

The Suicide Question in Late-Victorian Gothic Fiction

Representations of suicide in their historical, cultural and social contexts

Thesis submitted for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
at the University of Leicester

by

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October 2015

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Abstract

This thesis explores late-nineteenth-century theories on suicide that emerged alongside a perceived ‘epidemic’ of suicides in Western societies, which brought the question of suicide into the public domain. Suicide was clearly a subject that fascinated and simultaneously horrified many Victorians and became a recurring theme in late-nineteenth-century Gothic fiction. However, it has received little critical attention, with the most extensive investigation into suicide in Victorian literature having been carried out by Barbara Gates in 1988. There has been no sustained investigation into the recurrent use of suicide in many late nineteenth-century Gothic novels, both the canonical and lesser-known stories. This thesis examines the extent to which some authors of late-Victorian Gothic fiction engaged with specific concerns, fears and suppositions relating to the perceived increase in suicide rates at the end of the century. It investigates how the authors of the ‘second wave’ of Gothic fiction incorporate ideas of suicide into their texts amid wider-reaching late-century fears and anxieties. Using primary sources including newspapers, various journals and periodicals, psychiatric and medical reports, reviews and case studies, the thesis examines the many speculative opinions about the era’s perceived ‘suicide epidemic’. It also explores the multiple ways in which authors of this Gothic fiction contextualised their own understanding of current debates, drawing into their works of fiction not just suicide theory but related themes such as inheritance, transgression, degeneration, social hypocrisies, egoism, passion, emotional and moral insanity. This gives a fascinating insight into the mutually informing relationship between the Gothic genre and medical, psychological and sociological theories and documentation pertaining to suicide in the era.

Acknowledgements

I would like to express my gratitude to my supervisor, Professor Gowan Dawson, who supported and advised me throughout the process of researching and writing this thesis. His extensive knowledge and ability to pick up on the smallest of errors have been invaluable. I would also like to extend this thanks to the members of my APG committee, Professor Gail Marshall and Dr Richa Dwor who provided me with extensive and helpful feedback, insight and suggestions. Staff at the College of Physicians and Surgeons in Philadelphia went above and beyond to assist me in locating an article which could not be located at the British Library. Thanks also to Professor Barbara Gates at the University of Delaware for pointing me in their direction. I would like to thank Professor Linda Dryden at Napier University for her invaluable comments.

I extend my thanks to my husband and to my parents who financed my PhD and who offered hours of support in terms of listening, reading, babysitting and dog-walking! Finally, I offer an acknowledgement to my late brother, whose untimely death in 2008 eventually inspired the research topic of this thesis. You are always in my thoughts Joe Benyon.

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Introduction

‘And no one knows whether death, which men in their fear apprehend to be the greatest evil, may not be the greatest good’ – Plato, *The Apology*, 399BC

Suicide, considered objectively, as a physical event ...is a natural event of the human dispensation, just a necessary incident from time to time’ – Henry Maudsley, *Suicide in Simple Melancholy*, 1892

Initially, the idea that suicide might have an altruistic value is shocking. However, as the British psychiatrist Henry Maudsley (1835-1918) suggests above, suicide is, in theory, no less ‘natural’ than any other form of death. Nevertheless, suicide is a concept with which humanity has historically struggled, as is discussed below. Death signifies the ultimate unknown and thus the idea of allegedly choosing to enter the foreign land of death remains largely incomprehensible to this day and humanity still cannot answer the fundamental question: at what point does ‘not to be’ offer greater solace than ‘to be’?

By the late nineteenth century, questions about the nature of suicide had been appropriated by sociologists like Henry Morselli (1852-1929), and physicians such as Maudsley, or Samuel Strahan (d. 1892). Suicide became less a religious sin or a crime, with medical men, as this thesis shows, largely asserting that committing suicide was not a choice. Indeed, to physicians and psychiatrists suicide was often not a case of ‘to be or not to be’, but was instead largely due to the perpetrator’s mental state, moral insanity¹ or their biologically-determined and often degenerate nature. The significant changes in attitude towards suicide theory in the late nineteenth century are explained in

¹ A nineteenth-century concept discussed in detail in chapter three of this thesis.

this thesis and representations of suicide in art and literature in the era reflect this altered perspective, giving these representations a literary value which, until now, has lacked critical attention. I limit my research to late-nineteenth-century Gothic fiction, the reasons for which I explain in detail further below. I assert that suicide became a Gothic trope, the use of which in this fluid genre tells us much about the era's defining changes in thought about an act which had previously been abhorred as a religious and moral sin. Corresponding with Maudsley's quote above, two themes are woven through my thesis, finding ground in each chapter. The first is the argument for the 'necessity' of suicide in the late-nineteenth-century Western world and the second is the notion of free-will: were individuals who committed suicide making a judgement about life or did they simply have no choice over whether they lived or died – like any other form of death?

The historical study of suicide has developed slowly since the late twentieth century. Ron Brown (2001) traces the changes in suicide thought throughout history and how artwork reflected these changes and John Weaver and David Wright (2008) edited the detailed *Histories of Suicide*. Prior to these recent texts, earlier pieces on the subject include Anthony Giddens' 1971 excerpts of suicide theory over time; S. E. Sprott's *The English Debate on Suicide from Donne to Hume* (1961); and A. Alvarez's *The Savage God: A Study of Suicide* (1971). In light of these texts, I do not attempt to give a detailed history about attitudes towards suicide, but merely an overview of the history of suicide to show how significant the changes in thought and attitude which took place in the nineteenth century are.

