Jekyll. As they enquire after Jekyll through the closed door of his laboratory,

A voice answered from within: ‘Tell him I cannot see any one,’ it said complainingly. [...]

‘Sir,’ he said, looking Mr. Utterson in the eyes, ‘was that my master’s voice?’

‘It seems much changed,’ replied the lawyer, very pale, but giving look for look. ‘Changed?’

Well, yes, I think so,’ said the butler. ‘Have I been twenty years in this man’s house, to be deceived about his voice? No, sir; master’s made away with.’ (Stevenson 50-1)

His voice is the final indication that Jekyll is gone and has given way to Hyde. Utterson, who at this stage still refuses to give in to the mindless frenzy agitating the servants, formulates the hypothesis that “the alteration of his voice” (Stevenson 53), while undeniable, might only be the result of “one of those maladies that both torture and deform the sufferer”, unconsciously alluding to the vision of the pharmakon as a poison, an illness slowly corrupting the “living voice” of the sufferer. He is not entirely wrong in his analysis, although this affliction is much more moral or even mental than it is physical, and carries on to note that this hypothesis explains “his eagerness to find this drug, by means of which the poor soul retains some hope of ultimate recovery” (Stevenson 53). However, he must finally conclude with Poole that Jekyll is irremediably gone, and that Hyde has taken his place: “Ah, that’s not Jekyll’s voice — it’s

Hyde's!" (Stevenson 57).

On a deeper level though, Jekyll explains that is most intolerable in his situation is that the "inorganic" should become embodied and be able to sin and act, and "that the slime of the pit seemed to utter cries and voices" (Stevenson 93) – in other words, that the natural boundaries should become blurred and that the repressed should find a voice.

In the same way that he substitutes his own voice for his Jekyll's, Hyde substitutes an investigation for a confession, claims to gain independence from his creator, and cannot be held accountable for his actions by either the police or even Jekyll himself. He also becomes an *eidolon*, an idol or phantom, the incarnation of pure evil, rather than a multifaceted individual. For Jekyll and Hyde as for the remedy / poison duality inherent to the pharmakon,

one can no more "separate" them from each other, think of either one apart from the other, "label" them, than one can in the pharmacy distinguish the medicine from the poison, the good from the evil, the true from the false, the inside from the outside, the vital from the mortal, the first from the second, etc. Conceived within this original reversibility, the pharmakon is the same precisely because it has no identity. (Derrida 107)

The instability and mutability of both Hyde and the potion become all the more relevant as it is a specific percentage of impurity in the salts used for the original potion that made the experiment work ("I am now persuaded that my first supply was impure, and that it was that unknown impurity which lent efficacy to the draught." Stevenson 95). A certain dose of impurity must thus be present even in a remedy, in the same way that a certain dose of evil is necessarily present in man. Attempting transmutation and seeking for a pure material can only result in disaster.

Finally, it is his newfound scientific interest in transmutation from the baser facts of moral life into higher preoccupations which estranged me from his old friend Lanyon. Just like Frankenstein, his pseudo-scientific reveries earned him the contempt of his peers, with Lanyon deeming him too fanciful in the following passage:

‘I wish the friends were younger,’ chuckled Dr. Lanyon. ‘But I suppose we are. And what of that? I see little of him now.’

Indeed?’ said Utterson. ‘I thought you had a bond of common interest.’

‘We had,’ was the reply. ‘But it is more than ten years since Henry Jekyll became too fanciful for me. He began to go wrong, wrong in mind; and though of course I continue to take an

interest in him for old sake's sake, as they say, I see and I have seen devilish little of the man. Such unscientific balderdash,' added the doctor, flushing suddenly purple, 'would have estranged Damon and Pythias. (Stevenson 14)

The mythological allusion to Damon and Pythias, whose friendship is recorded in the writings of Cicero<sup>119</sup>, hints at the severity of the madness Jekyll must have indulged in; while the use of the terms "balderdash" to describe his works is revealing of the contempt in which he holds them. The narrator establishes Lanyon and Jekyll are close friends several times in the novel. When Utterson is puzzled by the discovery of Jekyll's will, he decides to go to Lanyon for help ("If any one knows, it will be Lanyon,' he had thought" (Stevenson 13)), hinting at the close proximity between them. They are bound together by the links of habit of a long continued friendship and their common background in medicine. We can conjecture their relation to be quite similar to Lanyon and Utterson's, which "reposed on genuine feeling. For these two were old friends, old mates both at school and college, both thorough respecters of themselves and of each other, and, what does not always follow, men who thoroughly enjoyed each other's company." (Stevenson 13-4). And indeed, when Jekyll momentarily gets rid of Hyde, they can resume the natural course of their friendship: "on the 8th of January Utterson had dined at the doctor's with a small party; Lanyon had been there; and the face of the host had looked from one to the other as in the old days when the trio were inseparable friends." (Stevenson 38).

While allusions to friendship need be qualified by the nature of social life in the Victorian era, and the unspoken rules of male companionship that prevail in the novel, Utterson still regards their friendship as essential, albeit in a characteristically utilitarian way: "We are three very old friends, Lanyon; we shall not live to make others." (Stevenson 40).

Jekyll's faith in Lanyon to carry out without failure the seemingly unexplainable actions he will require of him appears in full force in the following letter:

'DEAR LANYON, You are one of my oldest friends; and although we may have differed at times on scientific questions, I cannot remember, at least on my side, any break in our affection. There was never a day when, if you had said to me, 'Jekyll, my life, my honour, my reason, depend upon you,' I would not have sacrificed my left hand to help you. Lanyon, my life, my honour my reason, are all at your mercy; if you fail me to-night I am lost. (Stevenson 63)

The desperation discernible in the tone of the letter, added to the layer of secrecy and appeal to

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<sup>119</sup> Cicero. *De officiis*. A. Hakkert, 1966.

the sacred bonds of friendship, is a good indication of the degree to which Jekyll feels secure about his friend. This paradigmatic proof of friendship serves to highlight the intensity of the disgust Lanyon must have felt for Jekyll's experiments, that he might reasonably renounce their friendship for them.

This solid friendship is brought to an end by the nature of Jekyll's experiments, which alienates Lanyon. Friendship evolved into mutual disdain and disappointment, with Lanyon being displeased in Jekyll's whims, and Jekyll being dissatisfied by Lanyon's short sightedness and lack of consideration for his scientific endeavours. While the latter pretends to be full of contempt for Lanyon, it is actually fairly obvious that most of his resentment derives from his hurt pride, as he deplores the reaction of

that hide-bound pedant, Lanyon, at what he called my scientific heresies. Oh, I know he's a good fellow — you needn't frown — an excellent fellow, and I always mean to see more of him; but a hide-bound pedant for all that; an ignorant, blatant pedant. I was never more disappointed in any man than Lanyon. (Stevenson 24)

Scientific disagreement and pride are at the root of their estrangement, and while Lanyon continues to care for his friend "for old sake's sake", all relations must be discontinued after Lanyon witnesses Hyde's transformation into Jekyll. After this point, Lanyon will refuse to even utter Jekyll's name, and will claim to regard him as dead: "I wish to see or hear no more of Dr. Jekyll," he said in a loud, unsteady voice. "I am quite done with that person; and I beg that you will spare me any allusion to one whom I regard as dead." (Stevenson 40). While understandable granted the horror of the transformation he had to behold, Lanyon's reaction is also emblematic of the fate awaiting the scientist, who becomes increasingly isolated both because of the very nature of his experiments, and because his scientific pride prevents him from taking into account other people's feelings and points of view. Their friendship is therefore a narrative device used to dramatise the dire consequences of reckless scientific endeavours.

The figure of the alchemist thus seems fitted to the ambiguous figure of the scientist depicted by both Shelley and Stevenson because of a tradition of figures of genius creators slaving after illicit knowledge in the Jungian collective unconscious. It is closely linked to the idea of transgression of the natural or more dramatically to the divine order of things, as illustrated by

the figure of Faustus, who combines the notion of the genius alchemist surpassing his human condition and that of divine retaliation for his actions.

The combination of the figure of the alchemist and idea of divine retribution is epitomised in the Faustus myth, which is the paradigmatic mad scientist story. First popularised in England by Christopher Marlowe's 1604 *The Tragical History of Doctor Faustus*, which portrayed a "Renaissance humanist longing to transcend the imitations of human intellect"<sup>120</sup> who wanted to learn "the metaphysics of magicians" since "a sound magician is a demi-god"<sup>121</sup> and was offered a contract by a demon knowing "unlawful things / Whose deepness doth entice such forward wits / To practise more than heavenly power permits" (158). Since he eventually derived very little from the selling of his soul, Faustus introduces the theme of the "tragic wasted potential of a gifted man"<sup>122</sup> who serves as a cautionary tale, a tragic hero encouraging others not to follow his example. It was famously reworked in the 19<sup>th</sup> century by Goethe's own Faustus, which drew on Romantic staples to make the hero more loveable and relatable to the Romantic generations.

But by becoming a Romantic figure, Faustus endorses a set of values that mark him out as an exemplary man and a martyr to the readers. The religious vocabulary is stronger in the 19<sup>th</sup> century version of the play, and plays with the two-faced figure of the scientist as both a doomed criminal in the eyes of God and a prophet in the eyes of Man.

The representation of the scientist as a prophet announcing the rise of a new era or of a new race of better men seems to hint to the impossibility of disposing of the religious and mythological model, as illustrated by frequent references to Biblical episodes in *Frankenstein*. From the beginning of their lives, scientists seem to have been marked aside by fate or a godly power, and destined to greatness. The initial episode that determines the protagonists' scientific career is often described in terms of revelation, or otherwise memorable religious experience. In *Frankenstein*, Victor remembers his early readings of the works of Cornelius Agrippa as an

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<sup>120</sup> Haynes, Roslynn D. *From Madman to Crime Fighter: the Scientist in Western Culture*. Johns Hopkins University Press, 2017, p.20.

<sup>121</sup> Marlowe, Christopher. *The Tragical History of Doctor Faustus*, in *Marlowe's Plays and Poems*. Dent, 1963, p.122.

<sup>122</sup> Haynes, Roslynn D. *From Madman to Crime Fighter: the Scientist in Western Culture*. Johns Hopkins University Press, 2017, p.21.

early revelation that decided of his fate:

I chanced to find a volume of the works of Cornelius Agrippa. I opened it with apathy; the theory which he attempts to demonstrate, and the wonderful facts which he relates, soon changed this feeling into enthusiasm. A new light seemed to draw upon my mind; and, bounding with joy, I communicated my discovery to my father (Shelley 34)

The very opening of the paragraph on the verb “chance” places the following development under the sign of destiny. The passage conflates the ideas of revelation and light, and young Frankenstein prides himself on the discovery of new theories he hopes to share with an audience in order to impress them. A seemingly innocent victim of sheer bad luck, his whole future appears to have been determined by a chance encounter.

However, primary inspiration for the depiction of genius seems to hark back to 18th century intuitions as to the different physiological nature of men of genius, theories which would be expanded later in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In the case of *Frankenstein*, Shelley may have found inspiration through the perusal of Wollstonecraft’s account of genius. In her *Vindication*, she seems to consider the man of genius as part of a higher realm: “...an ingenious conception respecting Newton: that he was probably a being of a superior order, accidentally caged in a human body” (Wollstonecraft 145, II). And

The association of our ideas is either habitual or instantaneous; and the latter mode seems rather to depend on the original temperature of the mind than one the will. [...] Like the lightning’s flash are many recollections; one idea assimilating and explaining another, with astonishing rapidity. I do not now allude to that quick perception of truth, which is so intuitive that it baffles research [...] Over those instantaneous associations we have little power; for when the mind is once enlarged by excursive flights, or profound reflection, the raw materials will, in some degree, arrange themselves. The understanding, it is true, may keep us from going out of drawing when we group our thoughts, or transcribe from the imagination the warm sketches of fancy; but the animal spirits, the individual character, give the colouring. Over this subtle electric fluid, how little control do we possess, and over it how little power can reason obtain! These fine intractable spirits appear to be the essence of genius, and beaming in its eagle eye, produce in the most eminent degree the happy energy of associating thoughts that surprise, delight, and instruct. These are the glowing minds that concentrate pictures for their fellow-creatures (Wollstonecraft 244-5, VI).

Several important points emerge from this quotation. First, Wollstonecraft uses the running metaphor of electricity as both a simile to express the impression of rapidity and revelation inherent to the experience of intellectual discovery and progress. By doing so, she demonstrates her awareness of the Vitalist theories in vogue during the period and seems to endorse a



conception of intelligence and the mind as a by-product of bodily existence.

Moreover, she carefully distinguishes between the ordinary man, and the man of genius, and it would appear that the latter's capacities depend entirely on his idiosyncrasies and physiological organisation; as such, education can only be a tool used to perfect man's natural ability and bring him to the realisation of his full potential; however, the final result depends on the natural capacities of the individual. As such, genius can be said to belong to a subcategory of mankind, apart from the rest of humanity.

The role of the man of genius is to become a beacon of reason leading the path for his fellow-men. The lexical field of life is reminiscent of religious imagery associated with revelation. The impression is reinforced by the lack of an explicit physiological or anatomical explanation, such as that of Cesare Lombroso, as Wollstonecraft favours the use of the term "*spirits*", which can both allude to the scientific theory of animal spirits popularised by Descartes and natural philosophy and to the presence of spiritual entities guiding genius, such as the genius. In Roman religion, the genius is the individual instance of a general divine nature that is present in every individual person and guides him like a guardian angel. Often depicted as a winged human figure, the genius was thought to act as an intermediary between the realm of men, and that of the gods. In this text, the term "*spirit*" therefore also references the existence of a particular destiny, possibly determined by a higher spiritual entity that each man must fulfil.

19<sup>th</sup> century medical literature will be strongly indebted to this descriptive tradition. Both David Punter<sup>123</sup> and Robert Mighall<sup>124</sup> insist on the permeability between the medical and the artistic literature of the period. The Gothic genre, whose staple descriptions provided a basis for the analysis and exploration of medical concepts, made such concepts more readily available to a wider readership already familiar with the conventions of the genre. This medical literature in turn inspired authors in a mutually reinforcing cycle which contributed to the popularisation of certain ideas. A good illustration of the different nature of scientists can be found in John Abernethy's depiction of his teacher, John Hunter, at work:

He would stand for hours motionless as a statue, except that with a pair of forceps in either hand he was picking asunder the connecting fibres of some structure... patient and watchful

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<sup>123</sup> Punter, David. *The literature of terror: a history of Gothic fictions from 1765 to the present day*. Longman, 1996.

<sup>124</sup> Mighall, Robert. *A geography of Victorian Gothic fiction: Mapping history's nightmares*. Oxford University Press, 1999.

as a prophet, sure that the truth would come: it might be as in a flash, in which, as with inspiration, intellectual darkness became light.<sup>125</sup>

Such a description can be compared to that which Shelley offers of the dreams in which she conceived her novel : “I saw - with shut eyes, but acute mental vision - I saw the pale student of unhallowed arts kneeling beside the thing he had put together”<sup>126</sup>. As a prophet, Frankenstein kneels before the monstrous divinity he has created, in a reversal of the master / slave imagery that permeates the novel.

Moreover, the thought process she experienced during that night closely resembles what her mother describes:

My imagination, unbidden, possessed and guided me, gifting the successive images that arose in my mind with a vividness far beyond the usual bound of reverie [...] I returned to my ghost story - my tiresome unlucky ghost story! O! if I could only contrive one which would frighten my reader as I myself had been frightened that night! Swift as *light* and as cheering was the idea that broke in upon me.<sup>127</sup>

Shelley uses images of light to better convey the impression of suddenness and clarity that broke in upon her, making her the passive recipient to an artistic revelation.

Stevenson too explained how the idea for *The Strange Case* came to him in a dream. His wife, Fanny Osbourne, recalled: "In the small hours of one morning I was wakened by cries of horror from him. I, thinking he had a nightmare, wakened him. He said, angrily, 'Why did you wake me? I was dreaming a fine bogie tale.'", probably cocaine-induced. Stevenson takes up the story in his essay "A Chapter on Dreams": "I dreamed the scene at the window and a scene afterward split in two, in which Hyde, pursued for some crime, took the powder and underwent the change in the presence of his pursuers. All the rest was made awake and conscious."<sup>128</sup>. It would thus seem that both the scientist and the literary genius are under the same influence of divine or spiritual inspiration, blurring the boundaries between life and art.

The staple metaphors above run through the whole duration of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, all the more so as recent developments in intellectual and scientific discoveries (notably, the 1895 translation

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<sup>125</sup> Druin, Burch. *Digging up the Dead: The Life and Times of Astley Cooper*. Chatto & Windus, 2007, pp.154-5.

<sup>126</sup> Shelley, Mary. ‘Author’s Introduction’ in *Frankenstein, or; The Modern Prometheus*. 3rd ed. to the 1831 version, Penguin Classics, 2003.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid.

<sup>128</sup> Elwin, Malcom. *The strange case of Robert Louis Stevenson*. Macdonald, 1950, p. 79.

of Max Nordau's *Degeneration*) popularise the notion of materialism and determinism. As the medical literature of the period becomes more widely read, it borrows some of the theatricality observable in other literary genres, frequently abusing religious or mystical references. For instance, Cesare Lombroso describes his dissection of the corpse of renowned criminal Vilella as follows:

At the sight of that skull, *I seemed to see all of a sudden, lighted up as a vast plain under a flaming sky*, the problem of the nature of the criminal- an atavistic being who reproduces in his person the ferocious instincts of primitive humanity, and the inferior animals. Thus was explained anatomically the enormous jaws, high cheek-bones, prominent superciliary arches, solitary lines in the palms, extreme size of the orbits, handle-shaped or sessile ears found in criminals, savages and apes, insensibility to pain, extremely acute sight, tattooing, excessive idleness, love of orgies, and the irresistible craving for evil for its own sake, the desire not only to extinguish life in the victim, but to mutilate the corpse, tear its flesh, and drink its blood"<sup>129</sup>.

Tellingly enough, the passage is a perfect combination of meticulously, scientific observations and supernatural claims. The scientist appears as a prophetic figure, a soothsayer able to predict the future of individuals based on physiological features and to decipher signs ordinary men would miss. Because of his capacity to detect criminality, he appears as a potential saviour of humanity, allowing him to protect his cattle from the wolf in disguise.

The notion of (biological and intellectual) predetermination is thus central to the understanding of the imagery of the period, which translates as an obsession with fate and destiny in both novels of this study, which the main characters explicitly acknowledge. Indeed, Frankenstein insists on predetermination from an early age, stating that "The world was to me a secret which I desired to divine" (Shelley 31); "Curiosity, earnest research to learn the hidden laws of nature ... are among the earliest sensations I can remember"; and eventually that in spite of his best efforts, "Destiny was too potent, and her immutable laws had decreed my utter and terrible destruction" (Shelley 38). As for Jekyll, he blames the "late accursed night" when he "compounded the elements, watched them boil and smoke together in the glass, and when the ebullition had subsided, with a strong glow of courage, drank off the potion" (Stevenson 76). Even though he tries to become the master of his own destiny, Frankenstein is described as

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<sup>129</sup> Lombroso, Cesare. *Introduction to Lombroso-Ferrero, Gina. Criminal Man According to the Classification of Cesare Lombroso*. G.P. Putnam's & Sons, 1911, xiv-xv.

predetermined by his environment and parents, both in mundane matters, such as the choice of his future wife (“these indications [of Elizabeth’s good character]... determined my mother to consider Elizabeth as my future wife; a design which she found no reason to repent” (Shelley 29), and in matters that more clearly contributed to the shaping of his destiny, such as his education in Greek and Latin and natural sciences.

Frankenstein himself repeatedly draws insistence on the inescapability of his fate:

In drawing the picture of my early days, I must not omit to record those events which led, by insensible steps to my after tale of misery: for when I would account to myself for the birth of that passion, which afterwards ruled my *destiny*, I find it arise, like a mountain river, from ignoble and almost forgotten sources. (Shelley 33)

The circumstances in which he first became acquainted with the pseudo-scientific tradition that was to be his downfall are placed under the sign of fate, and of the combination between a natural propensity and inclination towards science on the one hand, as well as strong mystical tendencies seeking a medium of expression. As he notes,

“Natural philosophy is the *genius* that has regulated my *fate*; I desire therefore, in this narration, to state those facts which led to my *predilection* for that science. [...] I *chanced* to find a volume of the works of Cornelius Agrippa. I opened it with apathy; the theory which he attempts to demonstrate, and the wonderful facts which he relates, soon changed this feeling into enthusiasm. A new light seemed to draw upon my mind; and, bounding with joy, I communicated my discovery to my father” (Shelley 34)

The description emphasises the importance of this event as a form of revelation of Frankenstein’s manifest destiny. This factual exposition of the determining factors of his youth is quickly followed by a stage of remorse and wondering about his potential alternative fate had his father exposed the book as a fraud:

If, instead of this remark, my father had taken the pains to explain to me, that the principles of Agrippa had been entirely exploded, and that a modern system of science had been introduced, which possessed much greater powers than the ancient, because the powers of the latter were chimerical, while those of the former were real and practical; under such circumstances, I should certainly have thrown Agrippa aside, and , with my imagination warmed as it was, should probably have applied myself to the more rational theory of chemistry which has resulted from modern discoveries (Shelley 34).

Two crucial notions intertwine in the passage: the idea of an unescapable fate, and the role of education in the shaping of one’s personality, a preoccupation that very much influenced Mary Shelley’s life, as the daughter of two great intellectual figures of her period, and which finds

expression in her detailed account of the education of Lionel Verney by prince Adrian in *The Last Man* and the botched education of the monster in *Frankenstein*. Indeed, the monster himself insists on his inherent goodness (see part I of this study), and on the fact that he too was merely a passive agent determined by the two fold rejection he experienced, first at the hands of his master, and then at those of the DeLaceys. On the subject, Shelley may have been influenced by Wollstonecraft's *Vindication*, in which the following passage can be found: "A great proportion of the misery that wanders, in hideous forms, around the world, is allowed to rise from the negligence of parents" (Wollstonecraft 293, XI), a cautionary advice which applies both to Victor Frankenstein and to his monstrous progeny.

Throughout the novel, the impossibility of escaping one's past is dramatized by the chase throughout Europe that leads both master and creature to their demise. Frankenstein fails to account rationally for his unwavering will as a quest for the disintegration of a potential threat to the human race; instead, he uses a vocabulary reminiscent of the religious pilgrimage or exile:

"And now my wanderings began, which are to cease but with life. I have traversed a vast portion of the earth, and have endured all the hardships which travellers, in deserts and barbarous countries, are wont to meet. How I have lived I hardly know; many times have I stretched my failing limbs upon the sandy plain, and prayed for death. But revenge kept me alive; I dared not die, and leave my adversary in being." (Shelley 249).

The evocation of "wanderings" in the "deserts" cannot fail to lead the reader to read the passage in terms of religious, Biblical exile. As he notes himself, "The spirits that guarded me had provided these moments, or rather hours, o happiness that I might retain strength to fulfil my *pilgrimage*" (Shelley 252). He will also declare himself ready to join "those who even now prepare for me the reward of my tedious toil and horrible pilgrimage" (Shelley 254), acknowledging the formative quality of his quest. Indeed, many parallels can be drawn between this passage and the Book of Lamentations. In both cases, the central idea is that of an exile induced by transgression of the divine laws, leading to a recognition of one's responsibility in sinning: "I pursued my path towards the destruction of the daemon, more as a task enjoined by heaven, as the mechanical impulse of some power of which I was unconscious, than as the ardent desire of my soul" (Shelley 253)<sup>130</sup>. Frankenstein seems to reconcile the religious undertaking of an exorcism and a Cartesian vocabulary that previously served to explain and justify his experiments, perhaps revealing that to a certain extent he remained incapable of fully

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<sup>130</sup> Lamentations reads as follows: "The LORD is righteous; For I have rebelled against His command; Hear now, all peoples, And behold my pain" (Lamentations, 1:18).

renouncing his mode of thinking. Nevertheless, it confirms the strong ideological bias present elsewhere in the novel: that free will might be a fallacy hiding the workings of either God, or Fate.

Frankenstein's resolve takes the form of an oath to those who perished because of his blindness, ie a highly religious form akin to the dedication of oneself to the undertaking of a religious task or the adoption of the monastical life:

I knelt on the grass, and kissed the earth, and with quivering lips exclaimed, "By the sacred earth on which I kneel, by the shades that wander near me, by the deep and eternal grief that I feel, I swear; and by thee, O Night, and by the spirits that preside over thee, I swear to pursue the daemon, who caused this misery, until he or I shall perish in mortal conflict (Shelley 250).

Interestingly enough, to Frankenstein, affirmation of himself as an agent endowed with free will takes the form of an acceptance to accomplish the destiny set for him, in a final reconciliation with the responsibilities dawning upon him. Yet, even in that moment of self-affirmation, destiny awaits in the shape of the monster lurking by:

I was answered through the stillness of the night by a loud and fiendish laugh. It rung on my ears long and heavily; the mountains re-echoed it, and I felt as if all hell surrounded me with mockery and laughter. [...] The laughter died away, when a well-known and abhorred voice, apparently close to my ear, addressed me in an audible whisper – "I am satisfied: miserable wretch! You have determined to live, and I am satisfied!". (Shelley 251).

Apart from the convenient presence of the monster precisely as Frankenstein swears the oath, the ambiguity of the vocabulary he uses is telling of the role of the monster as an agent of fate: even though Frankenstein has *determined* to live to avenge his family and friends, this gesture is merely the recognition of a fate beyond his control, and self-affirming action can only be the acceptance of one's ontological passivity.

I pursued him; and for many months this has been my task. *Guided by a slight clue*, I followed the windings of the Rhone, but vainly. The blue Mediterranean appeared; and, by *a strange chance*, I saw the fiend (Shelley 251, italics mine).