Incidences of self-killing have been recorded in the Western world since the Classical era, when self-killing was condoned as an act of martyrdom or an acceptable means of death if an individual was suffering (Brown 2001, 21-49). It only became a religious sin in 452AD, when the Christian Church pronounced suicide as an act inspired by the Devil (Giddens 1971, xi). Despite never being outwardly condemned in the Bible, by the fifth century suicide was firmly established as a sin: the taking of a life which had been bestowed by God. This was termed 'felo-de-se' in the fourteenth century, meaning 'felon of himself' (Gates 1988, 5-6). From 452AD until 1823, as a result of its

proscribed nature, perpetrators of suicide could not be buried in holy ground and instead were often buried at crossroads with a stake through their body to pin down their supposed restless spirit. Funerals were afforded no religious rights, and the cadaver of the suicide was often desecrated (Gates 1988, 6). Punishments for the act of suicide were extended to the victim's family. All of the victim's property would be forfeited to the Crown, a law which remained until 1870, although by then the historian W E H Lecky believed this act a 'monstrous injustice' (Lecky 1869, vol. 2, 62).

The abolition of this law in 1870 corresponds with the emergence of increasingly lenient and widely published medical, social and scientific views about suicide. The Burial Act of 1880 heralded a significant change in attitude towards suicide. The Act allowed religious funerals for those who had taken their own lives, and the prison sentence for those who attempted suicide was reduced to a maximum of two years. The religious and legal institutions had simultaneously relaxed their views on suicide and, at the same time, suicide theory gradually gained a medical focus, appropriated by psychiatrists and physicians but also, increasingly, the general public as large 'medical aspects of suicide were discussed in publications with a more general readership' (Marsh 2010, 116). Attitudes towards suicide began to focus on the nature of the individual as a whole. It is these altered outlooks which emerged during the late nineteenth century with which this thesis is concerned as this forms the context in which the Gothic novels of this research were written.

In the late nineteenth century, suicide was a phenomenon still feared by many, largely because it suggested a complete lack of hope or indeed will to live in this rapidly-changing society (Gates 1988, introduction). Conversely, suicide became a source of fascination too, commonly sensationalised by the media.² In the early to mid-Victorian era, authors such as Charles Dickens

² See Anderson 1987, 193, and Brown, 2001, both of whom discuss the often satirical portrayal of suicide in song, art and media.

incorporated suicide into their novels to argue for social reform.³ However, as I will show in chapters one and two, Social Darwinists questioned the need for social reform.⁴ The use of suicide to emphasise the hardships of poverty decreased as the century progressed and instead suicide became a literary plot device which engaged with ideas about degeneration, hopelessness, despair, insanity and passion. Suicide came to be seen as a warning about the consequences of excess, of self-indulgence and egoism, of vices and immorality, and is used as such in late-nineteenth-century Gothic fiction.⁵

Suicide in Fiction

Jill Matus proposes that Victorian fictions can act as ‘primary cultural documents’ (Matus 2009, 12). She suggests that fiction in mid to late-nineteenth-century Britain increasingly examined the inner lives of the characters and thus had the potential to communicate prevalent Victorian attitudes and the psychological theories relating to the mind and inner consciousness. Likewise, Barbara Gates maintains that fiction provides us with historical and factual information about the concept of suicide because authors engaged with current concerns in their novels (Gates 1988, xiv). This thesis discusses the idea that fiction acts as a key to understanding both human nature and the corresponding era’s prevalent culture. It argues that the use of suicide in fiction is influenced by the psychological theories and social beliefs of the period in which the text was written and therefore literary suicides and their motivations are representative of common thought processes and anxieties. A work of fiction would often absorb the predominant anxieties of its age and as such the late-nineteenth-century fictional suicides examined in this thesis can be used as a means of understanding attitudes towards suicide in the Victorian epoch.

³ See, for example, Dickens’ *Bleak House* (1853) and *The Chimes* (1844).

⁴ Darwinian evolutionary theory was combined with Herbert Spencer’s term ‘survival of the fittest’ to postulate that evolution might not lead to humanity’s progression, especially if natural selection was prevented by charity, medical intervention and social reform.

⁵ Suicide as a consequence of pathological behaviour is discussed in subsequent chapters of this thesis and late-century Gothic is defined and discussed later in this introductory chapter.

Despite this, however, there has been little sustained attention afforded to the deliberate use of suicide in works of fiction. Ron Brown states that the images of suicide used throughout history were consistently informed by existing and new philosophies of suicide in each era and that works of art changed to represent cultural shifts in attitude toward suicide (Brown 2001, 14). However, I do not agree with Brown's statement that studying visual representations of suicide across history is the only means of 'add[ing] anything to the scholarship' (Brown 2001, 14). I argue that actually, considering the frequent use of suicide by authors in fiction over the ages, the amount of existing scholarship on the subject is limited. Olive Anderson (1987) describes the nineteenth-century medicalisation of suicide theory which forms part my thesis, and her chapter on social attitudes toward suicide is informative. However, her focus on statistics means that attention is drawn away from research into suicide in fiction; consequently, her text lacks any detailed critical analyses of nineteenth-century fiction. John Stokes draws on late-nineteenth-century newspaper reports and letters in his chapter 'Tired of Life' from his text *In the Nineties* (1989). Stokes uses real-life occurrences to demonstrate the perceived suicide 'epidemic' which occurred in the *fin de siècle*, demonstrating how the prolific and widely-publicised levels of suicide of the time were indicative of a disillusioned and anxious society. Howard Kushner studies the prevalent concerns of the nineteenth-century that urbanisation would create social pathologies such as suicide. He suggests that the high levels of suicide in Britain were used as 'evidence' of a declining society and to warn of the dangers of an increasingly secular society by reformers and religious groups (Kushner 1993, 461-490). Critics such as Lisa Nicoletti (2007) and Margaret Higgonet (1985) limit the focus of their research to gender-specific representations of suicide, and neither scholar devotes any detailed research to late-nineteenth-century theories about gender and suicide.