The mere implausibility of the chance encounters narrated by Frankenstein invites the reader to reconsider the passage, and indeed the whole relationship between Frankenstein and his creature, as an allegory of "strange chance", i.e. destiny. Frankenstein admits to being guided on his path by signs left by the monster himself, as well as "spirits": "sometimes he himself,

who feared that if I lost all trace I should despair and die, often left some mark to guide me.” (Shelley 251), “I knelt down, and, with a full heart, thanked my guiding spirit for conducting me in safety” (Shelley 258). The following passage is even more telling of the protagonist’s mindset:

Cold, want and fatigue, were the least pains which I was destined to endure. I was cursed by some *devil*, and carried about with me my eternal *hell*: yet still a *spirit of good* followed and directed my steps, and, when I most murmured, would suddenly extricate me from seemingly insurmountable difficulties. Sometimes, when nature overcome by hunger, sunk under the exhaustion, a repast was prepared for me in the desert, that restored and inspired me. [...] Often, when all was dry, the *heavens* cloudless, and I was parched by thirst, a slight cloud would bedim the sky, shed the few drops that revived me, and vanish. (Shelley 252).

The passage seems to echo two famous Biblical episodes. First, the temptation of Christ in the Wilderness, and especially the claim that ‘Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.’<sup>131</sup> (Matthew, 4:4). Whenever Frankenstein is threatened by death or despair, he finds solace in the right circumstances that allow him to support his life force. The force that allows him to go forth comes from beyond his bodily strength or stamina, as he remarks: “How I have lived I hardly know; many times have I stretched my failing limbs upon the sandy plain, and prayed for death. But revenge kept me alive; I dared not die, and leave my adversary in being.” (Shelley 249). Instead of living through his physical body alone, on bread alone, he is moved by a strong spiritual sense of duty, reminiscent of divine inspiration. Moreover, the Law and quotation from the Old Testament is enough for Christ to be able to defeat the demon; similarly, the Law and the necessity to redeem oneself for having transgressed it is the sole element that keeps Frankenstein alive. Later on, he will remark that “calling on heaven to support me, I continued with unabated fervour to traverse immense desert” (Shelley 254), once more resorting to the imagery of the desert and lexical field of religious fervour and faith.

Secondly, the passage reads as an inversion of the sermon on the Mount of Olives. In this sermon, Christ teaches that by being righteous and benevolent, one becomes closer to spiritual redemption through Christ, in a system of *quid pro quo* (‘Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.’<sup>132</sup>). However, in

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<sup>131</sup> See Matthew 4:1-4.

<sup>132</sup> Matthew 25:40.

Frankenstein's case, the fact that he should be fed by the "heavens" comes ironically, since all his actions so far have been rooted in spiritual transgression and have resulted in death and chaos. Godly retribution is thus profoundly independent of personal merit, and imposes itself upon even the worst, most unrepentant of sinners.

But this Biblical reading also implies a transformation in the reader's perception of the monster. Whether or not he was sympathetic before, the reader must recognise his value as either an instrument of fate or a messenger sent by God. The monster explicitly links his life to Frankenstein's, deepening their bond and the allegorical reading. "Come, my enemy; we have yet to wrestle for our lives; but many hard and miserable hours must you endure, until that period shall arise". As per usual, the monster's eloquent phrasing is oddly prophetic, and his use of the term enemy (the original translation of the name "Satan") is anything but innocuous, and invites a reversal of the roles between Frankenstein and the monster. At the same time, it confers metaphysical and religious gravity upon their opposition, which eventually appears as a fight between the forces of good and evil, though it remains suspiciously unclear which contestant symbolises what camp (although Frankenstein seems to have a pretty clear opinion on the subject, calling the monster a "scoffing devil"! (Shelley 254).)

In spite of the strong Christian undertones in the passage, it would seem that it is possible to preserve the Greek figure of the tragic hero as part of a reflection on individual *fatum*, by shifting from the myth of Prometheus to that of Sisyphus, and the undertaking of a never-ending task.

Frankenstein's deathbed confession is infused with feelings of and regret over his overwhelming pride :

"When I was younger," said he, "I felt as if I were destined for some great enterprise. My feelings are profound; but I possessed a coolness of judgment that fitted me for illustrious achievements. This sentiment of the worth of my nature supported me, when others would have been oppressed; for I deemed it criminal to throw away in useless grief those talents that might be useful to my fellow-creatures. When I reflected on the work I had completed, no less a one that the creation of sensitive and rational animal, I could not rank myself with the head of common projectors. But this feeling, which supported me in the commencement of my career, now serves only to plunge me lower in the dust. All my speculations and hopes are as nothing; and, like the archangel who aspired to omnipotence, I am chained in an eternal hell. (Shelley 261)



This exposition of Frankenstein's feelings on his deathbed relies on the comparison between his earlier hopes and aspirations and his current demise. While Frankenstein acknowledges his intellectual superiority over other men as both a token of pride and a responsibility towards them for the intellectual and scientific advancement of humankind, he also recognises that he failed to reconcile his warm feelings and coolness of judgement and had to suppress the one for the other. Moreover, Shelley makes an interesting use of the term "*criminal*", as Frankenstein would have deemed it criminal not to use his gifts for the advancement of mankind, but ended up becoming a criminal both as the main person responsible for the murders of his family and Justine's tragic death, but also in the eyes of God as one who has sought to surpass his condition and play God.

This passage is thus a good illustration of the thesis of the criminal scientist, driven astray by his failure to subjugate his ambition and respect a proper hierarchy of values between the law of God, that of man, and those of nature. The comparison between him and Satan as having both attempted to surpass their condition and access ungainly power also deepens further the eventual interchangeability between creator and monster, since he frequently designates the latter as "his enemy" or a "devil", and the monster himself empathises with the figure of the fallen angel from Milton's *Paradise Lost*.

In *The Strange Case*, the notion of faith comes to be embodied by the inescapable presence of the monstrous double. The fact that Jekyll should always revert to Hyde even while increasing the doses of potion and attempting to refrain from morally dubious acts proves the inescapability of fate and the capital sin committed in attempting to meddle with Creation. Initially born under favourable conditions that should have guaranteed him a distinguished and uneventful life, he was also born marred by the deadly defect of excessive pride, the root of his turmoil:

I was born [...] to a large fortune, endowed besides with excellent parts, *inclined by nature to industry*, fond of the respect of the wise and good among my fellowmen, and thus, as might have been supposed, with every guarantee of an honourable and distinguished future. And indeed the worst of my faults was a certain impatient gaiety of disposition, such as has made the happiness of many, but such as I found it hard to reconcile with my imperious desire to carry my head high, and wear a more than commonly grave countenance before the

public. [...] Many a man would have even blazoned such irregularities as I was guilty of; but from the high views that I had set before me, I regarded and hid them with an almost *morbid* sense of shame. It was thus rather the exacting nature of my aspirations than any particular degradation in my faults, that made me what I was and, with even a deeper trench than in the majority of men, severed in me those provinces of good and ill which divide and compound man's dual nature (73)

By insisting on his innate qualities, Jekyll follows a long tradition of determination theories, and as is the case with Frankenstein, the explicit display of his inborn gifts only serves to make him all the guiltier of his subsequent degradation. But more interestingly, his natural tendency towards pride and scorn leads to his demise. As Robert Mighall points out, it is Jekyll's "overdeveloped sense of sinfulness that constructs Hyde". In this regard, it is perhaps interesting to note that Stevenson himself was born in a strict Calvinist family, a fact biographers credit for infusing his writing with a stern, thoroughly negative vision of man. Indeed, Calvinism taught that humans were innately sinful and could only be saved by the Grace of God, and not through individual actions. This meant that each person's fate was determined before birth; either for heavenly salvation or eternal hell. Stevenson's father, a sternly religious man, often told the child tales of destiny and damnation. It could be argued that Jekyll's resignation and acceptance of his progression into vice and evil, coupled with his insistence on his inherently prideful nature, reflects the Calvinist belief in destiny and predetermination<sup>133</sup>. Scriptures abound with cautionary tales about excessive pride, especially the Proverbs ('Every one that is proud in heart is an abomination to the LORD: though hand join in hand, he shall not be unpunished' (Proverbs, 16:15).

Even though the term is conspicuously absent from the novel, the word "abomination" would be a perfect phrasing of both Jekyll's experimentations and their physical embodiment in the person of Hyde. From the abominable defect of pride surges a physical abomination that must be destroyed. Isaiah (2:12, KJV) also explicitly states threats of divine retaliation towards the prideful "For the day of the LORD of hosts shall be upon every one that is proud and lofty, and upon every one that is lifted up; and he shall be brought low", foreshadowing Jekyll's ungodly death by suicide.

Even though as an adult Stevenson would come to reject his upbringing, as illustrated by some

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<sup>133</sup> McLynn, Frank. *Robert Louis Stevenson*. Hutchinson, 1993.

of his poetry<sup>134</sup>, scholars note that “the Calvinism he [had] been brought up in left its gloomy mark upon him [and] he would always bear the indelible marks of the shorter catechism”<sup>135</sup>. Stern goes as far as to believe that to a certain extent, Stevenson channelled his moralising tendencies through his fiction, writing that “It cannot be denied that he [Stevenson] was inordinately fond of sermonising – ‘I shall preach on my death-bed’ – but it [the sermonising] always found a more vivid medium in fiction”<sup>136</sup>.

The fact that Stevenson should use Jekyll and Hyde to describe man as a fallen creature for whom a façade of Victorian virtue obscures a corrupted core is consistent with the theme of the double nature of man, and with the necessity to check and punish pride. If he dreamt of housing both parts of his personality “in separate identities” so “the just could walk steadfastly and securely on his upward path, doing the good things in which he found his pleasure, and no longer exposed to disgrace and penitence by the hands of this extraneous evil” (Stevenson 75), the evident rhetorical delight he derives from the depiction of his ideal, highly moral self is telling of the pride underlying his enterprise and dooming his actions.

Jekyll recognises his responsibility in the making of the potion and accepts his punishment, noting:

I have brought on myself a punishment and a danger that I cannot name. If I am the chief of sinners, I am the chief of sufferers also. I could not think that this earth contained a place for sufferings and terrors so unmanly; and you can do but one thing, Utterson, to lighten this destiny, and that is to respect my silence. (Stevenson 41)

The strong religious vocabulary hints at his acceptance of the doctrine of predetermination and the fallacy of the belief that man’s amendment and repentance are enough to save him. Therefore, even though Utterson comes to him with the best of intentions, there is nothing anyone else can do as his soul is irretrievably lost. His destiny cannot be avoided, as he rhetorically reinforces in his account of his waking up in the body of Hyde:

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<sup>134</sup> ‘O fine religious, decent folk, / In Virtue’s flaunting gold and scarlet, / I sneer between two puffs of smoke, /- Give me the publican and harlot’. From Stevenson, Robert Louis. ‘Hail! Childish Slave of Social Rules!’ in Sellar, Eleanor Mary. *“I Have Seen a Young Poet.” Robert Louis Stevenson – Interviews and Recollections*. Macmillan Press Ltd, 1996. 24-27.

<sup>135</sup> Ibid, p.25.

<sup>136</sup> Stern, Gladys Bronwyn. *Robert Louis Stevenson*. Longmans Group Ltd, 1971., p.17.

by sloping my own hand backward, I had supplied my double with a signature, I thought I sat beyond the reach of fate. Some two months before the murder of Sir Danvers, I had been out for one of my adventures, had returned at a late hour, and woke the next day in bed with somewhat odd sensations. It was in vain I looked about me; in vain I saw the decent furniture and tall proportions of my room in the square; in vain that I recognised the pattern of the bedcurtains and the design of the mahogany frame; something still kept insisting that I was not where I was, that I had not wakened where I seemed to be, but in the little room in Soho where I was accustomed to sleep in the body of Edward Hyde. (Stevenson 82)

By opening a separate bank account for his diabolical counterpart, Jekyll believed he could avert the hand of fate; yet, he quickly realises that such a fantasy is fallacious, as in spite of rational reassurance he can feel himself having turned into Hyde against his will. The anaphora running through the text is expressive enough of the inescapability of his plight, linked to the theme of religious retribution. Later on in the chapter, Jekyll muses on this experience which “like the Babylonian finger on the wall, to be spelling out the letters of my judgment” (Stevenson 83). The reference comes from Daniel book V, in which the prophet narrates a banquet thrown by Babylonian king Belshazzar, during which the guest use vessels stolen from the Temple. As a punishment, a hand appears and writes on a wall a mysterious message that no one in the kingdom is able to decipher, apart from Daniel, who interprets it as a prophecy of doom<sup>137</sup>.

Similarly, Jekyll sees this episode as a God-sent message which, as a prophet, he is able to interpret as the prefiguration of his own ruin.

I began to spy a danger that, if this were much prolonged, the balance of my nature might be permanently overthrown, the power of voluntary change be forfeited, and the character of Edward Hyde become irrevocably mine. (Stevenson 84)

Unfortunately, even though he is clearly able to understand the message, he is powerless and cannot prevent the return of Hyde. Surprisingly, he also acknowledges that while the specific term of his dilemma are unprecedented, the core question is the one that permeates the whole of moral philosophy and religious ethics:

Strange as my circumstances were, the terms of this debate are as old and commonplace as man; much the same inducements and alarms cast the die for any tempted and trembling sinner; and it fell out with me, as it falls with so vast a majority of my fellows, that I chose

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<sup>137</sup> Seow, Choon Leong. *Daniel*. Westminster John Knox Press, 2003, p.75.

the better part and was found wanting in the strength to keep to it (Stevenson 85)

As a born sinner, there is nothing Jekyll can do to oppose his fate, in spite of his best efforts, something other characters such as Utterson note :

in the law of God, there is no statute of limitations. Ay, it must be that; the ghost of some old sin, the cancer of some concealed disgrace: punishment coming, PEDE CLAUDO, years after memory has forgotten and self-love condoned the fault. (Stevenson 21)

The ease with which Utterson is able to accept this explanation and swiftly move on to examine his own past (“the lawyer, scared by the thought, brooded a while on his own past” Stevenson 21) is representative of a generalised, pessimistic view of the human destiny.

Both *Frankenstein* and *The Strange Case* thus present us with scientists who border on the mystical and who, despite their rational personality and aspirations, are at loss to explain or express their predicaments in non-religious terms. It would therefore seem that the claims of the Enlightenment of freeing man from superstition are subverted and annihilated by 19<sup>th</sup> century portrayals of men of science. On the contrary, what the authors previously evoked seem to hint at is the possibility that far from chasing the superstitions and errors of organised religion, scientific advancement could lead to a replacement of moral values and concerns with the cold, amoral interests of science.

### b) *The Modern Prometheus?*

The anxiety over the figure of the scientist is not merely due to the possibility that his creations might prove uncontrollable or irreversible, but also to their implications over the nature of human beings and over Western traditions of thought. Most significantly, the conflict between ideologies is centred upon two prevailing ideas of Man according to Christianity: first, the subjection of Man to a higher, transcendent power and creator before which he can be held accountable, and secondly, the idea of Man as a holistic individual and race set apart from the rest of Creation.

Frankenstein and Jekyll’s hubris is not only mentioned in passing as a character flaw, it actually relates to the lurking fear that the abolition of religion and superstition that had been part and parcel of the programmatic views of the Enlightenment, as the main means to free human beings

and allow them to pursue happiness without guilt or remorse, the combination of atheism and agnosticism that replaced Christianity with scientific theories creates the impression that one idol has been replaced by another, namely Progress, whose priests were no longer checked by moral concerns or rules of conduct. As early as the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century, intellectuals and writers such as Alexander Pope became critical of the moral failings that they believed followed on the success of the new science.

Jonathan Swift put things even more plainly when he stated that: “The whole school of the Greshamites [the Royal Society] are too wild in their claims; the whole realm of human knowledge is too broad for human nature to conquer.”<sup>138</sup> He also parodied astronomers in the book 3 of *Gulliver’s Travels* in the figure of the Laputans, whose minds “are so taken up with intense speculations that they can neither speak nor attend to the discourses of others, without being roused by some external action upon the organs of speech and hearing”<sup>139</sup>, in a nod to the empiricist theories of Locke. In Swift’s case, the belief that the multiplication in the production of riches that would necessarily follow the development of science would inevitably hasten luxury, corruption and social decay also underpins his critique of scientists. Not only are scientists and their followers caught up in fanciful ideas, they also lose touch with their mortal condition, a delusion sometimes associated with madness, as in the eighth plate of *The Rake’s Progress* which depicts two inmates in Bedlam who have been rendered insane by their pursuit of astronomy.

The idea prevailing was that religion had checked human pride into a certain form of humility from which it would be unbounded by the “death of God”. And indeed, “playing God” is certainly the most obvious critique that can be levelled at both Frankenstein and Jekyll. Frankenstein is quite explicit about his desire to create a new race that would worship him as a father and master, while Jekyll’s allusion to a “trembling immateriality, the mist-like transience, of this seemingly solid body in which we walk attired,” alludes to the Christian division of body and soul. Jekyll’s ability to “pluck back that fleshy vestment” (Stevenson 75) is a transcendence of his physical body with Christ-like powers.

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<sup>138</sup> Swift, Jonathan. *The Mechanical Operation of the Spirit*, in *Swift, Collected Works*, 16 vols. Basil Blackwell, 1976, vol.1 p.174.

<sup>139</sup> Swift, Jonathan. *Gulliver’s Travels*. Dent, 1963, p.169.

Although the novel's subtitle is a reference to pagan and Greek mythology, *Frankenstein* makes more sense within a Christian *episteme*. Indeed, Frankenstein as a character operates the shift from the altruism of a Prometheus to a modern, egoistic individual. As David Punter notes,

what Prometheus does, he does on behalf of a suffering humanity; Frankenstein is crucially different, for what he does he does out of his own sense of ambition, his wish to expand and extend the limits of the human for his own gratification – it is thus that Frankenstein becomes as emblem for individualistic modernity, and it is this crucial historical transition that Shelley managed – uniquely and mysteriously – to enact in her novel<sup>140</sup>.

This historical transition is also expressed through the religious and referential framework of the story. The allusions to the Christian mythos are very explicit in *Frankenstein*, which is heavily inspired by Milton's *Paradise Lost*. The figure of the monster as a new Adam is obvious from the overt parallels the monster draws before his own situation and that of the First Man, addressing Frankenstein as follows: "I am thy creature: I ought to be thy Adam, but I am rather the fallen angel, whom thou drivest from joy for no misdeed." (Shelley 114). The monster likens himself to Adam, the first human created in the Bible, but interestingly enough produces a form of conflation between Adam and Satan, who have in common their rebellion towards God, even though their reasons for doing so are extremely different. The monster's original sin, and the one for which he is actually punished by his master, is not having been born but rather being so eloquent and intellectually minded, qualities that contribute to his humanisation, and which, coupled to his benevolent feelings towards the rest of mankind, contribute to the blurring of the lines between the human and the monstrous. In this regard, the learning of language and of moral values associated with the De Lacey's are what brought the monster to his demise, by arising in him dreams of family and companionship:

Like Adam, I was apparently united by no link to any other being in existence; but his state was far different from mine in every other respect. He had come forth from the hands of God a perfect creature, happy and prosperous, guarded by the especial care of his Creator; he was allowed to converse with and acquire knowledge from beings of a superior nature, but I was wretched, helpless, and alone. Many times I considered Satan as the fitter emblem of my condition, for often, like him, when I viewed the bliss of my protectors, the bitter gall of envy rose within me. (Shelley 154)

The monster here follows Milton's original interpretation of the fall of Satan. Instead of putting the emphasis on the notions of arrogance and pride, Milton and his monstrous disciple

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<sup>140</sup> Punter, David. *The Gothic Condition: Terror, History and the Psyche*. University of Wales Press, 2016, p.75.

emphasise his solitude and jealousy towards the happiness of those who have not fallen...yet. In Milton's account, Satan is describes as laden with regret: "But his doom / Reserv'd him to more wrath; for now the thought / Both of lost happiness and lasting pain /Torments him (book 1, ll.53-56)". Far from thriving on the Throne of Hell, he bemoans his fall and lost condition, and must hide his misery:

O then at last relent! Is there no place  
 Left for repentance, none for pardon left?  
 None left but by submission and that word  
 Disdain forbid me and my dream of shame...  
 Ay me! They little know  
 How dearly I abide that boast so vain,  
 Under what torments inwardly I groan  
 While they adore me on the throne of Hell  
 With diadem and sceptre high advanced  
 The lower still I fall, only supreme  
 In misery (book 4, ll.79-92)

The monster's reading of this passage is particularly telling of his rewriting and adapting of the poem to better accommodate and reflect his own situation. During the Mont Blanc encounter with Frankenstein, during which he first exposes his theory of correlation and resemblance between Milton's characters and himself, the monster still distinguishes himself from Satan by stating that "Satan had his companions, fellow devils, to admire and encourage him, but I am solitary and abhorred" (Shelley 155). While Milton's Satan feels isolated from his "fellow devils" and resents their company since their presence forces him to hide his misery, the monster's reading only seems to remember the fact that Satan was surrounded by creatures more or less similar to himself, whose strangeness and isolation is merely a matter of degree ("only supreme / in misery"), whereas the distance that separates him from the rest of humanity is one of essence, which absolutely prevents their cohabitation.

Interestingly, the monster's complaint assumes the same wording as that of Adam after his fall, when he addresses God to bemoan his fate: "did I request Thee, Maker, from my clay /To mold me Man? Did I solicit Thee /From darkness to promote me or here place / In this delicious garden?"<sup>141</sup>.

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<sup>141</sup> Milton, John. *Paradise Lost*. Penguin Classics, 2003, book 10 ll.743-46.



In the monster's case, his recrimination stems from the fact that he was deserted by his creator and left to lead a solitary life. Solitude and the ingratitude of the men he feels such benevolence towards are the main complaints he voices. Indeed, his fiercest plight is being stuck in an in-between, unable to stay in the company of men but devoid of a family or kin of his own.

As I read, however, I applied much personally to my own feelings and condition. I found myself similar yet at the same time strangely unlike to the beings concerning whom I read and to whose conversation I was a listener. I sympathized with and partly understood them, but I was unformed in mind; I was dependent on none and related to none. 'The path of my departure was free,' and there was none to lament my annihilation. My person was hideous and my stature gigantic. What did this mean? Who was I? What was I? Whence did I come? What was my destination? (Shelley 152)

It is this overwhelming feeling of loneliness and isolation that leads him both to evil deeds and to curse his creator ("Believe me, Frankenstein, I was benevolent; my soul glowed with love and humanity; but am I not alone, miserably alone?" (Shelley 115). Abandoned by his maker, the monster's confusion means a transgression of the boundaries between benevolence and violence, which can occur quite suddenly, as with the episode of the murder of young William:

If, therefore, I could seize him and educate him as my companion and friend, I should not be so desolate in this peopled earth. [...]

"Frankenstein! you belong then to my enemy—to him towards whom I have sworn eternal revenge; you shall be my first victim.'

[...] 'I gazed on my victim, and my heart swelled with exultation and hellish triumph; clapping my hands, I exclaimed, 'I too can create desolation; my enemy is not invulnerable; this death will carry despair to him, and a thousand other miseries shall torment and destroy him.' (Shelley 170-71)

While the murder was committed in a fit of passion and anger at both the child's refusal to follow him because of his appearance and the discovery of a link between Frankenstein and him, it becomes the starting point of a revenge enterprise that leads to the deaths of Clerval and Elizabeth, a descent into violence which exemplifies the porosity between and reversibility of the figures of Adam and Satan.

It thus seems that the monster was stuck at the crossroads between following the path of Adam and that of Satan. Indeed, after the first murders, when he encounters Frankenstein, he offers to disappear should his creator make him a bride to be his companion, in a fantasy reminiscent of

the creation of the first couple. His description of the life he intends to lead is also closely associated to the pastoral ideal of the Garden of Eden:

I will go to the vast wilds of South America. My food is not that of man; I do not destroy the lamb and the kid to glut my appetite; acorns and berries afford me sufficient nourishment. My companion will be of the same nature as myself and will be content with the same fare. We shall make our bed of dried leaves; the sun will shine on us as on man and will ripen our food. (Shelley 176)

Unfortunately, the direct actions of the Maker, rather than free will or temptation, will decide otherwise. His refusal to comply with the Christian model of care for the creature disqualifies him as a creator and leads his creation to rebel against him, and eventually ask the question which is central to most representations of scientists: “How dare you sport thus with life?” (Shelley 113).

A paroxysmal example of a scientist seeking to replace God is Moreau, through the laws he impresses upon his animal subjects, as a parody of the Ten Commandments. As Prendick first meets the Beast-People, he witnesses and then is forced to participate in a strange ceremony taking place in the forest:

I realised that I had to repeat this idiotic formula; and then began the insanest ceremony. The voice in the dark began intoning a mad litany, line by line, and I and the rest to repeat it. As they did so, they swayed from side to side in the oddest way, and beat their hands upon their knees; and I followed their example. [...] That dark hut, these grotesque dim figures, just flecked here and there by a glimmer of light, and all of them swaying in unison and chanting,

‘Not to go on all-fours; that is the Law. Are we not Men?’

‘Not to suck up Drink; that is the Law. Are we not Men?’

‘Not to eat Fish or Flesh; that is the Law. Are we not Men?’

‘Not to claw the Bark of Trees; that is the Law. Are we not Men?’

‘Not to chase other Men; that is the Law. Are we not Men?’

And so from the prohibition of these acts of folly, on to the prohibition of what I thought then were the maddest, most impossible, and most indecent things one could well imagine. A kind of rhythmic fervour fell on all of us; we gabbled and swayed faster and faster, repeating this amazing Law. (Wells 71-72)

In a clear parody of Christian rituals infused with a pagan twist, the game and call-and-answer led by the Ape Man minister enumerates the laws that the Beast People have to follow as token of their “human” condition, even though they are actually just laws for the protection of the

scientists on the island, which Moreau thought would be more efficient if enforced in the guise of religious imperatives.

However, as Prendick notes, Moreau indulges in God-substituting fantasies (“A horrible fancy came into my head that Moreau, after animalising these men, had infected their dwarfed brains with a kind of deification of himself.”(Wells 72), through his desire to “make a rational creature of [his] own,” just as God did in the creation of man in His image. His conception of God is not entirely Christian, although he claims to be a believer – indeed, his is closer to an image of God as the Maker rather than a personal God of charity and benevolence. There is a conflation in his mind between God and Nature, and his claim to have mastered the process of creation assimilates him further to a ruthless Nature: “The study of Nature makes a man at last as remorse-less as Nature.” (Wells 93). His appropriation of the role of the creator becomes all the more obvious is the saying of the law, as the Beast-people conclude “His are the stars in the sky.” (Wells 73), underlining Moreau also trumpets to match the intellect of God, asserting “I have seen more of the ways of this world’s Maker than you...I have sought his laws, in my way, all my life” (Wells 92).

Deeply infused with Christian imagery, the novel also alludes to resurrection and transfiguration as Prendick and Montgomery struggle to find an acceptable excuse to keep the Beast People under their control after Moreau’s death: “‘Children of the Law,’ I said, ‘he is not dead! [...] He has changed his shape; he has changed his body,’ I went on. ‘For a time you will not see him. He is—there,’ I pointed upward, ‘where he can watch you. You cannot see him, but he can see you. Fear the Law!’” (Wells 131).

Moreau’s behaviour towards his creatures is also revealing, especially through the ritual conflation of pain and power which encapsulates the various fears surrounding the figure of the mad scientist:

‘His is the House of Pain.

‘His is the Hand that makes.

‘His is the Hand that wounds.

‘His is the Hand that heals.’ (Wells 71-72)

Through the master of nature and ungainly, morally doubtful experiments, the scientist becomes at once capable of creating and destroying, healing and poisoning, in an ambivalent resurgence of the *pharmakon*.

*The Strange Case*, imbued with Christian symbolism as it might be, is less concerned with the notion of playing God than with the unholy attempt at escaping the boundaries of human experience set by God, or Nature. Jekyll's realisation that "man is not truly one, but truly two" (Stevenson 74) is the basic assumption because of which he decides to mingle with that dual nature and attempts to alleviate his moral sufferings by bypassing this innate separation, thus radically transforming his very nature. Throughout his written confession, Jekyll seems to remain aware of his transgression of "that hard law of life, which lies at the root of religion and is one of the most plentiful springs of distress" (Stevenson 74). Not only is the essential division of man a matter of nature ("law of life"), it is also a staple of religion, thus doubly sanctified by natural sciences and religious experience. As such, Jekyll's fault is not merely his excessive pride which led him to want to question the godly law of physics, but also the attempt at reforming man and opposing the laws of nature.

Replacing the original duality between Roman Catholicism (superstition, cruelty, sexual depravation) and Protestantism (reason, benevolence, tame behaviour) at the heart of the first generation of Gothic writers (especially *The Monk* or *The Italian* with the theme of persecution by the Holy Inquisition and villainous father Schedoni), the scientist embodies the opposition between two other clashing ideological systems, namely the distinction between Man, and Other, whether that Other be animal, God, or monstrous. Indeed, "the Western philosophical category of man has always been governed by an internal 'mobile border', an 'intimate caesura', which determines 'the very decision of what is human and what is not'"<sup>142</sup>, and as such, the disappearance of clear boundaries can only be the source of dreadful anxiety. "From the late eighteenth century to the nineteenth century, the terrain of Gothic horror shifted from the fear of corrupted aristocracy or clergy, represented by the haunted castle or abbey, to the fear embodied by monstrous bodies"<sup>143</sup> according to Robert Mighall, who alludes to theories of atavistic resurgence and biological predetermination. Unsurprisingly given the nature of those anxieties, the body becomes a privileged site of exploration for the novelist. Kelly Hurley states that

general anxiety about the nature of human identity permeating late-Victorian and Edwardian

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<sup>142</sup> Agamben, Giorgio. *The Open : Man and Animal*. Stanford Univeristy Press, 2004, p.15.

<sup>143</sup> Mighall, Robert. *A geography of Victorian Gothic fiction: Mapping history's nightmares*. Oxford University Press, 1999, p.16.

culture, an anxiety generated by scientific discourses, biological and sociomedical, which served to dismantle conventional notions of "the human" as radically as did the Gothic which arose in response to them<sup>144</sup>

Frankenstein's monster is the perfect embodiment of the fear crystallised around the blurring of the boundaries between life and death. He seems acutely aware that his physical deformity is the main obstacle to his intercourse with human beings because of its very uncanniness. Indeed, he notices that while "God, in pity, made man beautiful and alluring, after his own image", his "form is a filthy type of yours, more horrid even from the very resemblance." (Shelley 155). Freud's definition of the uncanny insists on the familiarity and yet sense of estrangement produced by an encounter with the uncanny<sup>145</sup>. He adds that "the uncanny is that class of the frightening which leads back to what is known of old and long familiar"<sup>146</sup>, before engaging in an analysis of the relation between the uncanny and the dead, noting that

Jentsch believes that a particularly favourable condition for awakening uncanny feelings is created when there is intellectual uncertainty whether an object is alive or not, and when an inanimate object becomes too much like an animate one<sup>147</sup>

This definition seems to encapsulate both Frankenstein's monster and Jekyll's double. Indeed, the monster is the product of the sewing together of several bodies limbs, and Freud notes that

Dismembered limbs, a severed head, a hand cut off at the wrist, [...] feet which dance by themselves, [...] — all these have something peculiarly uncanny about them, especially when [...] they prove capable of independent activity in addition<sup>148</sup>.

The very disfigurement of the human figure is enough to produce a sense of the uncanny, all the more so as the lines between the alive and the dead are blurred: "Apparent death and the re-

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<sup>144</sup> Hurley, Kelly. *The Gothic Body: Sexuality; Materialism, and Degeneration at the 'Fin de Siecle'*. Cambridge University Press, 1996, p.5.

<sup>145</sup> "In general we are reminded that the word *heimlich* is not unambiguous, but belongs to two sets of ideas, which, without being contradictory, are yet very different: on the one hand it means what is familiar and agreeable, and on the other, what is concealed and kept out of sight. *Unheimlich* is customarily used, we are told, as the contrary only of the first signification of *heimlich*, and not of the second. [...] On the other hand, we notice that Schelling says something which throws quite a new light on the concept of the *Unheimlich*, for which we were certainly not prepared. According to him, everything is *unheimlich* that ought to have remained secret and hidden but has come to light." Freud, Sigmund, *The Uncanny*. Penguin classics, 2003, p.2.

<sup>146</sup> *Ibid*, p.3.

<sup>147</sup> *Ibid*, p.14.

<sup>148</sup> *Ibid*, p.20.

animation of the dead have been represented as most uncanny themes”<sup>149</sup>. Moreover, the motif of the uncanny is closely linked to that of the double and to death, with Freud adding that “the ‘double’ reverses its aspect. From having been an assurance of immortality, it becomes the uncanny harbinger of death”<sup>150</sup>. While this applies to Frankenstein to a certain extent (with the monster’s coming to life being the promise of immortality for his maker, before becoming the main threat looming over his life), it fits Jekyll and Hyde the best. The double, who was supposed to free Jekyll from guilt, remorse and sin, and thus grant him peace of mind and eternal life as a purer soul, and up being the bearer of death, both that of his maker and of other characters.

It would thus appear that the fear crystallised around the figure of the scientist is linked to his ability to transcend boundaries and create a sense of the uncanny through the mingling with the laws of Nature. The concern with life and death is paramount to the new developments of the vitalist theory, as illustrated by Humphry Davy’s Bakerian Lectures at the Royal Society around the potentialities of the voltaic battery and its connection with animal magnetism and human animation, with electricity becoming a metaphor for life itself:

The experiments of Sir Humphry Davy seem to me to form an important link in the connexion of our knowledge of dead and living matter. He has solved the great and long hidden mystery of chemical attraction, by showing that it depends upon the electric properties which the atoms of different species of matter possess... Sir Humphry Davy’s experiments also lead us to believe, that it is electricity, extricated and accumulated in ways not clearly understood, which causes those sudden and powerful motions in masses of inert matter, which we occasionally witness with wonder and dismay<sup>151</sup>

Similarly, reflecting upon his previous experiments on a dead man’s body, Giovanni Aldini states that “Vitality might have been fully restored, if many ulterior circumstances, had not rendered this – inappropriate”<sup>152</sup> and he had been able to go through with his experiment.

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<sup>149</sup> Ibid.

<sup>150</sup> Ibid, p.28.

<sup>151</sup> Abernethy, John. Quoted in *The Edinburgh Review*, Volume 23 in Smith, Sydney (ed.) *Early British periodicals*. A. and C. Black, 1814, p.395.

<sup>152</sup> Aldini, Giovanni. *An Account of the Late Improvements in Galvanism... Containing the Author’s Experiments on the Body of a Malefactor Executed at Newgate*, London 1803, in Fred Botting (ed) *New Casebooks: Frankenstein*, Palgrave 1995, p.125.

If *Frankenstein* is centred around the blurring of life and death, *The Strange Case* focuses instead on the fear of degeneration and the resurgence of primitive types in the civilised, modern man. Indeed, theories of atavism popularised by Cesare Lombroso find their echo in the description Stevenson as very much aware of the atavistic theory which posited that “our criminal population are mere savages, and most of their crimes are but injudicious and desperate attempts to act as savages in the midst, and at the expense, of a civilised community”<sup>153</sup>, and that “the criminal often acts like a savage who has wandered into a foreign environment - it is scarcely necessary to remark that a savage in his own proper environment is not an anti-social being”<sup>154</sup>. Hyde’s being described as the epitome of the Simian criminal type (“dwarfish, pale, deformed, ape-like, troglodyctic, hirsute”) and the clear link established between his arrested moral development and his lesser physical development designates him as physically degenerate because he is morally underdeveloped. Hyde is literally, or at least initially, an ‘unfinished man’. Moreover, his ferocity during the murder of Sir Danvers Carew is typical of the bloodlust characteristic of primitive types (the criminal “desire[s] not only to extinguish life in the victim, but to mutilate the corpse, tear its flesh and drink its blood”<sup>155</sup>). This topic will be discussed more thoroughly later on in this study.

The traumatising publication of Darwin’s *Origins of Species* opened the gates for a new wave of literature concerned with the fear that man might not only be a species amongst others, but also submitted to the same rules of evolution and possible regression. This generalised cultural anxiety finds expression in the literature of the period; with theorist György Lukács writing about the novel that “there is no more prevalent theme in classical nineteenth-century fiction than that of the loss of social “totality”, the sense of alienation” and that “The novel is the epic of an age in which the extensive totality of life is no longer directly given, in which the immanence of meaning in life has become a problem, yet which still thinks in terms of totality”<sup>156</sup>. Indeed, the fear of a sense of special destiny for man and loss of specificity

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<sup>153</sup> Lubbock, John. *Pre-Historic Times; As Illustrated by Ancient Remains and the Manners and Customs of Modern Savages*. Williams & Norgate, 1865, p.489.

<sup>154</sup> Havelock-Ellis, Henry. *The Criminal* (1890), cited in Wiener, Martin J. *Reconstructing the Criminal*, Cambridge University Press, 1994, p.55.

<sup>155</sup> Lombroso, Cesare in Lombroso-Ferrero, Gina. *Criminal Man According to the Classification of Cesare Lombroso*. Montclair, 1911, p. xxv.

<sup>156</sup> Lukács, György. *The Theory of the Novel: a Historico-Philosophical Essay on the Forms of Great Epic Literature*. MIT Press, 1971, p.4, p.32.

permeates post-Darwinian literature, precisely because

The philosophical ramifications of Darwin's theories are so immense that they strike at the most fundamental oppositions at the heart of Western culture: the difference between human and animal, male and female, Nature and culture. He reverses a system of signification at least as old as the Greek polis with whose emergence the images of hybrid and intermediary forms (centaurs, Amazons, Cyclops) were banished to the realms of monstrosity and otherness. With the disappearance of the Author from Darwin's universe, these oppositions, which had been elevated virtually to the status of logical categories or necessary ways of thinking about the world, collapsed into a kind of Derridean freeplay."<sup>157</sup>

The new, atheistic science demolishes the anthropocentric status quo, and problematises the relation between physical appearance and essence, even in the case of the human being, whose form can be linked and compared to that of other apes, through the gradual discovery by zoologists of internal similarities between the organisation of humans and animals, while the discovery of photoplasms meant the formal dissection of the human identity, reduced to the sum of its microscopic parts. Man became banal, a mere animal in a godless universe devoid of an author that could infuse meaning back into his life. Hurley concludes that "All of these, like the theory of natural selection, accomplished a radical destabilization of what had formerly been a fixed boundary between man and animal."<sup>158</sup>. Even more disturbingly, a significant portion of Darwin's theory is concerned with the fact that since evolution is a constantly ongoing process, no type can be fixed forever:

Every highly developed organism has passed through many changes; and... each modified structure tends to be inherited, so that each modification will not readily be quite lost, but may be again and again further altered. Hence the structure of each part of each species... is the sum of many inherited changes, through which the species has passed during its successive adaptations to changed habits and conditions of life<sup>159</sup>

Such claims hold two grim consequences: first, man can evolve or regress to previous types, secondly, it may be possible that man has actually never been man at all, but an animal that currently experiences a certain form of being commonly designated as "humanity" but prone to

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<sup>157</sup> Norris, Margot. *Beasts of the Modern Imagination: Darwin, Nietzsche, Kafka, Ernst, and Lawrence*. Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985, p.37.

<sup>158</sup> Hurley, Kelly. *The Gothic body sexuality, materialism, and degeneration at the fin de siècle*. Cambridge University Press, 1996, p.56.

<sup>159</sup> Darwin, Charles. *The Origin of Species; or, The preservation of favoured races in the struggle for life*. Penguin Modern Library, 1968, p.143.



change. Men become no more than the sum of their heredity, food, and environment<sup>160</sup>.

*The Island of Doctor Moreau* is probably the best illustration of the anxiety generated by the popularity of Darwinism. Freud noted that “in telling a story one of the most successful devices for easily creating uncanny effects is to leave the reader in uncertainty whether a particular figure in the story is a human being or an automaton”<sup>161</sup>, but the same be said of the uncertainty between human and animal identity. Indeed, its protagonist Prendick repeatedly finds himself unable to distinguish between human beings and the Beast People, as with his early belief that the Beast people on the boat are actually foreigners (“This man was of a moderate size, and with a black negroid face” (Wells 32) or as he notices “something - at first I could not distinguish what it was,” sucking up water. “Then I saw it was a man, going on all fours like a beast!” (p. 46). Prendick agonizes over the question of its identity: “Why should a man go on all fours and drink with his lips? . . . What on earth was he - man or animal?” (Wells 47).

The Beast People do in fact stand as liminal entities, whose eventual status remains uncertain. Describing one of them, Prendick writes

The grey creature in the corner leant forward. “Not to run on all Fours; that is the Law. Are we not Men?” He put out a strangely distorted talon, and gripped my fingers. The thing was almost like the hoof of a deer produced into claws ... His face came forward... into the light of the opening of the hut, and I saw with a quivering disgust that it was like the face of neither man nor beast (Wells 73)

His very choice of pronouns coupled with his remark upon the undecided status of his face prompts a reaction typical of an encounter with the uncanny (“The text first invites us to characterize Prendick’s disgust as the natural response of a white man to odd ‘natives’, who are not right to begin with; thus one can account for their unheimlich quality, the familiarity that is yet strangeness”<sup>162</sup>), which once more sets to disturb and trespass his conceptual boundaries. Moreover, if the Beast People must invariable revert back to their feral state, the men in the

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<sup>160</sup> « Humans are the sum total of parents and nurses, place and time, air and weather, sound and light, food and clothing”, Moleschott, Jacob. *Letter 19*, quoted in Smeed, John William. *Faust in Literature*. Oxford University Press, 1975, p.201.

<sup>161</sup> Freud, Sigmund. *The Uncanny*. Penguin classics, 2003, p.11.

<sup>162</sup> Parrinder, Patrick. *Shadows of the Future: H.G. Wells, Science Fiction and Prophecy*. Liverpool University Press, 1995, p.59.

novel are also, even though to a less extent, subject to reversion. From the outset, Prendick is faced with the daunting prospect of cannibalism, and as he returns to London, he remains nervous around his “fellow men”, afraid they might prove to be Beast People as well

Then I look about me at my fellow men; and I go in fear. I see faces, keen and bright; others dull or dangerous; others, unsteady, insincere,—none that have the calm authority of a reasonable soul. I feel as though the animal was surging up through them; that presently the degradation of the Islanders will be played over again on a larger scale. (Wells 167-68)

Indeed, as Hurley notes, “human identity in Moreau is an insubstantial thing, continually in danger of dissolution”<sup>163</sup>. Therefore Prendick’s attempt at reinforcing the rigid separation between man and animals in order to cope with his memories is doomed from the outset, echoing the well-spread fear of uncertainty brought by scientific theories which had been voiced in the daily press ever since the beginning of the century: “We ... would ask what it is that Mr Lawrence... modestly requires us all to believe? That there is no difference between a man and an oyster [...] Mr Lawrence considers that man, in the most important characteristics of his nature, is nothing more than an orang-outang or an ape, with “more ample cerebral hemispheres!”<sup>164</sup>.

Sander Gilman notes that

When the sense of order or control undergoes stress, when doubt is cast on the self’s ability to control the internalized world it has created for itself, an anxiety appears... we project that anxiety onto the Other, externalizing our loss of control. The Other is thus stereotyped, labelled, with a set of signs paralleling (or mirroring) our loss of control<sup>165</sup>

This obsession over the figure of the Other is most clearly expressed in Gothic literature through the motive of the double, whether it be the monster as Frankenstein’s foil, or Jekyll’s Hyde, or even to a lesser extent Prendick and the Beast People.

If, as Gerard Holton suggests,

the reigning [cosmology] until about the mid-nineteenth century [pictured] a finite universe in time and space; a divine temple, God-given, God-expressing, God-penetrated, knowable... [as completely] as the nature of things admits in this mortal life. This representation was gradually supplanted by another, particularly in the last half of the

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<sup>163</sup> Hurley, Kelly, & American Council of Learned Societies. *The Gothic body sexuality, materialism, and degeneration at the fin de siècle*. Cambridge University Press, 1996, p.103.

<sup>164</sup> *The Quaterley Review*, 1819, from *Frankenstein*, Oxford World Classics, pp.243-50.

<sup>165</sup> Sander L. Gilman, *Difference and Pathology*. Cornell University Press, 1985, p.20.

nineteenth century. The universe became unbounded, “restless”. The clear lines of the earlier [cosmic structures] have been replaced by undelineated, fuzzy, smears<sup>166</sup>.

Then it implies that the fear of the scientist may partially be explained by the fact that "nothing is more fearfully disturbing than experiences that seem to call in doubt the whole scheme of known distinctions by which we live"<sup>167</sup>, and that the scientist is precisely that seemingly all-knowing being that might replace God and abolish the boundaries previously established that keep the cosmos ordered. Gothic stories are therefore meant to act as cautionary tales, since “the ideal order of society is guarded by dangers which threaten transgressors. The danger-beliefs are as much threats which one man uses to coerce another as dangers which he himself fear to incur by his own lapses from righteousness”<sup>168</sup>.

c) “So writhes the mind Remorse has riven, / Unfit for earth, doomed for heaven” : the scientist as degenerate

“He is that monstrum horrendum, an unprincipled man of genius”<sup>169</sup>

While 18<sup>th</sup> century thinkers tended to exalt scientists and geniuses as men to be revered as they led the path to Enlightenment and progress (“men of genius, humanity’s eternal benefactors”<sup>170</sup>), their 19<sup>th</sup> century counterparts, especially those specialising in the field of science, were significantly less inclined to do so. On the contrary, the medical literature of the time sought to include in its records of degeneracy the figure of the genius as a prime example of a *deviant* or criminal type. Such works, whose titles are often rather explicit, include J.F.

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<sup>166</sup> Holton, Gerard. *Thematic Origins of Scientific Thought: Kepler to Einstein*. Harvard University Press, 1973, pp.35-36.

<sup>167</sup> Pole, David. "Disgust and Other Forms of Aversion" in *Aesthetics, Form and Emotion*. Duckworth, 1983, p. 227.

<sup>168</sup> Douglas, Mary. *Purity and danger : An analysis of concepts of pollution and taboo*. Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1976, p.4.

<sup>169</sup> Poe, Edgar Allan. *The Purloined Letter* in *Tales of Mystery and Imagination*. Collector’s Library, 2003, p.243.

<sup>170</sup> Condorcet, Jean-Antoine-Nicolas de Caritat, Lukes, Steven, & Urbinati, Nadia. *Condorcet : Political writings*. Cambridge University Press, 2012, p.7.

Nisbet's 1891 *The Insanity of Genius*, Francis Galton's 1892 *Hereditary Genius*, and above all Lombroso's 1888 *L'uomo di genio*, which was translated by Havelock Ellis in 1891. Max Nordau's 1895 *Degeneration* contributed to the popularisation of this idea.

Adding to his position as the father of atavistic theories and subsequent considerable influence over the medical literature of the period, Lombroso's account is the most detailed one as it reconciles commonly shared assumptions about the nature of genius with a systematic theory of degradation and strongly established, normative views of normalcy. Indeed, basing his claim on the science of phrenology he had contributed to develop, Cesare notes that "the capacity of the skull in men of genius, as is natural, is above average, by which it approaches what is found in insanity"<sup>171</sup>.

Thus, men of genius, while they have the potential to make humanity progress, might also more easily give in to their criminal tendencies as their intellectual capacities must be compensated by a lack of moral values or interpersonal feelings:

As regards their intellect, they can attain to a higher degree of development, but from a moral point of view their existence is completely deranged [...] Just as he [the higher degenerate] occasionally exhibits gigantic bodily stature or disproportionate growth of particular parts, has some mental gift exceptionally developed at the cost... of the remaining faculties, which are wholly or partially atrophied<sup>172</sup>

A paradigmatic example whose dissolute lifestyle was the object of much scandal, Paul Verlaine found himself on the receiving end of such theorists as Havelock Ellis<sup>173</sup>, while Nordau describes him in scientific terms as "a repulsive degenerate subject with asymmetric skull and Mongolian face, an impulsive vagabond and dipsomaniac"<sup>174</sup>.

But while Verlaine might fit their description of a degenerate, it is of little consequences as he is but a poet. However, such implications of potential reversion become much more frightening when their object's actions have deeper consequences on a larger scale and threaten the established order, like Sherlock Holmes's nemesis Moriarty who exhibits "hereditary

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<sup>171</sup> Lombroso, Cesare. *The Man of Genius*. Walter Scott, 1891, pp.5-6.

<sup>172</sup> Ibid, p.23.

<sup>173</sup> Havelock Ellis, Henry. *The Criminal*. Walter Scott & Co., 1890, pp.206-7.

<sup>174</sup> Nordau, Max. *Degeneration*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., William Heinemann, 1898, p.128.

tendencies of the most diabolic kind. A criminal stain ran in his blood"<sup>175</sup>; and even more so when they are involved in scientific endeavours, as Frankenstein or Jekyll are.

Indeed, this theory leads to the questioning of the role of the scientist as either an overman or a degenerate whose actions can only endanger the rest of mankind. Theories of genius as a form of degeneracy place emphasis on the possibility of reversion to a primitive type and on the impossibility to stabilise the bloodline :

[When transmitted, genius] almost always assumes the form of more and more aggravated neurosis, and rapidly disappears, thanks to that beneficent sterility through which nature provides for the elimination of monsters. The fact would be quite sufficiently demonstrated by the pedigrees of Peter the Great, the Caesars, and Charles V, in which epileptics, men of genius, and criminals, alternate with ever greater frequency, till the line ends in idiocy and sterility<sup>176</sup>

It is worth noting that Lombroso still invokes nature as the regulating entity preventing the complete degeneration of the species through the extinction of the faulty line. The vocabulary he uses (“thanks to that beneficent sterility”) reveals a pessimistic vision of genius as both the most valuable tool of social evolution for a short period of time, and a danger lurking, ready to compromise the future of the species. Others scientists and intellectuals involved in this debate were however much more reluctant to recognise the possible positive input of the genius-as-degenerate; as Nordau states:

I do not share Lombroso's opinion that highly-gifted degenerates are an active force in the progress of mankind. They corrupt and delude; they do, alas! frequently exercise a deep influence, but this is always a baneful one<sup>177</sup>.

Instead, Nordau insists on dragging geniuses back to the same level as the degenerates he strives to study; moreover, he believes that may prove as remorseless and devoid of a moral conscience as criminal types. Even though Frankenstein does express remorse at various points throughout the novel, he remains decidedly self-centred: going as far, for instance, as comparing his fate to that of the dead Justine, and finding his lot worse (Shelley 100-101).

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<sup>175</sup> Conan Doyle, Arthur. ‘The Adventure of the empty House’, in *Sherlock Holmes: The Complete Short Stories*. Murray, 1961, p.539.

<sup>176</sup> Lombroso, Cesare. *The Man of Genius*. Walter Scott, 1891, p.333.

<sup>177</sup> Nordau, Max. *Degeneration*. William Heinemann, 1898, p.24.

As for Jekyll, even though he expresses remorse after the murder of Danvers Carew, his subsequent change of behaviour provides him with the opportunity for complacent self-description :

I resolved in my future conduct to redeem the past; and I can say with honesty that my resolve was fruitful of some good. You know yourself how earnestly in the last months of last year, I laboured to relieve suffering; you know that much was done for others, and that the days passed quietly, almost happily for myself [...] After all, I reflected, I was like my neighbours; and then I smiled, comparing myself with other men, comparing my active goodwill with the lazy cruelty of their neglect. (Stevenson 88)

Interestingly enough, reverting to this state of self-aggrandising panegyric makes him turn into Hyde anew, revealing the close link between pride and evil.

Focusing on Frankenstein and Jekyll's social skills is a necessary step to see how their pertaining to a criminal type translates in terms of social relationships and behaviour even before they begin to undertake their *opus magna*.