Barbara Gates offers a broad insight into suicide and the Victorian era and as such her research is integral to my own. Despite being written over twenty years ago, *Victorian Suicides* is the only comprehensive critical analysis which goes beyond a statistical survey of poverty-stricken suicides in the mid-nineteenth century to undertake an extensive review of suicide in Victorian

literature. She focuses her research on changing attitudes towards suicide from 1823 to 1900, particularly in regards to how individual literary authors were informed by these developments. Each chapter centres on a different milieu, ranging from: female suicide; monstrous suicides; and sensationalist fiction. She explores how each topic represents the Victorians' attitudes towards suicide.⁶ Gates' work on the subject has shown how definitive the nineteenth century was in altering opinions on suicide and how influential the era was in ensuring that suicide was eventually decriminalised. Ultimately, however, her research leaves broad and multiple gaps when analysing key literary texts because she affords even canonical works of fiction merely a paragraph or two of analysis. By not centring her research on a specific timeline, or genre – instead researching Victorian attitudes in a wide variety of literature from 1823 to 1900 – she is unable to achieve the level of detailed consideration which I afford to the works discussed in this thesis. I allow a critical focus on literary texts for which the key suicides therein have been largely ignored by scholars until now.

I argue that suicide is not an act randomly picked by the author, but rather it is used in keeping with the author's depiction of social concerns as a whole. As in real life, suicide in fiction forces us to question 'why?' Is it a reasoned decision? Does the suicide convey a message about modern living, gender restrictions, or a warning? Is the suicide a pre-determined conclusion to a degenerate figure, subverting illusions of free-will and questioning the true meaning of 'voluntary death'? The act of suicide in fiction is a deliberately constructed plot device which is as essential to the author's central focus as other aspects of the novel. As Anne Stiles points out: 'authors of fiction ...were among the most articulate public figures to voice their concerns about new ...developments' (Stiles 2007, 6). I examine the interaction between medical texts, journalism and fiction, researching the ways in which the authors I am

⁶ My only criticism here would be that she does not differentiate between *which* Victorians but uses the term sweepingly.

studying would have been informed by theories surrounding such texts and, likewise, how the authors' own views are reflected in their writings, both fiction and non-fiction.⁷ Late-nineteenth-century Gothic is especially receptive to phenomena of mystery, excess, neurology, science, and degeneration, and, as I explain further below, this renders the genre appropriate in addressing the question of suicide. Yet scholarship into late-nineteenth century Gothic has left the employment of suicide in such narratives largely unaddressed.⁸

It is not just literary works that engage with scientific debate. I find that literary tropes also have an influence over scientific discourse. Edward Dowden argued in 'The Scientific Movement and Literature' (1877) that science and literature were connected and that both expressed the same attitudes. Scientific writings often relied upon literary traditions and motifs to support their argument. Maudsley, for example, wrote a case study in 1860 on an author of the Gothic, Edgar Allan Poe, in which Maudsley attempts to explain Poe's mental descent through scientific interpretations. In describing Poe's condition, Maudsley's text incorporates traditional Gothic elements such as the 'irrevocable ...sins of the father', the concept of 'doom' and the idea that Poe's mental incapacity was inherited from 'error and evil behaviour' from 'somewhere back in the far past' (Maudsley 1860, 337). In referencing earlier Gothic texts such as *Confessions of an Opium Eater*, published in 1847 (Maudsley 1860, 334-5), Maudsley demonstrates a knowledge of the Gothic which clearly infiltrates his scientific discourse. I will note throughout this thesis how traditional Gothic motifs, such as the curse of heredity or the effects of excess, influence medical and scientific works on evolution, degeneration theory and suicide theory itself. Nicole Rafter argues that the atavistic criminals described by Cesare Lombroso can all be seen as Gothic creations:

⁷ Theories included linking suicide with degeneration, Social Darwinism, biological determinism and eugenics, or the medical views regarding mental health and moral responsibility. These are all discussed throughout this thesis, predominantly in chapters one, two and three.

⁸ Detailed books about the late-Victorian Gothic include Botting (1996); Hurley (1996); Mighall (1999); Punter (1996); Smith (2007). None refer to suicides within the Gothic genre.

‘Gothic criminology was simultaneously a science and the creation of a full-blown, Romantic imagination’ (Rafter 2010, 278).⁹ Critics have long-agreed on the relationship between science and the Gothic (Hurley 1996; Botting 1996; Arata 1996) but Rafter shows that traditional Gothic tropes such as the grotesque, cruelty, blood-lust, decay and the monstrous did indeed shape scientific dialogue. The science of emerging late-nineteenth-century suicide theory also borrowed Gothic elements, the expression of which will be noted throughout this thesis. I therefore combine historical research of the era’s suicide theories with a reading of Gothic literature and indicate how the two inform each other, showing, as Rafter says, that ‘a science can be shaped by the artistic sensibilities and traditions from the times in which it develops’ (Rafter 2010, 282). Scientific discourse could therefore be written to capture the imagination of the public, deconstruct the familiar and instil the same sublime fear as the Gothic itself.