Anne K. Mellor insists on anchoring the conflicting position Frankenstein attempts to balance between his scientific endeavours and a more normal type of life in the prevalent discourse on the two-sphere ideology and belief in a clear cut distinction between the public and the private life. As she points out, "as a consequence of this sexual division of labour, masculine work is kept outside of the domestic realm; hence intellectual activity is segregated from emotional activity. Victor Frankenstein cannot do scientific research and think lovingly of Elizabeth and his family at the same time." His obsession with his experiment has caused him to become insensitive to the beauty of nature of which he was previously so keenly aware, and to isolate himself to a pathological extent:

my cheek had grown pale with study, and my person had become emaciated with confinement. It was a most beautiful season, but my eyes were insensible to the charms of nature. And the same feelings which made me neglect the scenes about me, caused me also to forget those friends who were so many miles absent (Shelley 54-55)

Through this description of himself as wasting away, he seems to confirm the Romantic prophecy and position that scientific pursuit leads to disengagement from the other areas of family life, love, sex, and lead to monomania. Unveiling his feelings at the time of the creation of the monster, he recognises his obsession for his unhallowed art and incapacity to ponder over the possible consequences of his actions:

I could not tear my thoughts from my employment, loathsome in itself, but which had taken an irresistible hold of my imagination. I wished, as it were, to procrastinate all that related to my feelings of affection until the great object, which swallowed up every habit of my nature, should be completed (Shelley 56)

This separation of masculine work from domestic affection is a key component of his downfall, since it leads him to fail to feel empathy towards his creature; and encourages him to put himself first, which might explain how he could be so fixated on himself he not only failed to correctly interpret the monster's threat about his wedding night but also to take preventive measures, such as admitting to his indirect responsibility in William's murder to save Justine's life.

Frankenstein's relationship with Elizabeth perfectly epitomises his social relations. While they are destined to each other from a very young age ("these indications [of Elizabeth's good character]... determined my mother to consider Elizabeth as my future wife; a design which she found no reason to repent" (Shelley 29), his recollections paint a childhood spent with very little in common: "I delighted in investigating the facts relative to the actual world; she busied herself in following the aerial creations of the poets. The world was to me a secret, which I desired to discover; to her it was a vacancy, which she sought to populate with imaginations of her own" (Shelley 31). The phrasing harkens back to much older notions of scientists as men caught up in fancies and unable to condescend to the level of "ordinary", healthy human beings. As the plot unveils, it becomes all the more apparent that his feelings towards her do not match their family's expectations; and he somehow comically expressed his feelings for her in an unexpected fashion, declaring he "loved to tend" on her "as I should on a favourite animal" (Shelley 30).

His failure to connect with her is dramatized by the episode of their wedding-night. It all begins with his failure to interpret correctly the threat that is so obviously aimed at his own fiancée his retaliation for the destruction of the monster's mate. This failure reveals the twofold unreliability of Frankenstein both as a narrator and as a person. The exact terms in which the monster expressed his thirst for revenge ("I shall be with you on your wedding night" (Shelley 206) is thwarted by Victor into "I will be with you on your wedding night" (Shelley 206). While seemingly innocuous, the change in the modal used not only reveals his incapacity to properly remember other people's intentions but also fails to convey the proper nuance and implications. Indeed, the use of the modal "shall" implies that the desire to avenge himself is not of his own decision and free will, which becomes the case with "will", which implies a personal

implication. By using the modal “shall”, the monster insisted on the fact that the decision was forced upon him by either Frankenstein or destiny, and that he was merely the tool of fate, directly echoing the theme of destiny and fate that pervades the novel. As Frankenstein unconsciously substitutes a different implication, he perceives the threat as the free decision of an evil creature eagerly waiting to avenge itself.

This narcissist tendency leads him to make some interesting declarations, more emblematically “this night is dreadful” (Shelley 241), the last words a bride might want to hear on her wedding night. Coupled with the constant postponing and near cancelling of the wedding, this anxiety seems to hint at a deeply ingrained fear of female sexuality. It is worth noting that the passage opens with a description of the night outside, and an emphasis on the moon, a symbol commonly associated with femininity, which in the extract is described as “yellow”, a colour associated with the monster. This association reveals how closely the two are linked with Frankenstein’s mind and how problematic his view of sexuality and reproduction is. The whole wedding night sequence is dramatized so that he might abandon her and leave her defenceless should the monster decide to intervene.

The second, practical consequence of his blindness is the death of Elizabeth as he fail to identify correctly who the aim of the threat actually was. Aside from the profound narcissism that clouded his judgment, the passage might read as an *acte manqué*, with the monster supplanting him as both the lover and murderer of Elizabeth in a symbolic and literal destruction of the female body and sexuality. As Mellor puts it, “the monster, like Fuseli’s incubus, leers over Elizabeth, enacting Victor’s own repressed desire to rape, possess, and destroy the female”<sup>178</sup>, making the reversal between the creator and his creature all the more obvious. The latter’s lust for revenge is made literal as he has possessed the object of desire of the man who destroyed his own object of desire. In a sense, the scene may read as an uncanny representation of the *droit du seigneur*, as their precedent encounter saw the monster inverting the power relationship as he shouted “I am your master and you are my slave” (Shelley 205). The supervirile creature replaces and acts on the behalf of his weaker, more effeminate master and conquers the feminine.

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<sup>178</sup> Mellor, Anne K. *Possessing Nature : The Female in Frankenstein in Romanticism and Feminism*, ed. Anne K. Mellor. Indiana University Press, 1988, p.363



The psychological analysis appears all the more justified as the description of Elizabeth's dead body borders on the erotic. While the description is clearly inspired from Henri Fuseli's painting *The Nightmare* (with Fuseli being a close friend of the Godwin household), it reads as a literary transposition of the theme of necrophilia and sexual violence present in the painting. As he muses over her body, Frankenstein waxes lyrical, noting that "She was there, lifeless and inanimate, thrown across the bed, her head hanging down, and her pale and distorted features half covered by her hair" (Shelley 241), a description which reveals a greater degree of physical and erotic intimacy or awareness than when she was alive. The ambiguity of her state, which does not disclose whether she was raped by the monster, can be answered in the light of the symbolic penetration of her room, i.e. her intimacy, by the monster. Frankenstein describes how he "embraced her with ardour; but the deathly languor and coldness of the limbs told me, that what I now held in my arms had ceased to be my Elizabeth whom I had loved and cherished" (193), showing he most ardently desires his bride once he knows she is dead; and it should be noted that this embrace is the only instance of physical intimacy between the two in the whole novel. The passage is reminiscent of the dream sequence that followed the creation of the monster, during which he dreamt of a conflation between Elizabeth and his dead mother, in a clear allusion to a form of necrophiliac desire for his mother.

I thought I saw Elizabeth, in the bloom of health, walking in the streets of Ingolstadt. Delighted and surprised, I embraced her, but as I imprinted the first kiss on her lips, they became livid with the hue of death; her features appeared to change, and I thought that I held the corpse of my dead mother in my arms[...] I started from my sleep with horror [. . .] [and] beheld the wretch—the miserable monster whom I had created. (Shelley 59)

As such, and from a psychoanalytical perspective, his erratic behaviour on his wedding night may be a result of his unconscious wish to punish Elizabeth for the conflicting desires and incestuous nature of their relationship. This analysis allows for a more in-depth reading of his stating: "The whole truth was revealed to me" (Shelley 241) as both the realisation of the reasons he was unable to understand the threat towards Elizabeth and of his personal sexual truth.

But while this episode reveals his lack of empathy towards others and ambivalent relation to sexuality in general, another is even more telling of his failure to conceptualise sexuality in a positive light: that of the destruction of the monster's mate. His description of her showcases his fear of an independent female will whose opinions and desires cannot be controlled because

of her superior physical strength:

I was now about to form another being, of whose dispositions I was alike ignorant; she might become ten thousand times more malignant than her mate, and delight, for its own sake, in murder and wretchedness. He had sworn to quit the neighbourhood of man, and hide himself in deserts; but she had not; and she, who in all probabilities was to become a thinking and reasoning animal, might refuse to comply with a compact made before her creation [...] She also might turn with disgust from him to the superior beauty of man; she might quit him, and he be again alone (Shelley 202)

His description echoes those of female revolutionaries by Burke and Wollstonecraft, with the latter writing “Strange that a people . . . should have bred up such monsters! Still we ought to recollect, that the sex, called the tender, commit the most flagrant acts of barbarity when irritated.”<sup>179</sup>. In both cases, the central idea is that the natural tenderness of the female sex might be reversed to wanton cruelty, as the female monster could prove “ten thousand times” more evil than the monster, and might “delight” in murder. Even worse on Frankenstein’s scale of values, she might force herself upon humans. Anne Mellor writes that “he fears that she will prefer to mate with ordinary males; implicit here is Frankenstein’s horror that, given the gigantic strength of this female, she would have power to seize and even rape the male she might choose.”<sup>180</sup>. Such a fear is related to the great theme of the suppression or confiscation of female reproductive powers, which runs throughout the novel. As Mellor continues to explain, “what Victor Frankenstein truly fears is female sexuality as such. A woman who is sexually liberated, free to choose her own life, her own sexual partner (by force, if necessary)”. She goes as far as to read the destruction of the bride as an unconscious enactment of Frankenstein’s disturbing, misogynistic, necrophiliac desire, stating that “Frankenstein violently reasserts a male control over the female body, penetrating and mutilating the female creature at his feet in an image that suggests a violent rape: “trembling with passion, [I] tore to pieces the think on which I was engaged” (Shelley 203) . The morning after “The remains of the half-finished creature, whom I had destroyed, lay scattered on the floor, and I almost felt as if I had mangled the living flesh of a human being” (Shelley 208). As such, she opposes

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<sup>179</sup> Wollstonecraft, Mary. *An Historical and Moral View of the Origin and Progress of the French Revolution*. 2d ed., Delmar, 1975, p. 258. Cited in Streenburg, Lee. ‘Mary Shelley’s Monster: Politics and Psyche in Frankenstein’, in *The Endurance of "Frankenstein": Essays on Mary Shelley’s Novel*, pp. 143-71, p.163.

<sup>180</sup> Mellor, Anne K. *Possessing Nature : The Female in Frankenstein in Romanticism and Feminism*. Indiana University Press, 1988, p.360.

Frankenstein's explanatory narrative on the episode, which revolves around a sense of duty towards the human race and the desire not to endanger it further.

Unsurprisingly enough, Frankenstein's most significant affections and most meaningful relationships tie him to men, mainly Clerval and Walton. In his letters to his sister, the latter expresses his desire for "the company of a man who could sympathise with me; whose eyes would reply to mine" (Shelley 7), and refers to Frankenstein as to a "celestial spirit" (Shelley 21). As for him, while reminiscing about his youthful innocence, he describes Clerval as "the image of my former self" (Shelley 192), a "friend and dearest companion" (Shelley 226), a "being formed in the very poetry of nature" (Shelley 189) and his true soul mate. While hyperbolic vocabulary used to evoke male friendships is not uncommon in the sentimental novel of the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, what is more notable and unexpected is his description of Clerval's eyes as "languishing in death, the dark orbs covered by the lids, and the long black lashes that fringed them" (Shelley 224), a depiction which verges on the erotic and is also strangely reminiscent of the detailed account of the selection of body parts used to put together the monster's body. The homoerotic fixation on the projected beauty of the creature, whose limbs are explicitly described as "beautiful" (Shelley 58) echoes and inverts the artistic tradition myth of Pygmalion and Galatea, with the newly born creature a parody of beauty and human nature. The author seemed to be aware of this ambiguity as she goes even further in her revision for the Thomas copy of Frankenstein, writing "my voice became broken, my trembling hands almost refused to accomplish their task; I became as timid as a lovesick girl, and alternate terror and passionate ardour took the place of wholesome sensation and regulated ambition" (51: 31-35).

Frankenstein's relationship with Clerval is interesting in that Clerval seems to sometimes replace Elizabeth when her presence would have been the most logical and expected. When Frankenstein becomes ill at Ingolstadt, Elizabeth writes in letters to them that she can only imagine that Victor's care has "devolved on some mercenary old nurse" when it should be her, the one who can guess his wishes and "minister to them with [. . .] care and affection" (Shelley 67). But to the contrary it is Clerval whose care and affection Victor receives, and, according to him, "nothing but the unbounded and unremitting attentions of [his] friend could have restored [him] to life" (Shelley 64). And when Frankenstein works on the making of a mate for his monster, it is Clerval's letters, which clearly express great emotional distress and a feeling of abandonment akin to that a love might feel, which he opts to mention instead of Elizabeth's: "I

had rather be with you, [. . .] in your solitary rambles, than with these Scotch people, whom I do not know; hasten, then, my dear friend, to return, that I may again feel myself somewhat at home, which I cannot do in your absence” (Shelley 198). In Clerval’s mind, the two men seem to form a close-knit relationship not unlike a marriage or romantic association, hence the allusion to a “home”, a household they might share. Granted Frankenstein’s relationship with his cousin / “more than sister” Elizabeth, the fact that Clerval and himself should have been brought up together as close friends and almost as brothers does not hinder a possible romantic association.

In her study of the ambivalence of male friendships in Victorian literature, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick goes as far as to suggest that *Frankenstein*, like William Godwin’s *Caleb Williams*, is

about one or more males who not only is persecuted by, but considers himself transparent to and often under the compulsion of, another male. If we follow Freud [in the case of Dr. Schreber] in hypothesizing that such a sense of persecution represents the fearful, phantasmic rejection by recasting of an original homosexual (or even merely homosocial) desire, then it would make sense to think of this group of novels as embodying strongly homophobic mechanisms<sup>181</sup>.

Eric Daffron for his part sees platonic sameness in Henry and Victor and a potentially sexualized sameness in Walton and Victor. He posits that Mary Shelley draws in her story a continuum for male desire that “moves in increasing degrees of sympathetic sameness from non-sexual to sexual male relations. In her version, the uneasy movement along this continuum towards more intense forms of intimacy and sexuality results in homophobia”<sup>182</sup>. The idea of the continuum was first Percy’s, according to Daffron. He uses Percy’s writings to show where he “inadvertently creates a continuum of male-male sympathies through a number of discursive slippages”<sup>183</sup>.

This latent homoerotic desire and deviant sexuality links him to his late 19<sup>th</sup> century counterpart, Dr. Henry Jekyll. Indeed, a number of readings of *The Strange Case* suggest that the “*shameful*

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<sup>181</sup> Kosofsky Sedgwick, Eva. *In Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire*. Columbia University Press, 1985, pp.91-92.

<sup>182</sup> Daffron, Eric. *Romantic Doubles: Sympathy in British Gothic Literature, 1790-1830*. AMS Press, 2002, p.424.

<sup>183</sup> *Ibid*, p.423.

*pleasures*” (Stevenson 79) Jekyll sought to suppress were sexual in nature, which classifies him as a typical victim of a *Psychopathia Sexualis*, to borrow the title of Richard von Krafft-Ebing’s 1886 influential first textbook on the subject of sexology, which according to Robert Mighall “concentrated on that grey area between criminality and mental pathology”<sup>184</sup>. The book’s main thesis is that “every expression of [the sexual instinct] that does not correspond with the purpose of nature- i.e., propagation- must be regarded as perverse”<sup>185</sup>, including masturbation, sadomasochism, and homosexual activity. The latter is also called “a hereditary neuropathic or psychopathic tendency”<sup>186</sup>, further linking sexual activity to theories of degeneration proper, all the more so as he defines deviant sexuality as synonymous with sociocultural deviation in the sense that it threatens the established world order (‘Fragments of a System of Psychology of Sexual Life’); but also as a deviation from a civilizational progression narrative, as Krafft-Ebing perceives sexuality as “a sort of behavioural recapitulation of some ancestral state, and a betrayal of the socioevolutionary process that distinguished the modern Caucasian from the present-day non-European “primitive.”<sup>187</sup>

Many passages in *The Strange Case* hint at the identification of Jekyll’s mortal vices and masturbation. In the earliest surviving draft Jekyll confessed that “From a very early age, however, I became in secret the slave of disgraceful pleasures”<sup>188</sup>. This confession was later changed to “From an early age, however, I became in secret the slave of certain appetites” in what is known as the ‘Printer’s Copy’. The same earliest existing version goes on to add that “as soon as night had fallen and I could shake off my friends, the iron hand of indurated habit plunged me once again into the mire of my vices. I will trouble you with these no further than to say that there were at once criminal in the sight of the law and abhorrent in themselves” and that having created Hyde he “began to plunge into a career of cruel, soulless and degrading vice”. The pun on the “iron hand of habit” is a clear indication of the nature of his vices, and the vocabulary used is reminiscent of the medical imagery which can be found in *Psychopathia*

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<sup>184</sup> Mighall, Robert. ‘Diagnosing Jekyll: the Scientific Context to Dr Jekyll’s Experiment and Mr Hyde’s Embodiment’, in Stevenson, Robert Louis. *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde and Other Tales of Terror*. Penguin Books, 2002, p.154.

<sup>185</sup> Krafft-Ebing, Richard Von. *Psychopathia sexualis*. 10th ed., Aberdeen University Press, 1899, p. 108.

<sup>186</sup> Cited in Weeks, Jeffrey. *Sex, Politic and Society*. Longman, 1981, p.104.

<sup>187</sup> Hurley, p.71.

<sup>188</sup> Mighall, p.156.

*Sexualis* as well as numerous treatises on ‘self-abuse’ published between 1840 and 1900.

The seemingly excessive and over-dramatic tone of the extract is in keeping with the medical literature of the period which emphasised the dangers of masturbation and deviant sexual activity, as illustrated by this passage from *Psychopathia Sexualis*:

Nothing is so prone to contaminate - under certain circumstances, even to exhaust - the source of all noble and ideal sentiments . . . as the practice of masturbation in early years. It spoils the unfolding bud of perfume and beauty, and leaves behind only the coarse, animal desire for sexual satisfaction. If an individual thus depraved, reaches the age of maturity, there is wanting in him that aesthetic, ideal, pure and free impulse which draws the opposite sexes together. The glow of sensual sensibility wanes, and the inclination toward the opposite sex is weakened [...]. Premature and perverse sexual satisfaction injures not merely the mind, but also the body; inasmuch as it induces neuroses of the sexual apparatus (irritable weakness of the centres governing erection and ejaculation; defective pleasurable feeling in coitus, etc.), while, at the same time, it maintains imagination and libido in continuous excitement<sup>189</sup>

In this regard, the fact that Jekyll, despite his handsomeness, sound reputation and liberal fortune, should be a bachelor can be explained in the light of his sexual deviancy.

The published version is however much tamer: “The pleasures which I made haste to seek in my disguise were, as I have said, undignified”. The term missing here is “criminal”, effectively turning Jekyll into what Mighall dubs an “ordinary secret sinner” and no longer the case for a medical expert. Yet, through the incarnation into Mr Hyde, those repressed urges become much more threatening and criminal again: “But in the hands of Edward Hyde they soon began to run towards the monstrous”, in the form of sadism as Hyde drank “pleasure with bestial avidity from any degree of torture to another”, “tasted delight from every blow” that he inflicts upon Danvers Carew, and is described as “stung to the pitch of murder, lusting to inflict pain” (Stevenson 91).

Sadism was one of the sexual neurosis identified by Krafft-Ebing and defined as “association of active cruelty and violence with lust”<sup>190</sup>. To him,

Sadism is nothing else than the excessive and monstrous intensification of phenomena – possible too, in normal conditions in rudimentary forms, - which accompany the psychical

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<sup>189</sup> Krafft-Ebing, Richard Von. *Psychopathia sexualis*. 10th ed., Aberdeen University Press, 1899, pp.310-11.

<sup>190</sup> Ibid, p.59.

*vita sexualis*, particularly in males... the sadistic acts have the character of impulsive deeds... vary in monstrosity with variation in the power of the perverse instinct over the individual afflicted, and with variation in the strength of the opposing idea that might be present, which almost always are more or less weakened by original ethical defect, hereditary degeneracy, or moral insanity<sup>191</sup>.

The passage is telling as sadism is not a monstrous impulse per se but rather the monstrous manifestation of normal instincts, the “pathological intensification of the normal impulse”<sup>192</sup>, in the same way that Hyde is the embodiment and intensification of Jekyll’s solitary pleasures. The novel contributed to the shaping of Victorian mentalities, especially the acceptance of the possibility of a double-life and of deviancy hiding under respectable pretences. Popular reactions in the wake of the Whitechapel murders, and especially the hypothesis that the killer might not be a plebeian, as initially suspected, but a member of the respectable class, or even a doctor mirror this tacit acceptance:

Among the theories as to the Whitechapel murders, which start up one day and vanish the next, the one which is most famous is the Jekyll and Hyde theory, namely, that the murderer is a man living a dual life, one respectable and even religious, and the other lawless and brutal

And

Dr Gordon Browne’s evidence at the inquest on the woman discovered in Mitre-Square establishes beyond a doubt the theory that the murderer is possessed of considerable anatomical skill... we now know for certain that he is a skilled anatomist.<sup>193</sup>

The ability for men to lead a double-life was itself considered a form of mania, often referred to as ‘moral insanity’, with moral encompassing a wide set of ethical concerns as well as behavioural anomalies and deviations from established norms of behaviours. The pioneering text on the subject is

James Cowles Prichard’s 1835 *Treatise on Insanity and Other Disorders Affecting the Mind*. In this study, Prichard defines moral insanity as follows:

A morbid perversion of the natural feelings, affections, inclinations, temper, habits, moral dispositions, and natural impulses, without any remarkable disorder or defect of the intellect or knowing and reasoning faculties, and particularly without any insane illusion or

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<sup>191</sup> Ibid, pp.59-61.

<sup>192</sup> Ibid, p.157.

<sup>193</sup> *East London Advertiser*, 13<sup>th</sup> October 1888.

hallucination<sup>194</sup>.

Henry Maudsley took up the theme of moral insanity to write about the inner battle causing the breakdown of will and reason. The victim suffers “agonies of distress during the paroxysms of its activity ...[as he]struggles ...to prevent his true will being overmastered’<sup>195</sup>. The war within thus becomes symptomatic of mental derangement as he laments that “in the agonised womb of consciousness these polar twins should be continuously struggling” (Stevenson 75). Jekyll’s mental turmoil can therefore be read in terms of a battle between degenerate instincts and civilised impulses, struggling to take control of the body.

Mighall draws a striking parallel between Stevenson’s case and Prichard’s ‘Case no 3’:

A gentleman of good connexions, of good education and of mental capabilities far above the general average, was brought up under the most advantageous circumstances that wealth can command, o the surgical branch of our profession... Educated as a gentleman, he possessed what is essential to the character – the highest moral and religious principles... and the strictest regard for the correct conduct which is due to those of his own rank in society. An unfortunate excess to which he was seduced when his duties in London were fulfilled, laid the foundation for a complete subversion of his character. He became reckless in his habits, negligent of his person, careless of the society he fell into, addicted to drinking, suspicious of his friends, wantonly extravagant, perverse in disposition, irritable, and over-bearing.<sup>196</sup>

To most characters in the novel, Jekyll’s behaviour could correspond to this description, especially in his reclusion from his friends. The patient from Case no3 exhibits a pattern of temptation, giving in, horror at his actions, and attempt at completing reformation followed by a quick relapse.

Excepting at these times, this gentleman’s habits are most abstemious... when, however, this thirst for ardent spirits comes on, a fondness for low society accompanies it. On these occasions he repairs to a pot-house, takes his mixture amidst the lowest of mankind... This continues for twenty to thirty hours, when he awakes to the horrors of his situation, and to the mortification arising from his folly<sup>197</sup>

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<sup>194</sup> Prichard, James Cowles. *Treatise on insanity and other disorders affecting the mind*. Sherwood, Gilbert and Piper, 1835, p.6.

<sup>195</sup> Maudsley, Henry. *Body and Will*. D. Appleton & Company, 1872, p.299.

<sup>196</sup> Prichard, James Cowles. *Treatise on insanity and other disorders affecting the mind*. Sherwood, Gilbert and Piper, 1835, p.57.

<sup>197</sup> Ibid, p.58.



Similarly, Jekyll is at first confident in his ability to control Hyde in chapter “Dr Jekyll is Quite at Ease’, before relapsing in broad daylight by turning into the hideous Hyde. A central aspect of ‘moral insanity’ is the disturbance factor induced by the exhibition by an upper-class man of behavioural tendencies which normally come associated with lower-class men; in this regard, the fact that he should unwillingly turn back into Hyde in the middle of Regent’s Park is revealing of Victorian class anxiety.

After all, I reflected, I was like my neighbours; and I smiled, comparing myself with other men, comparing my active good will with the lazy cruelty of their neglect. And at the very moment of that vainglorious thought, a qualm came over me, a horrid nausea and the most deadly shuddering... I began to be aware of a change in the temper of my thoughts, a greater boldness, a contempt of danger, a solution of the bonds of obligation. I looked down; my clothes hung formlessly on my shrunken limbs; the hand that lay on my knee was corded and hairy (Stevenson 89).

The horror resides not only in the exhibition of an anti-social behaviour but also in the disturbance of social hierarchy. As Jekyll notes, he was born “to a large fortune, endowed besides with excellent parts, inclined by nature to industry, fond of the respect of the wise and good among my fellow-men, and thus, as might have been supposed, with every guarantee of an honourable and distinguished future” (Stevenson 73), and as such, he is compelled to act in ways sanctified by his social identity. His inability to do so is a further indicator of social degeneracy.

Finally, his very death by suicide marks him as a definite degenerate type. Prichard stated that suicide and homicide were often consequences of the same perversions of moral sense: “like the impulse to homicide, this propensity to suicide is simply a moral perversion”<sup>198</sup>. Both actions were related to the impossibility of exerting sufficient self-control to prevent the passions from overpowering reason and taking over the body. Another eminent psychiatrist of the period, Samuel similarly agreed that “the creature bearing [the impulse for self-destruction] must be looked upon as a degenerate specimen of the family upon which nature has set the seal of disapproval”<sup>199</sup> and goes on to add that “[suicide is] defined as one of the signs of a markedly degenerate condition”<sup>200</sup>.

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<sup>198</sup> Ibid, p.54

<sup>199</sup> Strahan, Samuel. *Marriage and Disease*. Kegan Paul, 1892, pp.85-6

<sup>200</sup> Ibid, pp.65-6.

Interestingly enough though, suicide came to be seen in the same light as eugenics as a means for the species to self-regulate and dispose of degenerate, unfit individuals, who were too weak to confront the trials and struggles of life and would thus turn to suicide for relief. Even though Strahan takes things farther than Stevenson when he states that “what has been called voluntary death becomes merely one of the eliminative processes of natural selection”<sup>201</sup>, the latter still recognises suicide as the appropriate means to dispose of Hyde. Throughout the novel, Jekyll repeatedly threatens Hyde with self-destruction as a way of keeping him in check, and by the end of the novel, he wonders how Hyde will react when they run out of potion and Jekyll can no longer step in in his place to answer for his crimes: “will Hyde die upon the scaffold? Or will he find courage to release himself at the last moment? ... what is to follow concerns another than myself” (Stevenson 96). Indeed, it would appear that to Hyde, suicide was the only “release” available to avoid having to face a trial. As such, Stevenson subverts theories of degeneracy, since symptoms of degeneracy become solutions to this very problem.

The culmination of the figure of the scientist as degenerate has to be Wells’s Doctor Moreau. Named after French neurologist Jacques-Joseph Moreau, whose *Morbid Psychology* (1859) claimed that overexcitation of the part of the brain controlling intellect could cause the malfunction of the rest of the brain, and particularly the atrophy of moral sensibility, thus endorsing the view of the potential criminal lurking in men of genius.<sup>202</sup> J.-J. Moreau places the genius on the same "family tree" as the criminal, the lunatic, and a variety of other pathologies and nervous sufferers: the genius' over expenditure of cerebral energy results in immorality and criminal behaviour as well as monomaniacal insanity: "Just as giants pay a heavy ransom for their stature in sterility and relative muscular and mental weakness," Lombroso wrote in *The Man of Genius*, a work greatly indebted to *Morbid Psychology*, "so the giants of thought expiate their intellectual force in degeneration and psychosis"<sup>203</sup>, "fallen under the overmastering spell of research" to the point of monomania<sup>204</sup>.

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<sup>201</sup> Ibid, p.30

<sup>202</sup> Drinka, Frederick George. *The Birth of Neurosis: Myth, Malady, and the Victorians*. Simon and Schuster, 1984, p.53.

<sup>203</sup> Lombroso, Cesare. *The Man of Genius*. Walter Scott, 1891, p.vi.

<sup>204</sup> Ibid, p.33.

This onomastic predetermination weighs heavily on Wells's protagonist. While he possesses something of the charisma of the alchemist and his "his serenity, the touch almost of beauty that resulted from his set tranquillity, and from his magnificent build" (Wells 98) are commented upon, Prendick describes him to be "he was irresponsible, so utterly careless. His curiosity, his mad, aimless investigations, drove him on" (Wells 121). Moreover, Moreau himself willingly confesses to his insensitivity to the pain of others (humans and animals alike), since he reduces them to elements in his broader scientific system: "the thing before you is no longer an animal, a fellow-creature, but a problem" (Wells 93).

He finds his justification in the unquestioned belief in a clear correlation between the amount of experimentation one is able to secure and the degree to which one will be able to conduct one's research. In this regard, we can find a precedent in Descartes's claim that

out of this difficulty I cannot otherwise extricate myself than by again seeking certain experiments [...] but I perceive likewise that they are such and so numerous, that neither my hands nor my income, though it were a thousand times larger than it is, would be sufficient for them all; so that *according as henceforward I shall have the means of making more or fewer experiments, I shall in the same proportion make greater or less progress in the knowledge of nature.*<sup>205</sup> (italics mine)

In this passage, Descartes makes a clear link between experimentation and progress in natural sciences, to the extent that progresses proportionately depends on the quantity of experiments made. Interpreted in the context of his wider conception of nature, it seems to be a justification of all experimentation, included that on animals considered as machine (see III), for the sake of the advancement of humanity and science.

Moreover, Moreau is all the less accountable for the extreme to which he took his experiments as he lives in an era of considerable scientific advancement already, and thus can join Descartes when he declares: "I remarked, moreover, with respect to experiments, that they become always more necessary the more one is advanced in knowledge"<sup>206</sup>. By appealing to necessity, Descartes justifies experimentation as an irrevocable component of scientific pursuit, and can thus shrug off the problems linked to the moral responsibility of scientists; an ideology Moreau

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<sup>205</sup> Descartes, René. *Discourse on the method ; and Meditations on first philosophy*. Yale University Press, 1996, p.40.

<sup>206</sup> *Ibid*, p.41.

enthusiastically embraces. Whether he is actually working for the bettering of mankind, or whether he is simply using science as a way to construct his self-aggrandising, idolatrous fantasy remains to be debated.

However, Moreau can be redeemed if read as a personification of Nature itself, a Nature whose idle experiments on living flesh are as wanton, as aimless, as random, and finally as cruel, as Moreau's. Moreau openly acknowledges this legacy as he declares : "To this day I have never troubled about the ethics of the matter. The study of Nature makes a man at last as remorseless as Nature" (Wells 93). "Each time I dip a living creature into the bath of burning pain," Moreau tells Prendick, "I say, this time I will burn out the animal, this time I will make a rational creature of my own" (Wells 97); but what he achieves is only a crude mockery of humanity.

I can see through it all, see into their very souls, and see there nothing but the souls of beasts, beasts that perish - anger, and the lusts to live and gratify themselves . . . There is a kind of upward striving in them, part vanity, part waste sexual emotion, part waste curiosity. It only mocks me (Wells 98).

Nature, too, subjects its creatures to pain and suffering through the long process of evolution, refashioning new types of beings, testing their fitness, discarding the failures, only to generate a human species that is itself nothing more than a crude mockery of the idea of humanity, deformed by the "mark of the beast from which [it] came" (Wells 92) and thwarted in its "upward striving" by the soul of the beast.

Aside from theories of human degeneration proper, we cannot overlook the fact that Frankenstein appears to be the degenerate version of the Baconian and Enlightenment ideal he is heir to, which states that everything can be known and that such knowledge will inevitably be for the good. Indeed, in his *Sketch for a Historical Picture of the Progress of the Human Mind* (1794), Condorcet claims his belief in the continuous progress of science: "the perfectibility of man is truly indefinite; and that the progress of this perfectibility, from now onwards independent of any power that might wish to halt it, has no other limit than the duration of the globe upon which nature has cast us."<sup>207</sup> . In a similar fashion, Frankenstein struggles through failed experiments and negative feedback yet never doubts his ability to accomplish his

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<sup>207</sup> Condorcet, Jean-Antoine-Nicolas de Caritat, Lukes, Steven, & Urbinati, Nadia. *Condorcet : Political writings (Cambridge texts in the history of political thought)*. Cambridge University Press, 2012, p.4.

aim: “I doubted not that I should ultimately succeed” (Shelley 53).

He also warns against the evils of superstition “Philosophy has had to proscribe in no uncertain terms that superstition which believes that rules of conduct can be found only in the history of past centuries, and truth only in the study of ancient opinions”<sup>208</sup>, in a programmatic and performative tone characteristic of the rhetoric of the Enlightenment. The education Frankenstein states he has received seems to have been inspired by this philosophy, as he declares: “In my education my father had taken the greatest precautions that my mind should be impressed with no supernatural horrors. I do not ever remember to have trembled at a tale of superstition, or to have feared the apparition of a spirit” (Shelley 51).

Yet, while at first glance he seems to embody the scientific ideal of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, he proves to be a cautionary tale of the excesses that idealism might breed, a danger Condorcet was aware of as he warned scientists against the excessive hubris that might lead them astray if they refuse to take into account the deeds of wisdom of their predecessors: “But ought it [philosophy] not to condemn with equal vigour the prejudice that arrogantly rejects the lessons of experience? Without doubt it is only by meditation, which furnishes us with fruitful combinations of ideas, that we can arrive at any general truths in the science of man”<sup>209</sup>. In more than one way, Condorcet’s reluctance to give in fully to his enthusiasm applies to Mary Shelley’s protagonist in more than one way.

Everything tells us that we are now close upon one of the great revolutions of the human race. If we wish to learn what to expect from it and to procure a certain guide to lead us in the midst of its vicissitudes, what could be more suitable than to have some picture of the revolutions that have gone before and have prepared its way? The present state of enlightenment assures us that this revolution will have a favourable result, but is not this only on condition that we know how to employ our knowledge and resources to their fullest extent? And in order that the happiness that its promises may be less dearly bought [...] do we not need to study the history of the human spirit to discover what obstacles we still have to fear, and what means are open to us of surmounting them?<sup>210</sup>.

Even though the world has known no revolution of the type or intensity that it is about to witness

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<sup>208</sup> Ibid, p.11.

<sup>209</sup> Ibid.

<sup>210</sup> Ibid, p.12

with Frankenstein's experiment, the history of man and mythology are pervaded with stories of the downfall of men too ambitious. While the thinkers of the Enlightenment have been accused by a number of political thinkers, notably Edmund Burke, of being too radical and naïve in their belief in the possibility of setting up a functional government on the premise of a *tabula rasa*, it appears that they were more cautious when it came to their claims on the perfectibility of man and progress of sciences, and urged men to consider the works of those who came before them as secure knowledge on which to build their theories and in which to find fuel for experimentation and thought.

Indeed, even Descartes, whose radical justification of scientific experiments and views on nature and animals have been so influential in the shaping of the scientific project of the Enlightenment, includes cautionary advice into his works, stating that

although it is true that each man is obliged to procure, as much as in him lie, the good of others, it is at the same time true that our cares should extend further than the present time, and that it is good to set aside those things which may possibly be adapted to bring profit to the living, when we have in view the accomplishment of other ends which will bring much more advantage to our descendants.<sup>211</sup>

Even the most radical scientific thinkers thus insist on the moral responsibility of the scientist as a human being that will be held accountable in front of future generations.

Frankenstein himself seems to register his failure to live up to the expectations dawning on a scientist of the Enlightenment, as he confesses:

When I was younger," said he," I felt as if I were destined for some great enterprise. My feelings are profound; but I possessed a coolness of judgment that fitted me for illustrious achievements. [...] All my speculations and hopes are as nothing; and, like the archangel who aspired to omnipotence, I am chained in an eternal hell. [...] From my infancy I was imbued with high hopes and a lofty ambition; but how am I sunk! Oh! My friend, if you had known me as I once was, you would not recognise me in this state of degradation. (Shelley 262)

The explicit use of a vocabulary of degradation and degeneracy is telling of the transformation Frankenstein has seen in himself; a shift from high scientific and philosophical ambitions destined to advance the cause of humankind, to a state of despondency and irretrievable loss. But one can read further than the mere expression of a personal fate and read this confession as

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<sup>211</sup> Descartes, René. *Discourse on the method ; and Meditations on first philosophy*. Yale University Press, 1996, pp.40-41.

that of the scientific project of the Enlightenment, all the more so as Mary Shelley herself had gradually come to reject the utopian, radical values she had been brought up with, to instead embrace a more conservative and pessimism outlook on life and history<sup>212</sup>.

This may be because his motivations are not pure, if wealth is not enthralling to him, glory is: the modern Prometheus has fallen prey to arrogance and glory.

But it might also be a warning about the dire possibility that the very projects the original Enlightenment philosophers supported may have been inherently dangerous and threatening towards the social order and their own posterity. While Condorcet held the ideal of a community of scientists working together for the greater good, and of a continuous scientific, intellectual and moral progression towards perfection, Shelley has the novel depict the extinction of those hopes through the setting of the plot as part of a rebellion inside the bourgeois family. As Lee Sterrenburg notes, "The Monster kills off Victor's friends and kin, promises to be with him on his wedding night, and murders his new wife. If nothing else, his rebellion effectively brings about the demise of one socially prominent family with a long history of public service."<sup>213</sup>. Indeed, Victor comes from an illustrious family of civil servants, and both his "competent fortune" (Shelley 183) and education initially destined him to take up the family tradition and carry forth the dignity of their name. Instead, the monster brings to an end this "distinguished" line by killing William, Victor's bride, and eventually leading Victor himself to his death. Instead of perpetuating philosophical enquiries and scientific progress for the bettering of mankind, some scientific endeavours can actually lead to the ruin of families, an allegory for scientific and philosophical traditions, and throw their discoveries and achievements into oblivion.

Similarly, Stevenson has Jekyll die unconscious at the hand of Hyde, in a desperate act of self-murder which ensures his eternal damnation, as suicide was firmly condemned by the Church as early as Aquinas's *Summa Theologiae*, in which he understand the sixth commandment ("thou shalt not kill") to encapsulate suicide<sup>214</sup>. Therefore all possibility of redemption is

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<sup>212</sup> Sterrenburg, Lee. 'Mary Shelley's Monster: Politics and Psyche in Frankenstein' in *The Endurance of "Frankenstein": Essays on Mary Shelley's Novel*, pp. 143-71.

<sup>213</sup> Ibid, p.164.

<sup>214</sup> Eberl, Jason. *The Routledge guidebook to Aquinas' Summa Theologiae*. Routledge, 2016.

irretrievably lost for this unjustified sinner, and his possible imitators.





III. “Man's yesterday may ne'er be like his morrow; /  
Nought may endure but Mutability!”

“We know that wherever science goes the purifying breath of spring has passed and all things are re-created”<sup>215</sup>. As science progresses in depth and understanding of the world, so does its ambition to explain all existing phenomena and unite them under a series of fixed laws. As social sciences become more fashionable, linked to medicine and the study of anatomy, Man becomes another of those “things” that science gains the power to define and “recreate”, provoking a wave of unease and cultural anxiety throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century. As science replaces religion as the reigning human-centric narrative, the cards are reshuffled and Man loses his hegemonic position to become another observable species amongst others, whose mind and feelings can be analysed and whose fate can be predicted.

a) “Man, oh, not men! A chain of linked thought, / Of love and might to be divided not” : a rejection of the empiricist, mechanist model of the mind

The main scientific and philosophical theory that 19<sup>th</sup> century Gothic writers engage with is the belief in a mechanistic conception of the human mind and of human beings broadly speaking. As early as the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century, thinkers such as John Locke produced an empiricist model of the workings of the human mind, dedicating most of their attention to the belief in an initial state of *tabula rasa*, i.e. a conception of the mind as a blank slate on which the senses imprint sensations, that eventually build up more elaborate ideas.

Nancy Yousef notes that

In its engagement with Enlightenment theories of education, human nature, and sociality, *Frankenstein* displays Shelley’s penetrating and critical interpretation of masculine constructions of knowledge and personhood. The novel’s account of the creature’s education responds directly to eighteenth-century philosophical conceptions of human nature that have themselves lately become the objects of feminist revaluation in the fields of philosophy and

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<sup>215</sup> Havelock Ellis, Henry. *The New Spirit*. (3rd ed), Walter Scott, 1892, p.viii.

political theory<sup>216</sup>

As we have seen earlier (I.3), Shelley insists on a model of human individuality and personality that is more co-dependent on relationships and collective nurturing than most theories of formation of the human mind allow. Shelley seems to recreate the experiment first led by Condillac, who resorts to an imaginary statue gradually brought to life as his figure for the education of the human senses in the *Treatise on Sensations*, in an artificial recreation of the first moment of human life as “we are unable to observe our first thoughts and our first movements”<sup>217</sup>. As the monster narrates his second awakening in the forest, he tells Frankenstein that

A strange multiplicity of sensations seized me, and I saw, felt, heard, and smelt at the same time; and it was, indeed, a long time before I learned to distinguish between the operations of my various senses. By degrees, I remember, a stronger light pressed upon my nerves, so that I was obliged to shut my eyes. Darkness then came over me and troubled me, but hardly had I felt this when, by opening my eyes, as I now suppose, the light poured in upon me again. (Shelley 118)

This description conveys an impression of sensory overload as the monster is not yet able to distinguish between his sensations and becomes overwhelmed. Unsurprisingly in a “birth scene”, darkness gives way to light, which plays a very strong part in the initial sensory development of the monster; not only for metaphorical purposes, but also in a nod to the *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, which appears on Shelley’s reading list in November and December 1816 and in January 1817<sup>218</sup>. Locke writes that “those ideas are the earliest imprinted [on the mind] which happen to be the sensible qualities which first occur [to infants], among which light is not the least considerable. . . . children new-born always turn their eyes to that part from whence the light comes”; thus they exhibit “how covetous the mind is to be furnished with all such ideas as have no pain accompanying them”<sup>219</sup>. In *Frankenstein*, the monster waxes poetic about the “gentle light [which] stole over the heavens and gave me a sensation of pleasure. I started up and beheld a radiant form rise from among the trees. I gazed with a kind

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<sup>216</sup> Yousef, Nancy. *The Monster in a Dark Room: Frankenstein, Feminism, and Philosophy*. *Modern Language Quarterly* 1 June 2002; 63 (2), pp. 197–226, p.200.

<sup>217</sup> Condillac (abbé de). *Treatise on Sensations*, in *Philosophical Writings of Etienne Bonnot, Abbé de Condillac*. Erlbaum, 1982, p.158.

<sup>218</sup> Shelley, Mary. *The Journals of Mary Shelley, 1814–1844*. Clarendon, 1987.

<sup>219</sup> Locke, John. *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*. Penguin, 1997, 2.9., p.7.

of wonder.” (Shelley 119).

Shelley also appears to endorse Locke’s view that pain is crucial in informing sensations of ideas as it provides a first physical compass that allows the creature to distinguish between what is harmful and what is beneficent. Locke writes that the new-born infant is “seldom awake but when either hunger calls for the teat, or some pain . . . or some other violent impression on the body forces the mind to perceive and attend to it” (Locke 2.1.21), while in Shelley the creature lies “resting from . . . fatigue, until tormented by hunger and thirst” (Shelley 118), and “overcome by sleep” once satiated, only to be roused by “feeling pain invade [him] on all sides” (Shelley 119). During the first stages of his development, man (and the monster) is understood as only responding to powerful external stimulation that directly compromise his well-being.

However, Shelley departs from a strictly empiricist perspective as she introduces a moral dimension early on, having the monster declare: “I felt cold, and half-frightened, as it were, instinctively, finding myself so desolate” (Shelley 103). She thus introduces moral / psychological pain as another stimulus in “an unmistakable deviation from the foundational Lockean hypothesis that there are no innate ideas.”<sup>220</sup> She seems to endorse the view that the need for moral company is as natural as the need for food. Here again, she deviates from Locke, who seems to posit the need for affectionate, especially in the child, as subordinate to that for food. To Locke, the child needs his mother because hunger drives him to demand “the teat”, thus “blurs the distinction between person and thing, between affective and physical needs.” (Yousef 205). While it could be argued that this dissonance partly springs from their different experiences of children because of gendered distinctions, it is also useful to consider the broader implications of this disagreement in their conception of human beings. While addressing the topic of needs, it might prove necessary to use Maslow’s model of the pyramid of needs.

Maslow ranks the basic human needs in the following order of importance:

- *Biological and physiological needs* - air, food, drink, shelter, warmth, sex, sleep.
- *Safety needs* - protection from elements, security, order, law, stability, freedom from fear.
- *Love and belongingness needs* - friendship, intimacy, trust and acceptance, receiving and giving affection and love. Affiliating, being part of a group (family, friends, work).

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<sup>220</sup> Yousef, Nancy. *The Monster in a Dark Room: Frankenstein, Feminism, and Philosophy*. *Modern Language Quarterly* 1 June 2002; 63 (2), pp. 197–226, p.203.

- *Esteem needs* - which Maslow classified into two categories: (i) esteem for oneself (dignity, achievement, mastery, independence) and (ii) the desire for reputation or respect from others (e.g., status, prestige). Maslow indicated that the need for respect or reputation is most important for children and adolescents and precedes real self-esteem or dignity.
- *Self-actualization needs* - realizing personal potential, self-fulfilment, seeking personal growth and peak experiences. A desire “to become everything one is capable of becoming”<sup>221</sup>

His hierarchy of needs matches Locke’s own rendition of the primary needs the individual. On the contrary, Shelley argues that affection and the desire for belonging are parts of the primary needs of the individual, before “safety needs” and on the same level as the basic needs that ensure survival. This engagement with the theme of sociability and solitude is also present in her discussion of Rousseau, as she wrote a biographical essay on Rousseau for Dionysius Lardner’s *Cabinet Cyclopaedia*, in which she declared that “nothing can be more unnatural than Rousseau’s natural man” and argued that Rousseau’s misanthropy had shielded him from the real social nature of man, thus tainting the whole of his philosophy: “Rousseau became enamoured of solitude, “labour[ed] with uncommon eloquence to prove that man was naturally a solitary animal”<sup>222</sup>. Before her, her mother Mary Wollstonecraft had expressed similar distaste for Rousseau, who in her opinion “disputes whether man be a gregarious animal, though the long and helpless state of infancy seems to point him out as particularly impelled to pair”<sup>223</sup>. Indeed, Richardson notes, there are differences between Rousseau’s and Shelley’s state of nature, as indeed “Man in Rousseau’s imagined state of nature is essentially solitary and barely recognizes other individuals as such whereas Shelley’s creature is instinctively social, and “long[s] to join” the De Lacey family on the first day he observes them”<sup>224</sup>. This refutation of the philosophy of the Enlightenment on the ground of a feminine belief in the necessity for social activity and links comes to be dramatized by the birth of a creature strong enough not to

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<sup>221</sup> Maslow, Abraham Harold. *Motivation and personality*. 3rd ed., Pearson Education, 1987, p.64.

<sup>222</sup> Shelley, Mary. 'Rousseau' in *Eminent Literary and Scientific Men of France*, 2 vols., *The Cabinet Cyclopaedia Conducted by the Rev. Dionysius Lardner*. Longman, 1838-9, p. 13.

<sup>223</sup> Wollstonecraft, Mary. *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*. Penguin, 1975, 93–94.

<sup>224</sup> Richardson, Alan. ‘From Emile to Frankenstein: The Education of Monsters’ in *European Romantic Review*, 1:2 (1991), 147-62, p.150.

need shelter nor protection, but who still suffers greatly from the pains of solitude. Far from endorsing the view that men come together because they are pressed to do so by urgent interest, they argue for a natural sociability of man; and expose the ideal of self-reliance as unnatural. As an anonymous reviewer of *Frankenstein* notes, “Fellow-feeling is the deepest of all the needs which Nature has implanted within us. The impulses which lead us to the physical preservation of our life are scarcely stronger than those which impel us to communion with our fellows.”<sup>225</sup>.

As for the actual refutation of the theories of *tabula rasa*, they come up linked to the theme of education and the awakening of the monster’s sensibility and awareness of outer sensations. In his essays, Locke depicts the mind as a dark room in which understanding emerges from the intrusion of external sensations.

Sensations are the only passages that I can find, of knowledge to the understanding, these alone, as far as I can discover, are the windows by which light is let into this dark room. For methinks the understanding is not so much unlike a closet wholly shut from light, with only some little opening left, to let in external visible resemblances or ideas of things without  
(Locke 2.11.17)

It could be argued that Shelley literally dramatizes this extract through the hovel in which the creature hides in *Frankenstein*, separated from the DeLacey cottage by a wall and window whose “panes had been filled up with wood,” and breached by “a small and almost imperceptible chink, through which the eye could just penetrate,” allowing the creature to observe the human world on the other side (Shelley 108), a position Yousef describes as an “empiricist crib” (Yousef 211). While Locke intended to write the “true history of the first beginnings of human knowledge” (Locke 2.11.15), Shelley actively sought to point out the inconsistencies in his theory, first through insisting upon the necessity of social relations, then in dramatizing the evolution of a creature seemingly inherently endowed with a strong moral sense.

As he takes his first look into the cottage, the monster pours out his delight at beholding the close, affectionate family:

It was a lovely sight, even to me, poor wretch! who had never beheld aught beautiful before. . . . He played a sweet mournful air, which I perceived drew tears from the eyes of

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<sup>225</sup> Anonymous, ‘The Anniversary’, *Knight's Quarterly Review* 3 (Aug. 1824): 195-99, p.198.

his amiable companion. . . . she sobbed audibly; he then pronounced a few sounds, and the fair creature, leaving her work, knelt at his feet. He raised her, and smiled with such kindness and affection, that I felt sensations of a peculiar and overpowering nature; they were a mixture of pain and pleasure, such as I had never before experienced, either from hunger or cold, warmth or food; and I withdrew from the window, unable to bear these emotions. (Shelley 108)

The monster seems to have an innate sense of beauty, and affection, and is naturally able to understand the subtleties of musical playing and the fine sentiments between the family members, even though he has been deprived of such affection and thus cannot infer empirically what they are nor make generalisations from his own experience. David Marshall argues that Shelley “adopt[s] the theatrical model of sympathy she inherited from eighteenth century aesthetics and moral philosophy by placing the monster as an unseen, sympathetic spectator to the *tableau de famille* of the DeLaceys”<sup>226</sup>, turning the monster into a character familiar to most readers as part of the *drame bourgeois* and possessing the fine sensibility to which the learned portion of the population aspired.

Shelley's concern with education emerges in the opening pages of the novel's epistolary frame, as Walton laments his "neglected" studies, stating that “My education was neglected, yet I was passionately fond of reading.” (Shelley 4) and that “Now I am twenty-eight and am in reality more illiterate than many schoolboys of fifteen” (Shelley 8) and hinting at his hopes to find a friend to guide him through his studies. As for the Frankensteins, they dedicate great care to their children's studies, with Frankenstein reminiscing that

When I had attained the age of seventeen my parents resolved that I should become a student at the university of Ingolstadt. I had hitherto attended the schools of Geneva, but my father thought it necessary for the completion of my education that I should be made acquainted with other customs than those of my native country. (Shelley 39)

Interestingly enough, to his father, his education must encompass a broad range of subjects and be so comprehensive as to include the confrontation with cultural differences and the discovery of foreign customs – a very liberal, humanist model of education, as opposed to the one Clerval

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<sup>226</sup> Marshall, David. ‘Frankenstein, or Rousseau's Monster: Sympathy and Speculative Eyes’, in *The Surprising Effects of Sympathy: Marivaux, Diderot, Rousseau, and Mary Shelley*. University of Chicago Press, 1988, pp. 178-227, p.214.

must submit himself to as “His father was a narrowminded trader and saw idleness and ruin in the aspirations and ambition of his son. Henry deeply felt the misfortune of being debarred from a liberal education.” (Shelley 41). The parents seem to become personally involved in the instruction of their children, as opposed to the bourgeois habit of delegating such a task to preceptors. Frankenstein explains that “in my education my father had taken the greatest precautions that my mind should be impressed with no supernatural horrors” (Shelley 51), while Elizabeth’s education is not neglected either: “my aunt conceived a great attachment for her, by which she was induced to give her an education superior to that which she had at first intended” (Shelley 69), perhaps more so than expected of a lady.