Gothic Fiction

I don’t intend to give an overview or definition of the Gothic – much scholarship has been undertaken on this subject.¹⁰ Instead, I show how Gothic conventions render this genre particularly suitable for undertaking an investigation into suicide theory. I demonstrated above why the use of suicide in fiction is an important factor in literary and historical analysis. There were, of course, late-nineteenth-century authors outside of the Gothic genre who chose to include suicide in their texts. Thomas Hardy, for example, incorporated suicide into novels such as the disillusioned *Jude the Obscure* (1895), and Grant Allen portrayed an overt female suicide in *The Woman who Did* (1895). I aim to focus solely on the Gothic because it is the conventions of the Gothic which allow an unparalleled access to late-nineteenth-century ideas about suicide. The Gothic genre is renowned for its fascinations with excess;

⁹ Lombroso was an Italian criminologist, discussed in the following chapter.

¹⁰ For example, Botting’s *Gothic* (1996) which traces the evolution of the Gothic from its origin through to the present century as well as Ellis’ *The History of Gothic Fiction* (2000) and Punter’s *The Literature of Terror* (1996).

death and decay; an engagement with current fears and taboos; the haunting of the past and of ancestral sin; and the arrest of reason and will in place of irrational and sinful behaviours and passions (Botting 1996). These themes are all staple motifs within the Gothic genre but, importantly, they are staple motifs within the late-nineteenth-century theories about suicide itself, as I demonstrate throughout this thesis. There is an undeniable coupling between the conventions of late-nineteenth-century Gothic and conventions of ideas about suicide in the same era. This connection is too important to ignore – and yet, conversely, it has largely gone ignored. The tendency of the Gothic to defamiliarise the familiar allows the fears about suicide and what it represented – a loss of hope, illusion or even free-will – to be addressed while displaced within the fantastical realm of the Gothic.

The first wave of Gothic fiction originated in 1764 with the publication of Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto*. Telling the tale of a villainous prince, a family secret, an isolated medieval castle, labyrinthine passageways and the presence of the supernatural, Walpole devised a genre which only increased in popularity as it developed throughout the 1790s. The Gothic genre gradually became more outrageous as it engaged with countless taboos. Matthew Lewis's *The Monk* (1796), for example, incorporated scenes of rape and murder and a visit from the Devil himself. Critics have connected the popularity of the Gothic in the 1790s with the far-reaching consequences of the French Revolution; it is argued that the melodrama of this genre served as a reactive response to the disorder caused by the Revolution, with the Gothic tyrant and his villainous ways eventually resolved and morality restored (Paulson 1981). The Gothic villains of this era, however, rarely commit suicide in relation to their late-nineteenth-century counterparts. Ambrosio the Monk, for example, states that 'suicide is the greatest of crimes ...you destroy your soul' (Lewis 1796, 65). Ironically, Ambrosio does indeed destroy his soul through his other heinous crimes but, despite being left to die for two days on a mountain-top and suffering the torture of having his eyes pecked out, he still does not end his own life. In the eighteenth century, suicide was still very much a religious sin; it is only in the latter part of the nineteenth century that theories about suicide became increasingly medicalised, and this, therefore, is a

significant difference between traditional Gothic and the late-nineteenth-century resurgence. I will show how psychiatric and scientific discourse are influenced by early-Gothic nuances and images, but also indicate how theories developed and evolved as a result of the changing climate and social context, and are therefore able, in turn, to shape late-nineteenth Gothic fiction.

Critics now argue that the Gothic is a reflective genre, which re-emerges at points of instability and change. Christine Berthine states that ‘the Gothic brings issues of its day to the fore’ (Berthine 2010, 3), while according to Kelly Hurley: ‘The Gothic is rightly, if partially, understood as a cyclical genre that re-emerges in times of cultural stress in order to negotiate anxieties for its readership by working through them in displaced (sometimes supernaturalised) form’ (Hurley 2002, 194). The Gothic has fluidity which allowed it to flow successfully from its origin to the present while adapting itself to reflect the cultural climate in which it was written. In his introduction to *A Geography of Gothic Fiction* (1999) Robert Mighall suggests that the popular discourses, including race, gender or psychoanalysis, which have been used in contemporary scholarship to examine the Gothic ignore the importance of the historical context. He claims that when examining Gothic texts it is essential to have an understanding of the cultural and social concerns of the time. Mighall argues that the Gothic is, by definition, about history and thus re-emerges as a ‘new breed’ of Gothic fiction initiated by changes in ‘historical context’ such as theories of evolution, degeneration and – I argue – suicide. This thesis looks at original sources to collate a complete picture of the varying emerging theories on suicide and the perceived epidemic in the late-nineteenth-century, and how authors of the Gothic engage with these changing and increasing concerns. My thesis will examine the psychology of suicide in the context of this period while studying the representation of emotional and psychological states alongside the consideration of the historical and cultural context.

The Gothic had a resurgence in the late nineteenth century. Culturally, it is perceived to be reflective of the countless changes occurring in the Victorian era. There has been a growth of interest in the scholarly field of the late-nineteenth century Gothic; certainly critics such as Stephen Arata (1996), Linda Dryden (2003), Robert Mighall (1999) and Kelly Hurley (1996) have