Later on in the novel, the theme of education is developed through the double, concomitant education of Safie (who is instructed by her lover Felix, much like Sophie is by Emile in Rousseau’s work) and the monster. It might be argued that this double education is an ironic nod to Rousseau’s poor opinion of women, which he expands in book V of *L’Emile*, stating that women are characterised by their “unlimited desires” and tendency to be “extreme in everything”, turning them into natural monsters (compared to the rational norm, i.e. male) to be tamed through education. A contemporary reviewer noted that

In the account which the creature gives of his instruction by means of watching the polished cottagers, the hastiness of the composition is most apparent. Indeed, nothing would require such extreme trouble and carefulness as a correct representation of the mind of one who had (from whatever circumstances) reached maturity without any acquired knowledge. Those things which, from having been known to us before the period to which our remembrances reach, appear to be part of our innate consciousness, would be perfect novelty to such a being. Not only speech would be non-existent but even sight would be imperfect in him. In short, it would require much thought and some physical knowledge, joined (as I before said) to the greatest care, to render such a description at once full and accurate. In Frankenstein what there is of it is sufficiently interesting in itself, but it suggests so frequently how much more it might be wrought out, that it brings strongly into view its own imperfectness.<sup>227</sup>

While meant to be disparaging, the comment underlines the author’s success in deliberately dramatizing the failures and inconsistencies of the Lockean conception of the formation of ideas.

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<sup>227</sup> Anonymous, ‘The Anniversary’, *Knight’s Quarterly Review* 3 (Aug. 1824): 195-99, p.198.



On the study and learning of language, Shelley follows Locke up to a certain point, when he writes that “If we will observe how children learn languages, we shall find that to make them understand what the names of simple ideas or substances stand for, people ordinarily show them the thing . . . and then repeat to them the name that stands for it, as white, sweet, milk, sugar, cat, dog” (Locke 3.9.9). Indeed, when the monster first begins to imitate the De Lacey’s and learn the pronunciation of words, he starts off with simple words designating objects.

Their pronunciation was quick; and the words they uttered, not having any apparent connection to visible objects, I was unable to discover any clue by which I could unravel the mystery of their reference. . . . During the space of several revolutions of the moon in my hovel, I discovered the names that were given to some of the most familiar objects of discourse; I learned and applied the words, fire, milk, bread, and wood. I learned also the names of the cottagers themselves. . . . the old man had only one, which was father. The girl was called sister, or Agatha; and the youth Felix, brother, or son. . . . I distinguished several other words, without being able as yet to understand or apply them; such as good, dearest, unhappy. (Shelley 112)

For the time being, the monster still fails to separate proper nouns and common ones, but learns how to differentiate between nouns and adjectives. It remains unclear however how the learning of grammar comes to him, a theoretical failure Wittgenstein analysed while working on Saint Augustine’s *Philosophical Investigations*, in which he accounts for his learning of language as follows: “my elders named some object, and accordingly moved towards something, I saw this, and I grasped that the thing was called by the sound they uttered when they meant to point it out”<sup>228</sup>. On this rendition of learning, Wittgenstein suggests that

These words give us a particular picture of the essence of human language. It is this: the individual words in language name objects—sentences are combinations of such names. . . . If you describe the learning of language in this way you are, I believe, thinking primarily of nouns like ‘table,’ ‘chair,’ ‘bread,’ and of people’s names . . . and of the remaining kinds of words as something that will take care of itself.”<sup>229</sup>

Therefore, this presentation of the learning process proves unsatisfactory, especially as the novel puts forward more complex, moral notions that go beyond the mere description of one’s surroundings.

His education appears all the more extravagant and hard to believe as the monster remains an

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<sup>228</sup> Augustine. *Confessions* 1. 8, as quoted and translated in Wittgenstein 1953, p.2.

<sup>229</sup> Wittgenstein, Ludwig. *Philosophical Investigations*. Macmillan, 1953, p.2, §1.

outsider not involved in the normal circuit of communication: he lacks the cultural background that would allow him to master language properly. Indeed, nouns are not simply the designation of a given reality but a cultural and social construction of the object. Locke himself acknowledges the importance of culture in the gradual complexification of the individual's relation to language, writing that

The names of Nurse, and Mamma, the child uses determine themselves to those persons. Afterwards, when time and a larger acquaintance has made them [children] observe that there are a great many other things that in . . . shape and several other qualities resemble their father and mother and those persons they have been used to, they frame an idea . . . and to that they give . . . the name man for example” (Locke 3.3.7)

His view is that children gradually acquire the cognitive abilities to decipher a context in which to inscribe their use of language. On this issue, the most telling parallel lies in the distinction between the monster and Safie. Even though Safie is a human being whose education can be supposed to have been thorough, and she should be familiar with notions the monster has never been exposed to, her proficiency in the English language is lacking compared to that of the monster, who explains that “In two months [he] began to comprehend most of the words uttered by my protectors” and “[he] improved more rapidly than the Arabian. . . . [he] comprehended and could imitate almost every word that was spoken.” The passage from oral speech to literacy is just as supernaturally quick “While I improved in speech, I also learned the science of letters . . . and this opened for me a wide field for wonder and delight” (Shelley 118–19). Once more, Wittgenstein makes a very fitting comment when analysing Augustine, stating that the latter “describes the learning of human language as if the child came into a strange country and did not understand the language of the country; that is, as if it already had a language, only not this one”<sup>230</sup>. Shelley goes even further as her monster is quicker at acquiring the mastery of the English language than the very foreigner Wittgenstein describes, thus highlighting how unlikely Lockean theories of language are to actually correspond to the reality.

However, her engagement with the question of the acquiring of intellectual capacities does not stop with the learning of language, as she applies the same super-human rapidity of understanding to the monster in other areas of knowledge, including practical experience. Rousseau's savage man needs centuries to overcome “the crudeness of the first ages”, and the

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<sup>230</sup> Ibid, \*32.

philosopher notes that “the more one meditates on the subject, the greater does the distance between pure sensations and the simplest knowledge grow in our eyes, and it is inconceivable how a man could, by his own strength alone, without the help of communication and without the goad of necessity, have crossed such a wide divide.” (Rousseau 144). To Rousseau, the development of the intellect is linked to the increasingly pressing urgency of necessity, a factor the empiricist narrative does not take into account: the monster is quick to understand how to maintain a fire (the very example Rousseau uses), find food, and express his gratitude to the cottagers.

Therefore, it would appear that Shelley’s narrative reads as the dramatization of the failure of generic 18<sup>th</sup> century philosophy rendering of learning in general and of the acquisition of language in particular, “dismantling philosophical hypotheses that rely on abstract constructions of experience” (Yousef 217).

Thus *Frankenstein* can be said to be the dramatization of the failure of theories of *tabula rasa*. Indeed, it pushes forward the idea that human beings are defined as forming part of a network composed of their family, acquaintances, and the history of their nation; as opposed to all-powerful rational creatures who have it in their power to invent themselves from scratch, in spite of their upbringing. Interrelations matter and function on different levels, not least because of the importance of theories of evolution and degeneracy that posited the extraordinary and unescapable influence of heredity over the individual. As early as 1857, Morel in his *Traité des dégénérescences physiques, intellectuelles et morales de l’espèce humaine*, puts forward the enormous influence of heredity over the individual:

When under any kind of noxious influences an organism becomes debilitated, its successors will not resemble the healthy, normal type of the species, with capacities for development, but will form a new sub-species, which, like all others, possesses the capacity of transmitting to its offspring, in a continuously increasing degree, its peculiarities, these being morbid deviations from the normal form - gaps in development, malformations and infirmities<sup>231</sup>

Morel chooses to focus on degeneracy, but with heredity “not the vehicle of progress: it was an invisible source of contamination, with the infection jumping across bodies, across the

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<sup>231</sup> Morel, Bénédicte Augustin. *Treatise on Degeneration*. Cited in Nordau, Max. *Degeneration*. D. Appleton and Company, 1895, p.16.

generations, and manifesting itself in visible physical deformity” (Hurley 66). Such works draw inspiration from late 18<sup>th</sup> century, Lamarckian evolutionism that posited that characteristics acquired during the lifetime of the parent could be passed on to the next generation. As such, theoreticians emphasised the fact that

The individual who comes into the world is not an isolated being separated from his kindred ... He is bound [to those who preceded him and] to those who follow him, and to the atavic influences which he possesses; he serves for their temporary resting-place, and he transmits them to his descendants.<sup>232</sup>

On the contrary, *Frankenstein* presents the reader with the hypothesis of a being come to life *sui generis*, and mostly free from the hereditary influences that plague the existence of man (even though some film renditions of the novel reintroduced a certain dose of heredity through the theme of the exchange of brains. In the 1931 version directed by James Whale, Frankenstein’s assistant Fritz mistakenly chooses the brain of a criminal to be inserted in the skull of the future monster. Because of this mistake, Frankenstein believes his creature cannot be trusted because his inborn tendencies will necessarily overpower any effort of the will he might make).

Theories of criminality seem all the more fitting as the monster is repeatedly implied to be childlike and in constant amazement of his surroundings, a metaphor often used by Lombroso to describe the criminals he studied. Indeed,

Lombroso saw the child as a primitive human and a "natural" criminal. "The moral sense is certainly wanting in children in the first months or even the first years of life": young children are impatient, deceitful, obstinate, vain, vengeful, cruel, violent-tempered, obscene, even prone to alcoholism ("Criminal Anthropology Applied to Pedagogy," pp. 54-6<sup>233</sup>). In other words, a certain degree of criminality in children is normal, but as the normal child *grows up in a proper environment*, "all this criminality disappears, just as in the fully developed foetus the traces of the lower animals gradually disappear which are so conspicuous in the first months of the foetal life; we have a genuine ethical evolution corresponding to the physical evolution" (Hurley 56, italics mine)

The main point to take from this quotation is of course the allusion to the importance of a proper upbringing and education that could purge the criminal out of the child. When the role of the

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<sup>232</sup> Luys, Jules Bernard. *Maladies Mentales*. Cited in Talbot, Eugène. *Degeneracy: Its Causes, Signs, and Results*. Walter Scott, 1898, p.78.

<sup>233</sup> Lombroso, Cesare. ‘Criminal Anthropology Applied to Pedagogy’, in *Monist* 6 (1895): 50-59.

educator is not fulfilled, as is the case with the monster, the natural criminal tendencies of the individual can grow freely and have dire consequences.

Even if we leave those theories of heredity aside, the main source of suffering for the monster is his ignorance of his ancestry or how he came to life; a lack of information that deeply informs his feelings of worthlessness and isolation. While partaking in the education of Safie, he learns about history and civilisations and realises that he is not part of a nation with an organised social structure and history as those he hears about, which prompts him to wonder where he is from and what he is, since he painfully obviously is not human.

And what was I? Of my creation and creator I was absolutely ignorant, but I knew that I possessed no money, no friends, no kind of property. I was, besides, endued with a figure hideously deformed and loathsome; I was not even of the same nature as man [...] When I looked around I saw and heard of none like me. Was I, then, a monster, a blot upon the earth, from which all men fled and whom all men disowned? (Shelley 141)

Far from simply being a matter of personal comfort or an emotional need to know about one's origins, the monster's suffering acknowledges that the human identity needs be defined in terms of interpersonal relations and not in terms of physical or rational needs. The following passage is particularly important as it interweaves interpersonal bonds and education as the two essential components of one's personality:

I heard of the difference of sexes, and the birth and growth of children, how the father doted on the smiles of the infant, and the lively sallies of the older child, how all the life and cares of the mother were wrapped up in the precious charge, how the mind of youth expanded and gained knowledge, of brother, sister, and all the various relationships which bind one human being to another in mutual bonds. But where were my friends and relations? No father had watched my infant days, no mother had blessed me with smiles and caresses; or if they had, all my past life was now a blot, a blind vacancy in which I distinguished nothing. From my earliest remembrance I had been as I then was in height and proportion. I had never yet seen a being resembling me or who claimed any intercourse with me. What was I? (Shelley 142-43)

While the monster's pining for an accepting, affectionate family is tangible, his speech is interesting in that it puts on the same level the importance of the development of one's knowledge and that of the deepening of familial bonds. Unlike his maker, the monster is able to recognise that a fully human identity requires a holistic acknowledgement of social and personal needs; and that human life cannot be sustained by the sole pursuit of knowledge. Born

in an adult state (tall and able to care for himself), the monster is still lacking individuality because of the absence of a father figure, notable in his failed substitution of the De Laceys for an adopted family. An obvious, political interpretation of the monster is that of the monstrous man theorised by the philosophers of the Enlightenment - a being having reached the adult or mature stage of humanity and able to do away with irrational ties such as love and family bonds. As such, Yousef notes, "It is an observation that this novel, and indeed many novels, turns into a general rule: character is composed from the circumstances of relationship and engagement with others. The philosophical mind, by contrast, is generally composed by abstraction from such circumstances" (Yousef 225).

Eventually, it all breaks down to the way Locke's *Essay* and the subsequent school of thought conceived of people merely as a subordinate category of external objects:

Follow a child from its birth, and observe the alterations that time makes, and you shall find, as the mind by the senses comes to be more and more awake, [it] thinks more, the more it has matter to think on. After some time, it begins to know the objects which being most familiar with it have made lasting impressions. Thus it comes, by degrees, to know the persons it daily converses with and distinguish them from strangers. (Locke 2.1.22)

It comes out of such a description that the child, and arguably the adult individual, cannot tell the difference between human beings and objects, reducing human beings to a sub-category of empirical objects.

One of the aims of 19<sup>th</sup> century Gothic literature seems to have been to address and prevent the triumph of materialism fostered by 18<sup>th</sup> century philosophy and the positivist doctrine. Materialistic conceptions of Man were popularised by Julien Offray de La Mettrie's interpretation of Descartes, more specifically of the Cartesian hypothesis that animals are mere machines without a soul. Interestingly enough, Descartes's work sometimes applied the metaphor of the machine to the human body, even though he tended to only do so when seeking to highlight how much more sophisticated it was, being God's design: "the body is regarded as a machine which, having been made by the hands of God, is incomparably better arranged, and possesses in itself movement which are much more admirable, than any of those which can be invented by man"<sup>234</sup>, a claim Frankenstein will actively challenge. The materialists were more

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<sup>234</sup> Descartes, René. *Discourse on the method ; and Meditations on first philosophy*. Yale University Press, 1996, pp.41-42.

specifically interested in two questions that they sought to address: the essence of man and the existence and characteristics of the human soul.

La Mettrie's contribution to the debate is crucial in that he supported the idea of a bond between the body and soul which posited that the soul was a material entity, affected by bodily states, meaning that one's personality was predetermined and constantly influenced by his physical health. In his *Anti-Seneca*, La Mettrie first voices the opinion that it is the individual's physical organisation which determines the intellect. He insists on the way bodily states influence mental and emotional ones, and how one's moral personality depends on one's physiological organisation. 'Man' is therefore a 'machine' in the sense of being an automaton determined by natural inclinations.

The human body is a machine which winds itself up, a living picture of perpetual motion. Food maintains what is aroused by fever. Without it, the soul languishes, becomes furious and dies dejected. It is like a candle whose light flares up just as it is going out. But if you feed the body, pour into its pipes vigorous sugars and strong liquors, then the soul becomes as generous as they are and arms itself with proud courage. (La Mettrie 7)

As such, good and evil do not exist absolutely, but are simply the result of personal idiosyncrasies that are more or less prevalent in a given population and came to be regarded as norms. From a medical standpoint, criminals should not be held accountable for their actions since their physiology predisposes them to delight in crime (see II). Interestingly enough, a similar opinion is voiced by Diderot in a 1756 letter to Landois of 1756, denying human liberty and affirming that in that case “there is no vice or virtue, nothing that must be rewarded or punished”<sup>235</sup>, which shows that such a view was shared by a number of influential 18th century philosophers.

The most important statement of the nature of the soul is that “the different states of the soul are thus always related to those of the body” (La Mettrie 8). On the specific issue of the soul, 18<sup>th</sup> century materialism took different stances, either positing the existence of a material soul or subtle matter, which is then used to explain all the intellectual functions; or opting to deny the existence of any sort of soul, material or otherwise, and affirm simply that thought and other mental processes were the result of a particular organisation of matter in the brain. La Mettrie adopted the second hypothesis, locating mental processes in the brain, since

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<sup>235</sup> Diderot, Denis. 'Lettre à Monsieur Landois', in Roth, George (ed.) *Correspondence*, vol.2. Minuit, 1955-61, pp. 209 – 17, p.212.

there is another more subtle and wonderful one, which drives them all. It is the source of all our feelings, all our pleasures, all our passions and all our thoughts; for the brain possesses muscles for thinking as the legs do for walking. I mean that instigating and impetuous principle which Hippocrates calls 'evopucov (the soul). This principle exists and has its seat in the brain at the origin of the nerves, by means of which it exerts its control over all the rest of the body. (La Mettrie 29)

This way, the soul is entirely reduced to a physical principle, a spring animating the body, and moral issues are done away with altogether:

the soul is only a principle of motion or a tangible material part of the brain that we can, without fear of error, consider as a mainspring of the whole machine, which exercises a visible influence on all the others and even seems to have been made first. Thus all the others can be seen as an emanation of it (La Mettrie 31)

As has been mentioned before, the elimination of moral issues is consistent with the belief in the ruling of the body over the mind and the reduction of issues of morality to the peculiar idiosyncrasies of a given individual.

*The Strange Case* perfectly exemplifies the fear that even moral character might be changed by chemical, i.e. material, means, especially in a context in which drugs and physical therapies (cold showers, imprisonment, electricity) were used on misfits in mental asylums. There is an ironic twist in the way Jekyll states that “that man is not truly one, but truly two.” (Stevenson 72), as prior to the 19<sup>th</sup> century philosophical doctrines tended to oppose the body and the soul, a belief inherited from Greek philosophy, and especially from Plato’s *Phaedrus*<sup>236</sup>. Peace of mind and greatness could only be achieved through the subjugation of the body by the mind:

And does not the purification [katarsis] consist in this which has been mentioned long ago in our discourse, in separating, so far as possible, the soul from the body and teaching the soul the habit of collecting and bringing itself together from all parts of the body, and living, so far as it can, both now and hereafter, alone by itself, freed from the body as from fetters? (Phaedrus, 67c)

However, in Jekyll’s statement, the division inherent to man consists in a fragmentation

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<sup>236</sup> “...being permitted as initiates to the sight of perfect and simple and calm and happy apparitions, which we saw in the pure light, being ourselves pure and not entombed in this which we carry about with us and call the body, in which we are imprisoned like an oyster in its shell.” In Thompson, William. *The Phaedrus of Plato*. Whitaker, 1868, 250-c.



between his various personalities and aspirations, which could be rephrased as the belief in conflicting souls in a given individual. The solution is no longer to subjugate and tame the body so that it can follow the noble aspirations of the soul, but to “house” those entities or souls in different bodies so there can be a harmonious correspondence between body and soul, freeing the individual from moral dilemmas. As he reflects on the solution to this internal discrepancy, he comes to perceive

more deeply than it has ever yet been stated, the trembling immateriality, the mist-like transience of this seemingly so solid body in which we walk attired. Certain agents I found to have the power to shake and to pluck back that fleshly vestment, even as a wind might toss the curtains of a pavilion (Stevenson 75)

The allusion to the “trembling immateriality, mist-like transience” of the “solid body” and general insistence on the lexical field of materiality and solidity indicate a belief in the permeability of the categories of the material and the immaterial. And since the body appears to be “mist-like” and immaterial, the soul can conversely assume a physical shape.

When considering the base instincts he wants to embody in Hyde, Jekyll actualises the belief in the soul as a material component, since a moral notion (instinct, thoughts) can be turned into something physical, i.e. a body. In his own words,

I not only recognised my natural body for the mere aura and effulgence of certain of the powers that made up my spirit, but managed to compound a drug by which these powers should be dethroned from their supremacy, and a second form and countenance substituted, none the less natural to me because they were the expression, and bore the stamp, of lower elements in my soul. (Stevenson 76)

The conclusion to his experiment is the equation between mind and body and the ability to transfigure the soul into a physical body. Moreover, he seems to believe the body to be a perfect reflection of the soul since Hyde’s body is “the expression ... of lower elements in [his] soul” (see also his explanation as to why Hyde is younger and shorter than the doctor), in an interesting engagement with the theories of La Mettrie who wrote that “The soul follows the progress of the body, as it does the progress of education. [...] [T]he, diverse states of the soul are always correlative with those of the body. [...] The soul, then, depends essentially upon the organs of the body, with which it is formed, grows, decreases” (La Mettrie 7-8). While the latter expressed his belief in the influence of the body over the soul, Stevenson turns the argument upside down and presents a body that is the reflection of the moral status and values of the

individual, in keeping with 19<sup>th</sup> century theories of atavism. It would thus seem that materialism, as a philosophy, progressed throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century to become the dominant narrative and take 18<sup>th</sup> century intuitions to their furthest consequences.

This equation between body and soul proves deeply upsetting for the doctor. As Jekyll became weaker, he

thought of Hyde, for all his energy of life, as of something not only hellish but inorganic. This was the shocking thing; that the slime of the pit seemed to utter cries and voices; that the amorphous dust gesticulated and sinned; that what was dead, and had no shape, should usurp the offices of life. And this again, that that insurgent horror was knit to him closer than a wife, closer than an eye; lay caged in his flesh, where he heard it mutter and felt it struggle to be born; and at every hour of weakness, and in the confidence of slumber, prevailed against him and deposed him out of life. (Stevenson 93-94)

Once more, the equation between body and soul are reaffirmed as the boundaries of what defines a human being become blurred. While the soul is embodied and becomes matter, the inorganic becomes animate, and the dead becomes alive, “usurping” the place of its opposite and overstepping the boundaries of what should normally be possible. As the belief in a spiritual soul is denied by the terms laid out by materialist science and chemistry, and which all hold negative connotations (“slime, pit, dead”), the human subject is entrapped within the realm of matter and incapable of transcendence.

Moreover, man seems thoroughly unable to escape this physical part of himself, that Jekyll describes as “knit to him” and “caged in his flesh”, insisting on the gross materiality of his instincts. The contagion of the moral sense by the physical is exemplified in the seemingly innocuous use of the expression “the grasp of conscience” in the following passage: “the situation was apart from ordinary laws, and insidiously relaxed the grasp of conscience” (Stevenson 81). In the context of a novel in which the protagonist’s bad conscience is literally embodied and described as a juggernaut (Stevenson 6) with a tendency to trample and physically harm other people, the metaphor carries a sinister double meaning. As such, the physical manifestation of bad conscience becomes embodied and, through its violent actions, seeks to imprint his mark on the body of others.

Many 19<sup>th</sup> century writers were vocal about their fear of the alienation enabled by a scientific

discourse which reduced man to the rank of a machine. While tenants of positivism such as Comte<sup>237</sup> and Mill<sup>238</sup> welcomed the change in methods that encouraged social sciences to walk in the footsteps of the natural sciences, others expressed fear at the dehumanising effects such an approach could have on human beings. Indeed,

positivism, when it is radical, renounces the transcendental meaning of truth and reduces logical values to features of biological behaviour. The rejection of the possibility of synthetic judgments a priori – the fundamental act constituting positivism as a doctrine – can be identified with the reduction of all knowledge to biological responses<sup>239</sup>

As such, the knowledge of the inner workings of the human psyche no longer differs from that of the working of less complex forms of life; and Man is made an object of study for positivist science. Moreover, this approach leads to a rejection of psychology, and the belief the origin of the mind is biological, as already hinted at in the works of La Mettrie. Thus,

the positive theory of the affective and intellectual functions is settled, irreversibly to be this: it consists in the experimental and rational study of the phenomena of interior sensibility proper to the cerebral ganglions, apart from all external apparatus. These phenomena are the most complex and the most special of all belonging to physiology<sup>240</sup>

Feelings and emotions are reduced to the rank of epiphenomena and emanations of biological functions, while human intelligence becomes a mechanical process.

The result of scientific innovations and discoveries coupled with the negative perception associated with a dehumanising 18<sup>th</sup> century literature pave the way for a 19<sup>th</sup> century breakdown of values, heralding the end of “the reigning [cosmology] until about the mid-nineteenth century [which pictured] a finite universe in time and space; a divine temple, God-given, God-expressing, God-penetrated, knowable... [as completely] as the nature of things

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<sup>237</sup> “by positive philosophy, I understand the study of the social as well as all other phenomena [according to] a uniform manner of reasoning that is applicable to all other subject matters that the human spirit can occupy itself with”. Comte, Auguste. *The Positive Philosophy*. Calvin Blanchard, 1855, p.30.

<sup>238</sup> “the backward state of the Moral Sciences can only be remedied by applying to them the methods of Physical Science, duly extended and generalized”. Mill, John Stuart. *A System of Logic Ratiocinative and Inductive: Being a Connected View of the Principles of Evidence and the Methods of Scientific Investigation*, in *Collected Works*. Toronto University Press, 1963, 8, p.833.

<sup>239</sup> Kolakowski, Leszek. *The Alienation of Reason : a History of Positivist Thought*. Doubleday, 1968, p.214.

<sup>240</sup> Comte, Auguste. *The Positive Philosophy*, pp.381-82.

admits in this mortal life.”<sup>241</sup>. While it was comforting as it offered the prospect of understanding and mastering a finite universe in which man was assured of his prominence,

this representation was gradually supplanted by another, particularly in the last half of the nineteenth century. The universe became unbounded, “restless”. The clear lines of the earlier [cosmic structures] have been replaced by undelineated, fuzzy, smears... And now a significant number of our most thoughtful scholars... seem to fear that a third mandala is rising to take precedence over both of these – the labyrinth with the empty centre, where the investigator meets only his own shadow... It is therefore not surprising that [we] find little comfort in the beauty of scientific advances (Holton 36)

Far from being a reactionary movement keen on denouncing scientific and philosophical innovations, Gothic literature seems to have endorsed and integrated the cultural fears permeating the period, most notably that of the reduction of man to the state of machine. Yet, such fears only grew stronger after the 1859 publication of Darwin’s *On the Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection, or the Preservation of Favoured Races in the Struggle for Life*.

b) “And much may be done to change the nature of man himself”: the descent of Man

And at the sixth fire-hole, I did see that which I did think to be a great man, that did sit to the fire, with monstrous knees drawn upward unto his chin. And the nose was great and bent downward; and the eyes very large, and did shine with the light from the fire-hole, and moved, watching, always this way and that, so that the white parts did show, now this side and now that. But it was not properly a man.<sup>242</sup>

Hodgson, William Hope. ‘*The Nightland*’

As Man becomes an object of study, his superior position is challenged by a network of scientific theories that emphasise his belonging to the animal realm and the prevalence of

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<sup>241</sup> Holton, Gerard. *Thematic Origins of Scientific Thought: Kepler to Einstein*. Harvard University Press, 1973, pp.35-36.

<sup>242</sup> Hodgson, William Hope. ‘*The Nightland*’, in “*The House on the Borderland*” and *Other Novels*. Arkham House, 1946, p. 407.

heredity and determinism over free will. Darwinism prevails as the main proponent of this generalised cultural anxiety regarding the role of Man, since it classifies Man as one species amongst others and is apparently at odds with Creationism and the belief in a special, higher destiny for Man. Indeed, “the effect in Victorian England [...] was to demolish the model of human centrality in the universe, and replace it with one of human ephemerality, relativity, and potential "degradation" (Hurley 56). As man is reduced to the rank of the homo sapiens, the comfortable position of anthropocentrism is no longer tenable, and key systems of differentiation collapse:

The philosophical ramifications of Darwin's theories are so immense that they strike at the most fundamental oppositions at the heart of Western culture: the difference between human and animal, male and female, Nature and culture. He reverses a system of signification at least as old as the Greek polis with whose emergence the images of hybrid and intermediary forms (centaurs, Amazons, Cyclops) were banished to the realms of monstrosity and otherness. With the disappearance of the Author from Darwin's universe, these oppositions, which had been elevated virtually to the status of logical categories or necessary ways of thinking about the world, collapsed into a kind of Derridean freeplay.<sup>243</sup>

While 18<sup>th</sup> century philosophers had already contributed to the taking down of frontiers and demarcations between human beings and animals, especially Descartes and La Mettrie, Darwinism still provided more rational and scientific evidence to support those uncomfortable claims and grant them legitimacy and public recognition.

The essential statement of Darwinism has dreary implications: first of all, the individual becomes subordinated to the survival of the species as a whole, and “noble” feelings associated with civilisation appear to be foils masking the true instincts driving men, namely reproduction and competition. But other scientific discoveries also encouraged this relegation of Man amongst species, as geology discovered the actual age of the planet. As Sidney Alexander notes,

the infinity of time and the immensity of space; and a dominant conception of our earth as a whirling atom... revolving at incredible speed in an unimportant system of heavenly bodies. This discovery of the real position of man in the universe... has not failed, and cannot fail... to modify considerably ... our belief and practice... [The] chief and greatest tendency of all this set of facts and theories suggested by science... is towards the depreciation of the value

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<sup>243</sup> Norris, Margot. *Beasts of the Modern Imagination: Darwin, Nietzsche, Kafka, Ernst, and Lawrence*. John Hopkins University Press, 1985, p.37.

and importance of... the individual worker<sup>244</sup>

Human free will becomes dramatically reduced in this worldview, if not reduced to a mere illusion, all the more so as theories of degeneracy or physiognomy evoked earlier became more popular and contributed to the spreading of the idea that man was entirely the product of his heredity, turning man into a puppet in the hands of Nature and the species. Determinism derived from materialism became the dominant philosophical interpretation of the new scientific discoveries marking the period. It should also be added that the political impact of such theories greatly contributed to their popularity, since the negation of free will offers the perfect justification for the fallacy of social reform or education as tools for the betterment of working class individuals.

But since evolution is central to Darwinism, even deterministic theories cannot be used to argue for the preservation of the status quo. Indeed, rather than promoting a fixed vision of man as an object entirely determined for all eternity, Darwinism raises the question of the necessity of the equation between evolution and progress. Darwin himself was very optimistic regarding the future of mankind and held that

to believe that man was aboriginally civilised and then suffered into degradation [into the primitive tribes we find] in so many regions, is to take a pitifully low view of human nature. It is apparently a truer and more cheerful view that progress has been much more general than retrogression; that man has risen by slow and interrupted steps, from a lowly condition into the highest standard as yet attained by him in knowledge, morals, and religion<sup>245</sup>

But a darker branch of medicine and literature implied that evolution might actually be synonymous with degeneration. In this regard, the 1895 publication of Max Nordau's *Degeneration* marks a critical point in the intellectual and philosophical thought of the fin de siècle. As Stevenson notes in his preface to *Ollala*, "Man has risen; if he has sprung from the brutes, he can descend again to the same level"<sup>246</sup>.

While theories of degeneration proper are not the main theme that interests Wells, he still engages in the debate regarding the mutability of the species through his *The Time Machine*.

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<sup>244</sup> Sidney, Alexander. 'Pessimism and Progress' in *Contemporary Review* 63 (1893): p.78.

<sup>245</sup> Darwin, Charles. *The Descent of Man and Selection in Relation to Sex*. John Murray, 1885, p.145.

<sup>246</sup> Stevenson, Robert Louis. 'Ollala', in *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde and Other Tales of Terror*. Penguin Classics, 2002, p.127.

The novel jumps ahead eight hundred thousand years to imagine what a particularly remorseless process of "downward modification" of the human species might yield. The protagonist, "the Time Traveller," invents a machine that carries him into the future, where he finds humanity divided into two distinct species, having evolved from different social classes. The Eloi are lovely but degenerate beings of atrophied mental powers, who perform no useful labour and live only for pleasure. The Morlocks are abominations, half-human and half-ape, living deep underground in industrial communities and maintaining the Eloi as their food source. The novel emphasizes the fluctuability of species, prone to variation and divergence. The human form as we currently know it, and thus conceive as a "fixed" form, is only a temporary one. Moreover, the Eloi, like Nordau's modern civilized European, have been betrayed by progress itself, since technological and economic progress secured humanity against hunger, disease, and war, making qualities such as energy, intellect and will redundant. "The too-perfect security of the Upper-worlders had led them to a slow movement of degeneration, to a general dwindling in size, strength, and intelligence"<sup>247</sup>.

This observation leads Wells to question what it is that makes man truly man, and whether the answer lies in a disembodied essence or in external circumstances. As the Time Traveller notes, "We are kept keen on the grindstone of pain and necessity," in a struggle of the survival of the fittest; and Utopia is a "too perfect triumph of man" (Wells 40). "What, unless biological science is a mass of errors, is the cause of human intelligence and vigour?" he asks. "Hardship and freedom: conditions under which the active, strong, and subtle survive and the weaker go to the wall" (Wells 39).

Therefore, Wells fits well within a period which emphasizes the mutability of species, prone to variation and divergence. While an optimistic vision of Darwinism, reconciled with the belief in the continuous progress of the human race, initially prevailed, Hurley argues that

figures like Huxley and Wells challenged this glossing of Darwinism, arguing that humanity had come into existence through a random combination of natural processes, and that Nature was ethically neutral and under no compulsion to privilege the human species. The human race could not assure itself of its own stability and continuity, for like any other species it could regress into "lower" forms as well as evolve into "higher" ones, or simply disappear from the face of the earth. (Hurley 57)

Wells saw the belief in human ascendancy as facile and illusory, and sought to debunk the

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<sup>247</sup> Wells, Herbert George. *The Time Machine*. Penguin Classics, 2005, p.62.

evolutionary mythos:

Using their technical phrases and misquoting their authorities in an invincibly optimistic spirit, the educated public has . . . decided that in the past the great scroll of nature has been steadily unfolding to reveal a constantly richer harmony of forms and successively higher grades of being . . . This belief, as effective, progressive, and pleasing as transformation scenes at a pantomime, receives neither in the geological record nor in the studies of the phylogenetic embryologist any entirely satisfactory confirmation.<sup>248</sup>

His sobering take on Darwinism holds several implications. First, the individual is devalued as he is made to matter only in relation to the species: "the business of the animal seems to be, not to live its own life, but to reproduce its own kind"<sup>249</sup> and "Mortal man and the immortal protozoa have the same barren immortality; the individuals perish, living on only in their descendants, creatures of their body, separated pieces of their undying protoplasm; the type alone persists"<sup>250</sup>. However, even through reproduction, Man has no certainty of being able to access a certain level of permanence, since, homo sapiens simply being one species amongst others, it may very well go extinct - a possibility discussed in the article "On Extinction" (Chamber's Journal, 1893).

In his aptly-named article "Human Evolution, an Artificial Process", Wells argues that man cannot have evolved much because he does not reproduce quickly enough, and can hardly have "undergone anything but an infinitesimal alteration in [its] intrinsic nature since the age of unpolished stone"<sup>251</sup>. Thus, the primitive passions of sex, hunting, and killing are as strong in the civilised man as in the savage:

In the artificial man, we have all that makes the comforts and securities of civilisation a possibility . . . [W]hat we call morality becomes the padding of suggested emotional habits necessary to keep the round Palaeolithic savage in the square hole of the civilised state. And Sin is the conflict of the two factors - as I have tried to convey in my *Island of Dr. Moreau*.

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<sup>248</sup> Wells, Herbert George. "Zoological Retrogression" in *Early Writings in Science and Science Fiction*. University of California Press, 1975, p.158.

<sup>249</sup> Wells, Herbert George. "Duration" in *Early Writings in Science and Science Fiction*. University of California Press, 1975, p. 133.

<sup>250</sup> Wells, Herbert George. "Death" in *Early Writings in Science and Science Fiction*. University of California Press, 1975, p.139.

<sup>251</sup> Wells, Herbert George. "Human Evolution, an Artificial Process" in *Early Writings in Science and Science Fiction*. University of California Press, 1975, p. 214..



(Wells 217).

Social reform and education appear as fallacies and attempts at concealing the reality of the primitive nature of man. Because of a very factual matter, i.e. the limited capacities for reproduction of the human species, especially in a context of strict monogamy, the future of the species can only remain uncertain, as it can only slowly evolve under the external pressures of the environment: "The presumption is that before [humanity] lies a long future of profound modification, but whether that will be, according to present ideals, upward or downward, no one can forecast" (Wells 168).

It is however tempting to complete his thought by referring to other theoreticians of decay and decadence, such as Krafft-Ebing, to add that "the material and moral ruin of the community is readily brought about by debauchery, adultery, and luxury, [which]... can always be traced to psychopathological or neuropathological conditions of the nations involved"<sup>252</sup>. His allusion to "nations" is characteristic of a global anxiety regarding social movements and the possible disruption of established hierarchies. For instance, Marx explains that the notion of dialectics i.e. the glorification and delighting in a progressive, transformative process became threatening

in its rational form, it is a scandal and an abomination to the bourgeoisie and its doctrinaire spokesmen, because it includes in its positive understanding of what exists a simultaneous recognition of its negation, its inevitable destruction; because it regards every historically developed form as being in a fluid state, in motion, and therefore grasps its transient aspect as well; and because it does not let itself be impressed by anything, being in its very essence critical and revolutionary."<sup>253</sup>

Far from only applying to the human species, those theories therefore apply to the whole of the human enterprise, including political organisations that could be hoped to prosper long after the death of individual human beings:

The telos of the narrative in the first case was the human form; in the second, European culture. Degeneration theory, however, not only reversed the narrative of progress, proposing a negative telos of abhumanness and cultural disarray. It also accelerated the pace of the narrative, emphasising the mutability and flux of human bodies and societies (Hurley 65)

As discussed previously, those theories are based on the belief on the mutual influence of man

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<sup>252</sup> Krafft-Ebing, Richard von. *Psychopathia Sexualis: A Medico-Forensic Study*. G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1965, pp.34-35.

<sup>253</sup> Marx, Karl. *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*. Penguin Books, 1982, p.103.

and society, since the two cannot be separated. Any change affecting the one must necessarily affect the other, and as Hurley notes,

scientists pointed toward the possibility, even inevitability, of changes within the physical or social environment that would irrevocably reshape the human form and human culture. [...] Degenerationism is a highly narrative discourse, concerned, as Daniel Pick writes, with "the dynamic patterns which underpinned a chain of changing pathologies across generations."<sup>254</sup> (Hurley 65)

It would appear that degeneration theory was a discourse invented to rhetorically contain the cultural anxieties of the period and grant them legitimacy through a pseudo-scientific discourse. However, it would be inaccurate to depict the whole period as solely obsessed with the certainty of regression and degeneracy, and not to take into account the development of contrary discourses, grounded in philosophy and sometimes science, putting forward a faint hope for the redemption of mankind.

Indeed, if human evolution equates regression in a process that cannot be turned around, perhaps the hope for humanity lies in the creation of a new, superior race of men, an idea that has become known as post humanism. Now, it is necessary to keep in mind that a fantasy of a "more than human" existence has always been a staple in literature and the arts. As Katherine Hayles notes, "we have always been posthuman", and this tension between the recognition of the limitations inherent to human existence and the desire to soar above them has always been part of the human condition<sup>255</sup>. But the concept is granted more philosophical weight as the development of technology makes innovation more plausible, and motor-power flying engines reactivate the old Greek fantasy of wings stuck together with wax.

Andrew Mousley gives several definitions of the term "posthuman" in an attempt at bettering characterise the concept and its various implications:

Apocalyptically, the term suggests the demise of the human species due to such real or imagined dangers as environmental catastrophe, global warfare or diminishing resources. Less drastically [...] the posthuman signifies the passing of the human as we know it, or think we know it. There are a number of contributors to the kind of posthuman condition in

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<sup>254</sup> Pick, Daniel. *Faces of Degeneration: A European Disorder, c.1848-c.1918*. Cambridge University Press, 1993, p.49.

<sup>255</sup> Hayles, Katherine. *How We Became Posthuman*. University of Chicago Press, 1999, p. 291.

which we might one day find ourselves [...]The first is that increasingly sophisticated machines may render human beings and whatever special characteristics they (think they) possess superfluous [...]. A second scenario is that instead of being left behind by (new) technologies, humans or a privileged few of them will be enhanced by them (as they have been by past technologies), living longer, improved lives liberated from the limitations of being 'merely' human. In some of its more wildly egocentric manifestations, 'posthuman' here spells a desire for 'superhuman' existence. A third, related contributor to a posthuman condition is the morphing of the human into its often-presumed 'others': the machine, the animal, the digital, the automated. Such morphing may occur either through the importation into the human body of cybernetic implants, animal tissue and genetic modifications, or through increased exportation of mechanized processes into the human world. Such multiple, two-way hybridizations may make it difficult to distinguish the natural from the artificial, or the simulation of the human by a machine.<sup>256</sup>

This lengthy quotation opens several keys for interpretation. First of all, the obvious link between global, traumatising changes in the environment and the desire for a "more than human" identity as a response to growing cultural anxiety regarding the status of man confronted to those changes is an accurate description of the 19<sup>th</sup> century context that gave rise to the scientific Gothic novels we have studied so far. Moreover, the constant uncertainty regarding the "essence" of the nature of man ("the human as we know it, or think we know it") justifies scientific and imaginary elaborations as to what the future of the human race might look like if it is a factual truth that the species is constantly evolving. The temptation that naturally follows is that of regaining agency instead of being submitted to the necessity for change, through scientific innovation as a ways of deciding on the future shape of humanity. The desire to modify the species thus surges from the anxiety produced by the recognition of human frailty and lack of control over the process of mutation and evolution threatening to destroy the human identity.

As for the several definitions of the posthuman Mousley offers, it is easy to see how they strike home with 19<sup>th</sup> century Englishmen. The first definition is a direct answer to the increase of mechanisation, making man labour redundant in the countryside but also increasing the pressure on factory workers to compete against machines that were becoming more efficient and proving

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<sup>256</sup> Mousley, Andrew. "The Posthuman" In *The Cambridge Companion to Frankenstein*. Cambridge University Press, 2016, pp.158-72, p.158.

more economical to factory owners. The early 19<sup>th</sup> century movement of the Luddites, those textile workers and weavers who destroyed weaving machinery as a form of protest against lower wages and the fear that time devoted to their apprenticeship would be made useless as machines replaced them<sup>257</sup>, is emblematic of that fear of mechanisation stomping human lives. Since the movement lasted from 1811 to 1816, debates concerning industrialisation were in the forefront of intellectual thoughts for a significant period of time, seeing the involvement of major romantic figures such as Lord Byron himself<sup>258</sup>. While Percy Bysshe Shelley fully embraced their cause, going as far as to set up a fund for Luddite orphans<sup>259</sup>, Mary Shelley did not publicly take sides. However, some scholars are argued that given her critic of power relations and her eagerness to demonstrate that monsters are the by-products of a society that alienates and humiliates them, her novel could be read as an echo to the Luddite uprisings. Edith Gardner is notable for her engagement with class and power relations in *Frankenstein*, which she argues represents the struggle between the upper-classes and the British government and the working-class men they try to exploit. She highlights the trauma of “skilled craftsmen in the textile industries [who] were being displaced by steam- and water-powered machines, as well as by cheap, unskilled labor and the production of second-rate goods.”<sup>260</sup>. While the fear of replacement by unskilled labour is a recurring feature of the history of economic development, the expression of the fear of being replaced by machines that might be more efficient than human beings is typical of 19<sup>th</sup> century labour anxiety.

The second definition of the “posthuman”, centred on the hope for a “superhuman existence” and the abolition of limitations, is even more fruitful for debate over both *Frankenstein* and *The Strange Case*; while the third definition brings us back to issues of hybridisation and cross-breeding developed at length in *The Island of Doctor Moreau*.

The question of the posthuman in *Frankenstein* is directly linked to Frankenstein’s desire for immortality and for the leadership of a new species, as explained earlier in this work. “Frankenstein himself is a prime example of a human whose humanity paradoxically consists

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<sup>257</sup> Conniff, Richard. ‘What the Luddites Really Fought Against’ in *Smithsonian Magazine*, March 2011.

<sup>258</sup> Lord Byron, ‘Debate on the 1812 Framework Bill’, Hansard.

<sup>259</sup> Thomas, Malcolm I. and Peter Holt. *Threats of Revolution in Britain 1789- 1848*. Macmillan, 1977, p.13.

<sup>260</sup> Gardner, Edith. ‘Revolutionary Readings: Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* and the Luddite Uprisings’ in *Iowa Journal of Cultural Studies* 13 (1991), pp.70-91, p.73.

in the simultaneous recognition and denial of human limits.” (Mousley 163), as he exemplifies the posthuman in the human, i.e. the recognition of the potential surpassing of limits and will to better the whole species. The most obvious limitation he is keen on surpassing in the ineluctability of death: “I thought... I might in process of time ...renew life where death had apparently devoted the body to corruption” (p. 36). Interestingly enough, his desire to become impervious to death is deeply rooted in an all too human trauma linked to the death of his mother. The acute conscience of the limitations of his life as a human being are thus the main motivation between his scientific enquiries.

However, several other episodes correspond to this injunction for all human beings to seek self-betterment, not only through science but through resilience in the face of adversity and manly courage. When Walton’s crew is considering mutiny and demands to sail back towards Europe, Frankenstein commands them to “Be men, or be more than men. Be steady to your purposes, and firm as a rock. This ice is not made of such stuff as your hearts might be; it is mutable, cannot withstand you, if you say that it shall not.” (Shelley 183).

But the theme of the posthuman in the novel also has to do with the monster himself, whose constitution makes him posthuman. First of all, the fact that he was made out of corpses literally makes him *post*-human: he is the result of the end of human beings, and the use of human corpses after they have passed and subsequently ceased to be human. Moreover, the epitome of the posthuman in the novel is the natural world, which appears ‘posthuman’ because its sublime vastness and grandeur are beyond human scale and comprehension. Through the contemplation of nature (“No one can feel more deeply than he does the beauties of nature. The starry sky, the sea and every sight afforded by these wonderful regions, seems still to have the power of elevating his soul from earth”, Shelley 16), Frankenstein craves elevation above the ‘merely human’. Yet, the novel explicitly links the monster to the natural world, making him taller and more sublime than human beings through the assimilation with nature and through it with the posthuman.

But he is also posthuman in that he surpasses the expectations set for human beings in various ways. Physically, he is much taller than them. Morally, his retelling of his earlier life makes him look more morally aware and benevolent than most human beings. His utopian dream pictures him as living in harmony with nature, as opposed to perpetuating a state of war and confrontation:

My food is not that of man; I do not destroy the lamb and the kid, to glut my appetite; acorns and berries afford me sufficient nourishment. My companion will be of the same nature as myself, and will be content with the same fare. We shall make our bed of dried leaves; the sun will shine on us as on man, and will ripen our food. The picture I present to you is peaceful and human, and you must feel that you could deny it only in the wantonness of power and cruelty. Pitiless as you have been towards me, I now see compassion in your eyes. (Shelley 176)

His appeal to the pity of his maker and to the extension of “basic” human compassion towards him contributes to setting him above his maker. Interestingly, as Mousley notes,

‘Inhuman’ might easily substitute here for ‘pitiless’, the creature’s word for his human creator. The world of Frankenstein is at this point a topsy-turvy one in which the human seems more monstrous than the monster, and the monster outstrips the human in its humanity. (Mousley 160).

Indeed, the picture he describes as “peaceful and human” is far from coinciding with the vision of the relation between man and nature that Shelley offers throughout the rest of the novel. Able to survive on scarce resources and unwilling to hurt other living creatures, including animals, the monster refuses the hierarchy between beings implicit in Frankenstein’s vision of the world. The monster’s speech is almost performative in that it sets higher standards for human compassion and harmony with nature, to which he and his mate would apparently conform while human beings still fall short of the mark. The vision of the posthuman here presented is one in which the human race has become able to surpass its inherent egotism and devote itself to a peaceful lifestyle.

However, the question then arises of the very possibility for human beings to ever reach this enlightened state. Indeed, as Mousley notes,

The unsettling of boundaries between human and inhuman, natural and unnatural, does not resolve itself into this simple inversion, however, for if the creature acts as a touchstone for human values (such as compassion, peaceful co-existence with nature, living within boundaries rather than in excess of them), then it is immediately necessary to say that it may be ‘all too human’ to betray these and all other human touchstones (Mousley 160)

Monstrosity appears to characterise the behaviour of human beings towards their fellow men as well as towards other living creatures; as is the case with Frankenstein’s decisions regarding the monster, but also concerning Justine (leaving her to die though she is innocent and then rationalising his decision by holding it to be self-evident that no one would have believed him).

Throughout the novels, men consistently fail to uphold the moral standards they should stand by, and *Frankenstein* is very much a story of betrayal (Safie's father) and selfishness. Between his ungodly research that isolate him from the company of other men and his self-absorbed quest, Frankenstein is constantly in danger of becoming inhuman. "Thus not only does the posthuman (meaning, in one of its senses, the desire to transform or transcend the human) inhabit the human, the inhuman also exists within the (post)human." (Mousley 164).

Humanity being defined by this tension between noble aspirations and a strong propension towards selfishness and egoism, the rise of the posthuman as the next step in human evolution seems unlikely. On the contrary, the only possibility left appears to be the replacement of mankind by a new, superior race, a threat clearly perceived by Frankenstein who eventually rejects the posthuman aesthetics and aims to more fully embrace an imperfect, human identity. The theme of renunciation to the posthuman is also visible in Walton's eventual decision to sail back towards Europe, thus ignoring Frankenstein's plea to "be men, or be more than men".

The recognition of the complexity of man as a moral creature is not specific to Frankenstein. While to be "human, in Frankenstein's words, 'complex' as well as 'wonderful', means that our better selves are always likely to be tarnished" (Mousley 164-65), the theme of moral stain also prevails over Stevenson's novella. Both works are concerned with the temptation of using science to achieve a posthuman status but simultaneously with the necessity to label it as monstrous and despicable. As Judith Butler explains, "the effort to identify the enemy as singular in form is a reverse-discourse that uncritically mimics the strategy of the oppressor instead of offering a different set of terms"<sup>261</sup>. The treatment both novels offer of the posthuman is expressed in terms of the monstrous, but Stevenson is more explicit about the moral danger inherent to the posthuman enterprise, as unlike Shelley's monster, his is unambiguously evil. Unlike *Frankenstein*, which takes into account the possibility of a positive acceptance of the posthuman, the late 19<sup>th</sup> century narrative seeks to reinforce the need for a norm and the acceptance of the ambiguous and irreconcilable nature of man, and the impossibility to ever surpass it.

Late 19<sup>th</sup> century thought about the nature of man and his future, was, as we have seen, chaotic

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<sup>261</sup> Butler, Judith. *Gender trouble: feminism and the subversion of identity*. Taylor & Francis, 2006, p.13.

and contradictory at best. While pessimism seemed to prevail, voices made themselves heard, heralding the dawn of a new era and the recreation of a new race of superior men. To borrow the words of Nietzsche,

All beings so far have created something beyond themselves; and do you want to be the ebb of this great flood and even go back to the beasts rather than overcome man? What is the ape to man? A laughingstock or a painful embarrassment. And man shall be just that for the overman: a laughingstock or painful embarrassment<sup>262</sup>.

Jekyll's drive is closely linked to the idea of genetic engineering and appears to posit as a given that the essence of man is difficult to pin down, and a historical construct rather than a natural given, since it is dependent on technological innovation and prone to change in correlation with the advancement of knowledge. The posthuman, Nicholas Gane explains, citing Donna Haraway, tests the "three key boundaries that have helped preserve the sanctity of 'the human' as a self-contained being: those between humans and animals, animal-humans (organisms) and machines, and the realms of the physical and nonphysical"<sup>263</sup>. In Stevenson's novella, the boundary that becomes shifted is that between the physical and the nonphysical. His idea of the posthuman is thus twofold: on the one hand, it is the dream of a conception of man in which chemistry and science can transcend the physical limitations of the body, since as we have seen earlier *The Strange Case* exemplifies the fear that moral character and the soul might be altered by chemical means. On the other hand, and perhaps more interestingly in a potentially eugenicist society, it entails the creation of a thoroughly good race of individuals, and potentially that of a race their evil counterparts, that could then be disposed of.