tried to portray the ways in which the conventions of the Gothic were modified by advances, anxieties and concerns during the period. In novels such as Robert Louis Stevenson's *Jekyll and Hyde* (1886), Oscar Wilde's *Dorian Gray* (1891), Marie Corelli's *The Sorrows of Satan* (1896) and Arthur Machen's *The Great God Pan* (1894), the standard characteristics of the Gothic are clearly present but are interwoven with adaptations to the typical 1790s form which reflect the era's transitions, developments and fears. Advancements in scientific thought and technology, changes to urban centres brought about by the Industrial Revolution, and diversifications of religious thought brought about by Charles Darwin's publications on evolution all evoked an atmosphere of instability and uncertainty as the century's end drew near. The motif of the ancestral curse of earlier Gothic was retained, but changes to views on inheritance meant that this hereditary curse in the texts of the late-nineteenth-century Gothic had implications for the future of humanity as a whole, tinged as it was with thoughts of biological determinism and atavism. Atavism became the central theme of this era's Gothic: the idea that humans were related to animals and the fear of a reversion to primitive nature and instinct with a loss of will, reason and morality gave way to the degeneration theory. Fears about human regression, the primitive double and physical, mental and moral decay, were accentuated by the perceived increase in pathological behaviours and concerns about increasing 'mass' groups such as the working-class or the New Women (see chapter five). Thus, degeneration, atavism, moral decline and the existence of 'the Other' buried beneath a respectable surface came to permeate late-nineteenth-century Gothic fiction. In his introduction to *Late Victorian Gothic Tales*, Roger Luckhurst makes the claim that 'the pseudo-science of degeneration' and all that it entails has been identified as 'the defining aspect of the late Victorian Gothic' (Luckhurst 2005, xxi). It is certainly a 'defining aspect' of suicide theory, which I discuss primarily in chapters one and two.

Death is another motif central to Gothic fiction, motivated by the Gothic's fascination with human nature, its psychology and human regression (Jalland 1996). Death was often used in the Gothic as a means of resolving the issues about the existence of evil; the evil was removed and morality and order

could therefore be restored. Thus, Gothic fiction – despite its outrageous and taboo content – would often conclude positively, with the villain suffering retribution and punishment. This outcome was retained in late-nineteenth-century Gothic fiction; the degenerate or sinful perpetrator would be killed. I look at the predominance of suicide as a means of restoring order and ensuring the sinner suffers retribution. Suicide was viewed by British psychiatrists such as Henry Maudsley and Samuel Strahan, as well as other European experts like the Italian Henry Morselli as a symptom of degeneration and, simultaneously, a means of eliminating the degenerate person or group of persons (see chapter one). Despite the amount of literature and research dedicated to understanding Victorian degeneration theory there has been little sustained research into the evident links between degeneration, suicide and the fear of the continued decline of society – which forms a significant theme in the era’s Gothic fiction. The views of Victorian psychiatrists about suicide therefore were significantly interwoven into the Gothic literature of the time. However, scholars have not attempted to explain the use of suicide as a means of removing the degenerate or emotional protagonist. Even Barbara Gates dedicates only a handful of pages to the ‘monstrous’ suicides of the Gothic, with *Jekyll and Hyde* receiving just six paragraphs, whereas the same novel appears in my thesis in four different chapters in differing contexts. Suicide evokes many questions in both reality and fiction, so this begs the question as to why has there been such little sustained effort to explore its use further? Gothic fiction, as critics suggest, reacts to ideas about, for example, degeneration, immorality, gender reversal, inheritance, social pathology and excessive emotion. Suicide is a phenomenon which is linked to all these concerns, rendering it an interesting phenomenon to research and underlining its deliberate use as a literary plot device.

As Julian Wolfreys points out, a typical feature of the Gothic genre is the haunting of the past, as ancestral sins and evil bloodlines contaminate the existence of present generations (Wolfreys 2002). This, as my thesis will show, is a central motif of late-nineteenth-century theories on suicide. Suicide was, after all, often seen as a biologically-determined condition stemming from the inheritance of degeneracy overall (Maudsley 1884; Strahan 1892; Morselli 1881). Suicidal tendency therefore becomes one of the ancestral degenerate

‘sins’ that haunts the Gothic protagonists and helps to determine their end. Dorian Gray, for example, references the sinful nature of his own ancestors while, in ‘Oke of Okehurst’ (1886), Mr Oke comes from a bloodline of murderers and adulterers. The theme of negative inheritance weaves its way through all of my chapters and therefore the relationship between suicide and heredity is an important one. The concept of a cursed inheritance is also linked with the emerging views about biological determinism (see chapters one and two) and fears about the existence of free-will, as Victorian experts like Maudsley questioned the reality of free-will if human nature was so biologically determined (1874a).¹¹

The Gothic is also renowned for its portrayal of unrestrained emotions and passions. Such a depiction flouted the middle and upper-class Victorian belief that desires and appetites for sinful temptations should be repressed, as should uncontrolled emotion (Kitson 2002, 167). *Jekyll and Hyde*, for example, demonstrates the dichotomy between the constrained Victorian gentleman and the need to gratify the potentially more base needs which exist beneath the respectable façade. To Elizabeth MacAndrew, the Gothic villain allegedly conveys the ‘nature of human frailty ...[and the] constant battle with themselves to repress these inner feelings’. She refers to this internal battle as ‘self-destructive’ (MacAndrew 1979, 81). The war between expectation and desire culminates in an internal break-down of mind and spirit. The Gothic fiction of the late-Victorian era demonstrates the overarching effects should this alleged Victorian hypocrisy be allowed to continue, with the likes of Jekyll/Hyde, Dorian Gray and Machen’s aristocratic sexual indulgers all committing suicide after surrendering to their inner passions. Similarly, the

¹¹ It is important to note here the contradictions in Maudsley’s work. In *Body and Will*, for example, Maudsley describes suicide as ‘free will’ (326) which is quite a contradiction to his usual stance. In doing so, he meant that sometimes suicide could be an assertion of self because it manages to override the will to live. However, in referring to the majority of suicides he acknowledged the pre-determined nature of the degeneration of mind which led to people committing suicide. Clearly, to Maudsley, some acts of suicide did not follow this pattern. Suicide is, after all, an individual act and therefore will not always have the same cause, hence the varied chapters in this thesis.

respective suicides of Edmund Orme and Oke of Okehurst demonstrate the consequences of succumbing to their own emotions. The Gothic use of emotions and passions, therefore, is knitted together with the theories surrounding suicide and the self-indulgent gratification of one's emotions. Gothic villains break-down, just as suicide theorists portrayed the break-down of those committing suicide, alongside the eradication of will and reason (Esquirol 1845; Maudsley 1884; Tuke 1885). The *Daily Chronicle* proclaimed in 1893 that '[Suicide] should be defined as when the balance of man's nature is not even' (Anderson 198, 251). The balance in human nature was integral to widespread suicide theories and to the restoration of order in the Gothic novel.

Andrew Smith (2007) claims that late-nineteenth-century Gothic adapted to social change by incorporating themes of psychology and internalisation of horror. Psychological readings of the texts feature heavily throughout my thesis, in trying to gauge an understanding of the psychological theories regarding suicide. The Gothic indeed was a genre which engaged in wider social concerns, pathologies and taboo subjects – such as suicide – and is a genre of excess, of which suicide was largely viewed to be a consequence. I chose to examine late-nineteenth-century Gothic not just because suicide features much less in the 'original' Romantic Gothic but also because this was a period when attitudes towards suicide were dramatically changing, and when concerns were increasing in the wake of evolutionary theory and new views on inheritance and determinism. The publication of Charles Darwin's *On the Origin of Species* in 1859 had opened doors to new ways of thinking in fields of sociology, biology and psychology. By the latter part of the century there was thus a growing assertion that humans were related to animals, and that their existence on this earth was the result of random events. The idea suggested by burgeoning scientific views that the human race was not placed on this earth for a specific reason would add to the disillusion enveloping Britain on her approach to the end of the century. The late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth century saw a resurgence of Calvinism, the religious doctrine postulated by John Calvin in the sixteenth century that all life was predestined according to the will of God, and that only He possessed knowledge of each individual destination (Wolffe 1997, 112). According to Jane Goodall, the

early Victorians were largely governed by the religious and ‘psychological tyrannies of predestination’ (Goodall 2008, 124). By mid-century onwards, ‘[science had] resolved human agency to the centre of the picture’ (Goodall 2008, 124). It is this ‘science’ with which my thesis engages. Although the late-nineteenth century was by no means secular, late-Victorian religious attitudes had begun to differ, with Calvinism being overridden by new scientific thought. As my thesis will show, some of this conflicting thought placed human agency and free-will at the centre, while some theorists still believed in determinism; however, this determinism was less to do with God’s will and more to do with the biology of hereditary determinism. As a result, I have made the decision not to examine the suicides in the Gothic fiction discussed in this thesis under the category of religion, deciding instead to look at how the theories about suicide had moved on from religious condemnation; this change in thought was incredibly significant. In the increasingly scientific environment of the late-nineteenth century, religious attitudes towards suicide began to relax, with religious funeral rites finally being afforded to suicide victims from 1882 (Barnard 1990, 168-9). Views about suicide became more sociological, psychological and medical, and it was these aspects which I wanted to explore in relation to the Gothic fiction of the era.

The main novels which receive my attention are Robert Louis Stevenson’s *The Strange Case of Jekyll and Hyde* (1886) and Oscar Wilde’s *A Picture of Dorian Gray* (1891). Both authors and texts address the aforementioned idea that those with a degenerate nature could not be redeemed, particularly as both are products of hereditary curse, and instead must face retribution in the form of suicide. I look at the characters of Jekyll/Hyde and Dorian as degenerates and therefore their suicides as a consequence and symptom of this degeneration. In the same vein, I explore Arthur Machen’s *The Great God Pan* (1894) and Marie Corelli’s *Wormwood* (1890), both of which show the irreversibility of degeneration. *Wormwood* also features the

female suicide of Pauline, who once she has killed herself is restored to her former pedestal of the adored Victorian feminine ideal.¹² Jekyll/Hyde and Dorian Gray also display tendencies toward ‘moral insanity’, a nineteenth-century term which, by the end of the century, had come to encompass those with murderous, tortuous and/or suicidal propensities (Tuke 1885; Pritchard 1835). Marie Corelli also published *The Sorrows of Satan* (1896) which incorporates two significant suicides, that of the upper-class gambler, Lynton, and Lady Sibyl Elton. I analyse Sibyl’s suicide note which places the blame for her breakdown of mind upon her biology (her mother) and upon society’s hypocrisy and expectation. Lynton’s death is also the consequence of an upper-class hypocritical indulgence in vices and the punishment for succumbing to this concealed and yet encouraged existence. *Dorian Gray* also includes the suicides of Dorian’s lover, Sibyl – whose death epitomises the aesthetic ideal – and Alan Campbell who dies as a result of his own shame and remorse, engendered by his own actions and weaknesses. I also look at lesser-known Gothic publications of the era, such as Frank Constable’s *The Curse of Reason* (1895), which explores the outcome of social disillusion and a break-down of hope; Henry James’s ‘Sir Edmund Orme’ (1891) and Vernon Lee’s ‘Oke of Okehurst’, which use the suggestion of the supernatural to indicate the psychology of their characters. The strength of emotion is underlined in both of these texts, and indeed demonstrates the consequences of indulging in such unrestrained and unmanly emotion.