Once more, the theme of degeneracy and the necessary steps to take to avoid the collapse of human identity are the main motivations behind a reflection on the posthuman, understood as that which can escape atavism and the curse of heredity. The key to understanding Jekyll's viewpoint lies in his description of his scientific interest as leaning "wholly toward the mystic and the transcendental," (Stevenson 74), with the adjective "transcendental" being described by the English Oxford Dictionary as concerned with what extends "beyond or above the range of normal or physical human experience" and aims at "surpassing the ordinary; exceptional" but also in Kantian terms "not realisable in experience". As such, Jekyll's aim from the very

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<sup>262</sup> Nietzsche, Friedrich. *Thus Spake Zarathustra*. Wordsworth Classics, 1995, p.14.

<sup>263</sup> Gane, Nicholas. "Posthuman" in *Theory, Culture, and Society*, vol. 23 no. 3, 2006, pp. 431-434, p.431.



beginning of his research is also to surpass the normal limitations of human life; however, while Frankenstein seeks logical contradiction through the blurring of the boundaries between life and death, Jekyll seeks it through what is “not realisable in experience”. Once more, the very impossibility of his research inscribes it in a posthuman perspective in that he both strives to surpass human limitations but also to go beyond logical and biological rules of experience. His aim is however less self-aggrandising than Frankenstein’s, as he remains primarily concerned with his own interest. Indeed, while he concedes that “If each, I told myself, could but be housed in separate identities, life would be relieved of all that was unbearable” (Stevenson 75) and that through his work he could lift “the curse of mankind” (Stevenson 75), his primary motivation remains to be able to indulge in shameful pleasures; and any positive side effect that might bring mankind relief is quite marginal.

Jekyll’s definition of the posthuman is therefore centred around the resolution of the moral conflict, and the creation of a race of men free from moral struggle. In this regard, he may be compared to the works of other 19<sup>th</sup> century thinkers such as Nietzsche, who I have quoted earlier on the necessary rise of a new race of men freed from the guilt associated with Christianity and a bourgeois<sup>264</sup> morality, noting in one of the lapidary sentences he is well-known for, that “The bite of conscience, like the bite of a dog into a stone, is a stupidity”<sup>265</sup>. To Nietzsche, the concept of guilt and punishment, the whole “moral world order”, was invented against the emancipation of man from the priest, to force him to constantly look inwards at his own tortured conscience instead of learning and developing his abilities. The internalisation of guilt also made the priest class more powerful as it meant that Man, being in a constant state of moral agony and needing to be saved, would remain dependent on them for salvation and solace.

Nietzsche identifies the origin of guilt as the masochist, deviated counterpart of Man’s natural

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<sup>264</sup> Nietzsche is far from being the only author critical of the bourgeois lifestyle. H.G. Wells parodies bourgeois domesticity to link it to theories of degeneracy, reversing the assumption that civilisation equates progress. “He shocks his aunts. Presently, however, he realises the sober aspects of things. He becomes dull; he enters a profession; suckers appear on his head: and he studies. Finally, by virtue of these he settles down – he marries. All his wild ambitions and subtle aesthetic perceptions atrophy as needless in the presence of calm domesticity” (‘Zoological Retrogression’ in *Gentleman’s Magazine*, 271, 1891, pp. 246-53, p.250).

<sup>265</sup> Nietzsche, Friedrich. *On the Genealogy of Morals*. Penguin Classics, 2013, p.49.

desire for dominance over others ( “to make someone suffer is pleasure in its highest form, and to the degree that the injured party received an extraordinary counter-pleasure in exchange for the injury and distress caused by the injury: to make someone suffer, – a true feast”<sup>266</sup>). However, the development of society and culture was synonymous with the need for the domestication of this sadistic instinct, and guilt became the new way for men to express this power by making themselves suffer, through a process Nietzsche calls internalisation:

I look on bad conscience as a serious illness to which man was forced to succumb by the pressure of the most fundamental of all changes which he experienced, – that change whereby he finally found himself imprisoned within the confines of society and peace. [...] All instincts which are not discharged outwardly turn inwards – this is what I call the internalization of man: with it there now evolves in man what will later be called his ‘soul’. Those terrible bulwarks with which state organizations protected themselves against the old instincts of freedom [...] had the result that all those instincts of the wild, free, roving man were turned backwards, against man himself. Animosity, cruelty, the pleasure of pursuing, raiding, changing and destroying – all this was pitted against the person who had such instincts: that is the origin of ‘bad conscience’<sup>267</sup>.

The feeling of guilt is characterised by holding oneself “responsible not only for one's acquired obligations, but also for the flawed nature of one's very being”<sup>268</sup>, and as seen earlier Jekyll's personality is largely determined by the overwhelming feeling of guilt associated with the tension between his aspirations and natural inclinations, resulting in his “will to find himself guilty and condemned without hope of reprieve, his will to think of himself as punished, without the punishment ever being equivalent to the level of guilt”<sup>269</sup>. The acknowledgement of this intense suffering naturally leads Nietzsche to find a way for man to be reborn again, free from this guilt, in the form of the “overman”,

the sovereign individual, something which resembles only itself, which has broken loose again from the morality of custom [...] the human being who possesses his own independent and enduring will, who is entitled to make promises—and in him a proud consciousness, quivering in every muscle, of what has finally been achieved and given living embodiment in him: a real consciousness of power and freedom, a feeling of completion for human beings generally. (Nietzsche 52)

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<sup>266</sup> Ibid, p.42.

<sup>267</sup> Ibid, p.57.

<sup>268</sup> Conway, Daniel. *Nietzsche's "On the Genealogy of Morals"*. Continuum, 2008, p.13.

<sup>269</sup> Nietzsche, Friedrich. *On the Genealogy of Morals*. Penguin Classics, 2013, p. 64.

In Jekyll's case, there is a correlation between the overman and the posthuman, the individual freed from common moral law and able to indulge his every whim without having to face moral or societal disapprobation. Interestingly enough, even though he purports to seek moral redemption and uprightness above all, Jekyll initially shows no sign of disgust upon beholding Hyde, the man freed from moral constraint. On the contrary, he expressed his awe and amazement at the twisted sense of harmony that permeates from his evil counterpart:

when I looked upon that ugly idol in the glass, I was conscious of no repugnance, rather of a leap of welcome. This, too, was myself. It seemed natural and human. In my eyes it bore a livelier image of the spirit, it seemed more express and single, than the imperfect and divided countenance I had been hitherto accustomed to call mine. (Stevenson 78)

The use of the term "idol", defined by the Oxford English Dictionary as "an image or representation of a god used as an object of worship", is telling in that it turns Hyde into something above the normal condition of man, an object of worship comparable to Nietzsche's overman in that it was able to reconcile his natural instincts and morality through the creation of his own, individual moral code.

However, the pain that he experiences every time he drinks the potion is also symptomatic of the ambivalence associated to the posthuman, as both that which can elevate Man beyond his conditions and marks the end of humanity as we know it. The transition is therefore logically described as "the most racking pangs: a grinding in the bones, deadly nausea, and a horror of the spirit that cannot be exceeded at the hour of birth or death", and as "agonies" (Stevenson 76).

The reaction of men towards the posthuman, in both *Frankenstein* and *The Strange Case*, is a violent one. When listening to his creature's tale, Frankenstein cannot help but picture "the loathing and scorn which his protectors had manifested towards him" (Shelley 178), and notes the asymmetry of the relation between the monster and human beings: while he will "again seek their kindness", he will inevitably "meet with their detestation" (Shelley 176). This hatred, inspired by the monster's appearance, culminates in acts of violence and lynching:

On seeing me, he darted towards me, and tearing the girl from my arms, hastened towards the deeper parts of the wood. I followed speedily, I hardly knew why; but when the man saw me draw near, he aimed a gun, which he carried, at my body and fired (Shelley 169).

Jekyll notes that “Jekyll was now my refuge; let but Hyde peep out an instant, and the hands of all men would be raised to take and slay him” (Stevenson, 1886. p.61), not only because of his evil deeds, but because of his very essence. Indeed, suicide is the only salvation for Jekyll, and reads not only as a necessary punishment for the trespassing of the boundaries of human experience, but also as the natural conclusion of this desire: by definition, it is temporally impossible to live simultaneously as human and posthuman, and as such, the dual death / suicide that mars the end of the story is necessary to re-establish a temporal logic; it is indeed telling that after his first transformation Jekyll should wonder whether he has “lost [his] identity beyond redemption” (Stevenson 78) by having an early taste at the potential future state of Man. Both novels thus eventually acknowledge the fallacy of indulging in the posthuman dream and the dreadful consequences that it may have. The only solution left, then, is to accept the limitations of man, either by sailing back to Europe or destroying any scientific evidence that might allow future disciples to retake their endeavours.

On the contrary, Wells’s *The Island of Doctor Moreau* does not give us such an obvious moral conclusion, precisely because the temporal logic between the human and the posthuman is not as clear cut as in the other two novels. The work itself is more explicitly an anti-utopia relying on striking images of the posthuman. As Kagarlitski notes, “in a period of transition - and the world was experiencing precisely such a period - a situation frequently does not lend itself to description so much as to images which do not coincide with the real, images containing in themselves something greater than reality”<sup>270</sup>. This greater thing is the aggrandising of fears linked to hybridity and the post human as the definitive erasure of the boundaries between man and animal.

Moreau himself embodies the posthuman scientist more unequivocally than either Frankenstein or Jekyll. But he does not seek to distinguish himself from the rest of mankind through the sheer force of his drive for knowledge- his badge of honour lies in his ability to cast aside emotions and moral concepts (in a gesture reminiscent of Nietzsche’s overman’s) in order to accomplish his goals. The first step is to become able to surpass the physical limitations linked to the human body, or more precisely to the psychological interpretation of bodily phenomena. Moreau seems to endorse the view that organic life is an entirely physiological and

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<sup>270</sup> Kagarlitski, Julius. "Realism and Fantasy," in *SF: The Other Side of Realism*. Bowling Green, 1971, p.32.

factual phenomenon that can be deconstructed into a series of causal facts, whose interpretation depends on one's strength of character. Attempting to brush aside Prendick's argument about the puma's pain, Moreau decides to set an example by using his own body as a subject of experience:

As he spoke he drew a little penknife from his pocket, opened the smaller blade, and moved his chair so that I could see his thigh. Then, choosing the place deliberately, he drove the blade into his leg and withdrew it. 'No doubt,' he said, 'you have seen that before. It does not hurt a pin-prick. But what does it show? The capacity for pain is not needed in the muscle, and it is not placed there,— is but little needed in the skin, and only here and there over the thigh is a spot capable of feeling pain. Pain is simply our intrinsic medical adviser to warn us and stimulate us. (Wells 91)

By reducing pain to a medical, easily explainable phenomenon, Moreau is able to exceed the limits of what human beings would normally be willing to do. Unrestrained by the spirit of self-preservation that would prevent most individuals from willingly inflicting pain upon themselves for the sake of demonstration, Moreau hints at the possibility of the rise of a new type of men unconcerned by the moral ideas associated to their body and its integrity. Indeed, he dismisses the instinct of self preservation as a remnant from a less evolved, bestial type: "This store which men and women set on pleasure and pain, Prendick, is the mark of the beast upon them,— the mark of the beast from which they came! Pain, pain and pleasure, they are for us only so long as we wriggle in the dust" (Wells 92). As a figure of the posthuman, the Wellsian scientist has gone beyond the very notion of pain that links us to the animals; but also beyond moral dilemma:

I asked a question, devised some method of obtaining an answer, and got a fresh question. Was this possible or that possible? You cannot imagine what this means to an investigator, what an intellectual passion grows upon him! You cannot imagine the strange, colourless delight of these intellectual desires! The thing before you is no longer an animal, a fellow-creature, but a problem! Sympathetic pain,—all I know of it I remember as a thing I used to suffer from years ago. I wanted—it was the one thing I wanted—to find out the extreme limit of plasticity in a living shape.' 'But,' said I, 'the thing is an abomination—' 'To this day I have never troubled about the ethics of the matter,' he continued. 'The study of Nature makes a man at last as remorse-less as Nature (Wells 92-93)

As we have shown before, the assimilation to sublime Nature - sublime precisely because of its ruthlessness and lack of pity - is the ultimate step in the assimilation to the posthuman; which is a parallel that Moreau explicitly draws. Moreover, the discourse of evolution that permeates the novel emphasises the credibility of the rise of a new species of men like himself, with

### Moreau insisting that

with men, the more intelligent they become, the more intelligently they will see after their own welfare, and the less they will need the goad to keep them out of danger. I never yet heard of a useless thing that was not ground out of existence by evolution sooner or later. Did you? And pain gets needless. (Wells 92)

The performative figure of the scientist Moreau outlines in his description of his own experience is that of a man gone beyond good and evil and entirely devoted to the search for the “extreme limit of plasticity in a living shape”, which can only lead him to experiment on the human body. And indeed, while Moreau denies being interested in human experimentation, Prendick finds this denegation difficult to believe:

I asked him why he had taken the human form as a model. There seemed to me then, and there still seems to me now, a strange wickedness for that choice. He confessed that he had chosen that form by chance. ‘I might just as well have worked to form sheep into llamas and llamas into sheep. I suppose there is something in the human form that appeals to the artistic turn more powerfully than any animal shape can. But I’ve not confined myself to man-making. Once or twice—’ He was silent, for a minute perhaps. (Wells 90)

The very need for Prendick to resort to an epanorthosis (“and there still seems to me now”) indicates his unwillingness to believe Moreau’s claims – a trait in which he is no doubt mirrored by the reader. Is not the struggle to turn animals into human beings the expression of a desire to experiment on a new race of men, as smart as their homo sapiens counterparts but retaining some of the distinguishing abilities of animals, such as finer senses or a superior strength, since “the mental structure is even less determinate than the bodily.” (Wells 90)?

And even at the very end of the novel, when Prendick removes himself from the company of men and decides to dedicate himself to science, the posthuman aspiration is still present. In spite of his traumatising experience on the island, Prendick still devotes himself to the quest for the posthuman in the study of books and astronomy:

I spend many of the clear nights in the study of astronomy. There is—though I do not know how there is or why there is—a sense of infinite peace and protection in the glittering hosts of heaven. There it must be, I think, in the vast and eternal laws of matter, and not in the daily cares and sins and troubles of men, that whatever is more than animal within us must find its solace and its hope. I hope, or I could not live (Wells 169)

“Whatever is more than animal within us”, i.e. the rational part of man that contains the ability for self-amelioration and the surpassing of baser instincts, is a drive that still must be indulged

through the quest for knowledge and what extends beyond the petty realm of mundane, daily human affairs.

To conclude on the notion of the posthuman, it seems to be a central concern for a significant portion of 19<sup>th</sup> century literature because it coincides with cultural anxieties about the changing nature of man. In this regard, this strand of literature can be described as inherently posthuman, because

To be posthuman, on this view, means not to sit comfortably in one's skin, not to take for granted one's 'human-ness', not to assume that being human guarantees morality, progress or ontological stability. It means being aware instead that we are always coming 'after' the human: not just in the sense of pursuing a category of being that remains elusive, but also in the sense that, whatever identifiable remnants of humanity may survive its deconstruction, we are forever in danger of leaving those remnants behind. (Mousley 168).

#### IV. Conclusion: “Wherever an altar is found, there civilisation exists”<sup>271</sup>

There is yet another, and very fashionable, error which I am anxious to avoid like the very devil. I refer to the idea of ‘progress’. This gloomy beacon, invention of present-day philosophizing, licensed without guarantee of Nature or of God, this modern lantern throws a stream of darkness upon all the objects of knowledge; liberty melts away, discipline vanishes. Anyone who wants to see his way clear through history must first and foremost extinguish this treacherous beacon. [...] And if this disastrous folly lasts for long, the dwindling races of the earth will fall into the drivelling slumber of decrepitude upon the pillow of their destiny. Such an infatuation is the symptom of an already too visible decadence... I leave on one side the question of deciding whether, by continually refining humanity in proportion to the new enjoyments which it offers, indefinite progress would not be its most cruel and ingenious torture; whether, proceeding as it does by a stubborn negation of itself, it would not turn out to be a perpetually renewed form of suicide, and whether, shut up in the fiery circle of divine logic, it would not be like the scorpion which stings itself with its own terrible tail – progress, that eternal desideratum which is its own eternal despair!<sup>272</sup>

In this obvious, and quite scathing, parody of the rhetoric of the Enlightenment as a set of fallacious philosophical doctrines meant to lead to both political progress and the betterment of the species, Baudelaire mocks the intellectual ambitions of the politicians and scientists of his time. To industrial and technical progress, he opposes morals, notions of happiness and aesthetics, and proves that the dialectic of the Enlightenment causes the decrepitude of the latter while chasing the former. The idea of political and social progress is done away with and denounced as a rhetorical tool going against common sense, nature, and the law of God. The chase for progress might lead to the degradation of the human race, and the quest to “refine humanity” might end up stripping it of its essence, turning men into automata in constant need of improvement. Dissatisfaction with the current state of things and a desire for an ever-evolving species endanger the possibility of happiness, and appears as a “form of suicide” seeking to destroy human nature.

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<sup>271</sup> De Maistre, Joseph. *St Petersburg Dialogues; or, Conversations on the Temporal Government of Providence*. McGill - Queen's University Press, 1993, p.16.

<sup>272</sup> Baudelaire, Charles. ‘The Exposition Universelle, 1855’, in *The Mirror of Art : Critical Studies*. Doubleday Anchor, 1956, pp.192-208, pp.198-200.



In the same way, the writers we have studied all wrestle with the notion of progress, attempting to debunk it as a myth, and to show that the narrative associating progress and happiness is erroneous, fallacious, and harmful. Notably, Mary Shelley is the only one to provide the reader with an alternative vision of progress and development that might salvage what is left of beauty and affection in the world. As for Stevenson and Wells, their works are overshadowed by a thick sense of pessimism – it would appear that as the century went on, intellectual optimism took too many blows to recover, and the theories of degeneration came to prevail. On the intellectual background of their novels, we can however distinguish the temptation of eugenics as a possible answer to growing cultural anxiety – but unlike what Shelley offers, it can hardly be a satisfying solution.

The 19th century began with a strong wave of enthusiasm for the seemingly endless possibilities brought on by the development of science. Even writers who would later become strong advocates of conservatism and scepticism towards scientific progress were initially overwhelmed with hope. Wordsworth is one notable example, who wrote: “And from my pillow, looking forth by light / Of moon or favouring stars, I could behold / The Antechapel where the statue stood / Of Newton, with his prism and his silent face, / the marble index of a Mind for ever / Voyaging through strange seas of Thought, alone.”<sup>273</sup>. He would become one of the main voices opposing the Industrial Revolution which had been fostered by scientific progress but threatened to take over his beloved England, irremediably degrading it. As years went by, the general public and intellectuals became increasingly disillusioned with the prospect of reform promoted by science, which showed in popular and literary representations of the scientist.

From a cultural history perspective, our society is indebted to the Romantic imagination in terms of crafting archetypes associated to the image of the scientist. Indeed, Romantic and Gothic writers are to be credited for the invention of the image of the solitary scientific genius ready to sacrifice anything at the altar of science and for the description of scientific discoveries as phenomena akin to both poetic inspiration and religious revelation. We also owe them for the notion of an infinite, mysterious nature waiting to be figured out, and for the fear that man may use science to expand his agency and improve his body. But those Romantic tropes also

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<sup>273</sup> Wordsworth, William. ‘The Prelude’, in *Lyrical Ballads*. Penguin Pocket Poetry, 2017, book 3, lines 58-64.

convey darker implications with the fear of the prevailing of a vision of nature and the world as a purely mechanical phenomenon, the mathematical world of Newtonian physics. Moreover, they showed how the ideal of a pure, disinterested science independent of political ideology has been subverted and how science was turned into an instrumental discourse allowing for the preservation of the status quo. Scientific discourse went from being revolutionary and a conveyor of progress to a tool for conservatism and immobility. As such, the 19<sup>th</sup> century greatly contributed to the codification of images of science still prevalent today, as illustrated by the renewed interest in the posthuman, but also by the fears linked to the rise of “Frankenfoods”<sup>274</sup> and the possibilities afforded by cryogeny and other methods that could finally fulfil the hopes of escaping our mortal condition. The fact that such methods should only be accessible to a small elite is a reminder of the fact that “science [...] is not merely a matter of knowledge; it is crucially a matter of power”<sup>275</sup>

The three main features we have been able to identify as part of our study of scientific utopias are a loss of faith in narratives of human goodness and progress, the overwhelming fear of degeneration and failure looming over any human enterprise, and the definite belief in the eventual damnation of the species.

On top of the radical doubt cast upon the notion of the goodness of man in the wake of the Revolution, science contributed to the lurking fear that man might actually be devoid of any sense of agency, a mere puppet in the hands of higher entities, either spiritual, through a sense of irremediable declines, or biological, entailing the subjugation of the interest of the individual to those of the species. As North Whitehead notes, “each molecule blindly runs. The human body is a collection of molecules. Therefore, the human body blindly runs, and therefore there can be no individual responsibility for the actions of the body”<sup>276</sup>. The mind / body relation is redefined in terms of agency and prevailing of the biological instinct over either the Christian

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<sup>274</sup> “Frankenfoods” is best described as a pejorative term for genetically modified food. This derogatory term was coined from ‘Franken(stein)’ + ‘food’ on the 16<sup>th</sup> of June 1992 by Paul Lewis, Professor of English at Boston College, who wrote to *The New York Times*: “...Ever since Mary Shelley's baron rolled his improved human out of the lab, scientists have been bringing just such good things to life. If they want to sell us Frankenfood, perhaps it's time to gather the villagers, light some torches and head to the castle.”

<sup>275</sup> Punter, David. *The Gothic Condition: Terror, History and the Psyche*. University of Wales Press, 2016, p.74.

<sup>276</sup> North Whitehead, Alfred. *Science and the Modern World*. Fetter Lane, 1927, p.96.

soul or the rational mind.

What to make of this knowledge is a tricky question that requires a highly personal answer. While the authors studied here have opted for a model of partial disclosure of the truth that still makes room for blissful ignorance, other contemporary authors have argued for the radical necessity to confront knowledge, as harmful as it might be, or else die. A proponent of that second strand of thought, Nietzsche declared: “One question there is that seems to lie like lead upon our tongues, the question whether we can consciously remain in falsehood and, if we must, whether death would not be preferable”<sup>277</sup>.

Yet the question of the access to knowledge is far from being entirely metaphysical. Through the study of Stevenson and Wells, we have hoped to render visible the power inherent to the “*discursive field*” of psychopathology, which enforced and popularised a set of assumptions about the human subject while institutions formed a frame around the objects of the discourse: the criminal, the feeble-minded, the neurotic women. In a Foucauldian analysis, it appears that their power is exercised through language and disseminated through varied discourses and institutions, including the literary discourse. Degeneration is discursively activated to produce typologies of “inclusion” and “exclusion” and a human hierarchy, which contributes to the permanence of the state apparatus, of social organisation, and continues to fuel the fears exploited by Gothic writers. The world is made “morally legible, spelling out its ethical forces and imperatives in large and bold characters”. Science competes for the right to display “the grandiose moral terms of the drama” in which “gestures within the world constantly refer us to another, hyperbolic set of gestures where life and death are at stake”<sup>278</sup>. While Gothic fiction was not scientifically accurate, what mattered was that it should be legible as “‘scientistic’ rather than ‘scientific’: in other words, it is certainly unproven, and frequently implausible, but it is couched, dressed up, in the language of science.” (Punter 83). The core of novels “in classic science fiction is a fantasised solution to a problem” (Punter 83); systematically, it is bound to fail, or irremediably compromise a situation that might have been salvaged otherwise.

Therefore, it can be said that 19<sup>th</sup> century Gothic literature acted as a “witness to the discord

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<sup>277</sup> Nietzsche, Friedrich, cited in Vaihinger, Hans. *The Philosophy of “As If”: a System of the Theoretical, Practical and Religious Fictions of Mankind*. Kegan Paul, 1924, p.345.

<sup>278</sup> Brooks, Peter. *The Melodramatic Imagination*. Yale University Press, 1976, p.42, p.8.

between the aesthetic intuitions of mankind and the mechanism of science”<sup>279</sup>, and that “the literary movement at the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century ... refused to be confined within the materialistic concepts of the orthodox scientific theory”<sup>280</sup>. Instead, the writers we have studied purported to vilify scientific reductions of the world to mathematically explainable phenomena, in a reaction that was a “protest on behalf of the organic view of nature, and also a protest against the exclusion of value from the essence of matter of fact”<sup>281</sup>. By constantly engaging with the physicality and the body and the inescapable links between man and his environment (whether it be nature or an artificial cityscape); by arguing for the necessity of interpersonal relationship, those authors opposed an organic and ramified vision of society and man to the scientific model. As such, their aim was to replace the human at the centre of the scientific and intellectual enterprise, even if that meant dismissing more optimistic possibilities, and arguing that “our boasted progress is but a pitfall into which the race is falling”<sup>282</sup>.

As to the question of why Christianity and the progress narrative must be replaced with other meta narratives, albeit much darker in tone, it may be that the need for a new model of *episteme* able to make sense of the world around him lies at the very core of the nature of man. Whether religious, political, or scientific, grand narratives are bound to prevail as the token of an attempt at ordaining a world spiralling out of human control. Therefore, it is tempting to reinterpret Joseph de Maistre’s claim that “wherever there is an altar, there civilisation exist” as the expression of a deeply human need for answers regarding the world, and man himself.

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<sup>279</sup> North Whitehead, Alfred. *Science and the Modern World*. Fetter Lane, 1927, p.108.

<sup>280</sup> Ibid, p.109.

<sup>281</sup> Ibid, pp.117-8.

<sup>282</sup> Moore, George. *Confessions of a Young Man*. William Heinemann, 1933, p.54.



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