Thesis

This thesis is organised thematically. I have isolated what I consider to be the most essential medical and social themes which have a bearing on Gothic fiction and, likewise, theories about suicide in the late nineteenth

¹² Which is explained and considered further in chapter five: Pauline represents the epitome of girlish beauty, purity and innocence until her dalliance, which casts her out to the streets of Paris. After her suicide, she is described once more in loving and delicate terms, and is buried to her family plot in the cemetery, restored to her family once she is redeemed through death.

century – Degeneration, Moral Insanity, Social Classes, Gender and Excessive Emotion. The chapters analyse the social, medical and cultural spheres in which the authors were working. The thesis avoids single readings of texts which would create a one-dimensional view on suicide. Instead, the comprehensive reading of all sources of suicide theory reveals that a variety of attitudes existed, hence the multiplicity of readings of some of the texts.

Chapter one approaches theories of suicide in the context of late-nineteenth-century degeneration theory, utilising in particular the arguments of Henry Morselli (1881) and Samuel Strahan (1892) in the framework of post-Darwinian biological theories of inheritance, social Darwinism and eugenics. Suicide was deemed, by these theorists, to be a natural process working according to Darwinian law, ensuring the decline of degenerate types. As Ian Marsh says, ‘towards the end of the century, suicide came to be read as a symptom of degeneracy – the outcome of a constitutional weakness’ (Marsh 2010, 116). Max Nordau, the author of the widely disseminated *Degeneration* (published in England in 1895), made this connection in writing of *fin-de-siecle* Europe: ‘every city possesses its club of suicides’ (Nordau 1895, 537). Suicide wove itself into ideas already pertaining to degeneration, including ideas surrounding impulses and pathological instincts.

Henry Morselli’s work on suicide features throughout my thesis. By his own admission he was influenced by the Reverend Thomas Malthus (1766-1834), who published his *Essay on the Principle of Population* in 1798, and Darwin. Morselli’s main focus of research is the idea that suicide was a form of natural selection and so a necessary means of eliminating the ‘unfit’: ‘*suicide is an effect of the struggle for existence and of human selection, which works according to the laws of evolution among civilised people*’ (Morselli, 1881: 353 – his emphasis).

Using specifically the late-Victorian Gothic texts of *Jekyll and Hyde* (1886), *Dorian Gray* (1891), *The Great God Pan* (1894) and *Wormwood* (1890), chapter two will look at Gothic fiction according, predominantly, to the ideas of Morselli, Maudsley and Strahan. The latter was a British alienist who wrote of the inherited and degenerate nature of the suicidal individual,

asserting that suicide was ‘merely one of the eliminative processes whereby nature rids herself of the unfit’ (Strahan 1892, 66). Prevalent medical representations of suicide relied on deterministic narratives that often presented self-murder as a result of a hereditary condition transmitted by degenerate parents. Maudsley was inclined to agree, relentlessly arguing: ‘no one can elude...the tyranny of his organisation...the sins of the father shall be visited upon the children unto the third and fourth generations’ (Maudsley 1874a, 22). For Maudsley, punishment or reform could not reverse degeneracy. What then could be done for those with a criminal nature? An article in the *Saturday Review* titled ‘Ticket-of-Leave Men’ stated: ‘It is clear that we have not yet found out what to do with our criminals ...our moral sewage is neither deodorised nor floated out to sea, but remains in the midst of us’ (Ticket-of-Leave Men 1862, 241).¹³ Degenerates were often seen as incurable blights and scourges upon, largely, middle-class society.

I demonstrate how Darwinian themes of evolutionary biology were linked to scientific writing on determinism and natural selection to form new ideas on suicide. If suicide was, as argued, a symptom of degeneration, that meant that a suicidal individual had a degenerate nature. Thus, as a mechanism of natural selection, suicide should be accepted as a necessary means of removing the ‘unfit’ from society and ameliorating conditions in it. Kelly Hurley writes that ‘suppression of the degenerate was demanded as a biological imperative, a social imperative, and a national imperative’ (Hurley 1996, 79). Chapter two explores the wide dissemination of these ideas in original sources and the influence the ideas had on literary authors, as late-nineteenth-century arguments about eugenics, degeneracy and suicide informed many Gothic fictions. I examine the degenerate characters in some of the Gothic fiction of Stevenson, Wilde, Machen and Corelli. Literary scholarship has failed to recognise the relationship between the degenerate nature of these characters

¹³ The term ‘Ticket-of-Leave Men’ referred to people who were on parole from prison, therefore living amid the population.

and their suicide. The novels evoke images of the power of suicide to effect social change in removing the degenerate, while signifying the contemporary concerns at degeneration. Drawing on the theories outlined in chapter one, I show how the suicide of the characters can be read alongside eugenicist and determinist ideas as an organic and inevitable end for these individuals.

In chapter three, I explore the representations of Jekyll and Dorian Gray as ‘morally insane’, a term in the late-nineteenth century appropriated by well-known psychiatrists like Maudsley and Daniel Tuke. Moral insanity had become a widely used term to ‘explain’ certain alleged pathological behaviours, including suicidal tendencies. The chapter begins by explaining the origin of ‘moral insanity’ from its first use in 1835 by James Cowle Prichard to its wide-spread use in psychiatry, the media and the courts by the late-nineteenth century. I show how the term became linked with ideas about degeneration, egoism and loss of will. Jekyll and Dorian are therefore appropriate case studies for the ‘condition’. As Mighall says, ‘moral insanity’ represented the ‘unkinding’ of a person, for which he borrows Maudsley’s description of degeneration (Mighall 1999, 147). The symptoms of moral insanity also allegedly included the existence of an impulsive and savage inner ‘Other’, which, as I demonstrate, are to be found in Jekyll and Dorian. I examine the ways in which Stevenson and Wilde may have been influenced by theories of moral insanity and the representations of this condition in media in the latter part of the century, and trace how the characters, and deaths, of Jekyll and Dorian embody the condition of ‘moral insanity’.

Chapter four examines the effect of a changing society upon the upper classes, analysing less-canonical texts such as Frank Constable’s *The Curse of Intellect* (1895), Stevenson’s *The Suicide Club* (1878) and Corelli’s *The Sorrows of Satan* (1896). This fiction seemingly warns of the implications of egoism, indulgence, and, simultaneously, the potentially destructive consequences of the restrictive moral and social laws of late-Victorian upper-class society. This chapter outlines the problems inherent in late-Victorian society as two-fold when it came to leading to suicide – one was the level of disillusionment and pessimism increasing towards the end of the century and second was an egoistic and self-indulgent lifestyle. I show how earlier authors

and journalists suggested that suicide was a condition of the working classes, but by the late-nineteenth century, the Gothic genre and newspapers had begun to portray suicide as a condition of the upper-classes. Ennui, disillusionment and frustration all allegedly contributed to breakdowns in mental stability and in the evolutionary energy which alienists such as Maudsley saw as pivotal in individual development. In Western society, individuals often seemingly existed in conflict with their inner selves and desires. The alleged products of evolution, reason and moral sense bestowed upon individuals the knowledge to understand this conflict, and also the wider hypocrisies of society in general. Judith Rowbotham and Kim Stevenson refer to the Victorian paradoxes in society, writing that in emphasising 'self-restraint', late-Victorian society created more opportunities for 'hypocrisy' and 'deceit' (Rowbotham and Stevenson 2003, 11).

The chapter also explores the perceived consequences of not adhering to late-Victorian social order, looking at vices like gambling and alcoholism and how these were viewed in both the public and private spheres, as well as the potential consequences of such vices: in the case of this thesis, suicide. I explore how the media itself sensationalised suicide and how newspaper reports were capable of causing fear and anxiety amongst their readership. As Marsh says, 'Newspapers reports and stories...acted as conduits for the dissemination of medical ideas on suicide' (Marsh 2010, 116). I look at how authors such as Arthur Machen draw this reporting of suicide into gothic fiction, engaging with the impact which sensationalist news reporting was seen to have upon the public and how the phenomenon of suicide had become a fascination for the late-Victorians.

In chapter five, I investigate gendered representations of suicide in late-nineteenth-century Gothic fiction. In 'Suicide and Modernity', Howard Kushner concludes that suicide in the nineteenth century was more common in

men, suggesting that this was because they lacked the safety of the domestic sphere in a society increasingly lacking in governance and unification (Kushner 1993). However, theorists such as Maudsley and the evolutionist George Romanes (1848-1984) used biology to consider the fragility of the female mind.¹⁴ I argue that the view that women were of weaker mind and more prone to mental instability actually feminised suicide in that era. In *The Art of Suicide* (2001), Ron Brown shows how visual culture in the nineteenth-century tended towards a female representation. Kushner and Brown cite Gates (1988) and her analysis of female suicide. Gates questions the truth behind representation of female suicide versus the statistical evidence and gender expectation. She uses various sub-headings addressing 'lovelorn women', 'male displacement' and 'female will-fullness'. She shows how some (middle-class) Victorians viewed female suicide as the consequence for 'monstrously passionate' women. Others viewed suicide in women as evidence of their lack of will-power and restraint, while some (middle-class) Victorians depicted her as 'yearning', 'fallen' or 'betrayed', a woman for whom there was little other option available to her outside of death once abandoned in love. Gates' ideas inform this thesis, but again she offers little detail in respect of important aspects like the evolutionary biology of the 'monstrous' woman.

Unlike Gates, I look in detail at the emergence at this time of the figure of the 'New Woman' and examine her role in the texts as a warning of the consequences for women should they transcend expectations, particularly sexually. Both Corelli and Machen present the same outcome for the 'New Woman' – suicide – but address the issue differently. Corelli's Sibyl breaks down under the conflict between her taught belief of how a woman should behave and what she has seen through real-life and fiction. She attempts to emulate her favoured New Woman fiction and releases her passion, with disastrous consequences. Machen's Helen Vaughan becomes a sexual predator

¹⁴ For example, Maudsley's *Sex in Mind and Education* (1874b), and Ferrero's 'Mental Difference between Men and Women'

with no obvious moral worth and thus her suicide is encouraged. Ultimately, the alleged self-destructiveness of sexually emancipated or deviant women – as perceived to encompass the term New Woman - is evident in both stories. This chapter also shows how gender reversals were also seen to affect men: a lack of restraint or will-power in a man would allegedly render him effeminate. As fears about degeneracy within all classes of society increased, there emerged a new concern, associated with the ‘manliness’ of the male middle-class and the need for self-control. Gail Cunningham claims that this ‘crisis of masculinity’ was responsible for the demonization of female figures in the late-nineteenth century (Cunningham 2001, 94).

Finally, and again in a method not used by Gates, I draw upon the idea of free-will, which threads through each chapter, to argue that perhaps the suicides of females figures can, in some cases, be viewed as a true act of autonomy. Research into the visual representation of female suicide in the late-nineteenth century is useful for background, in particular the contradictions between expectation and fact, but I develop my own line of research, particularly in keeping with the themes of degeneration, biological determinism, inheritance and free-will which run through my thesis.

Chapter six looks at the use of the supernatural and of suicide in Vernon Lee’s ‘Oke of Okehurst’ and Henry James’s ‘Sir Edmund Orme’ to underline the consequences of both ‘bad passions’ such as jealousy or of submitting to heartbreak and strong emotion in an unmanly fashion. The chapter discusses the perceived physiological and behavioural changes elicited by giving in to negative emotions, as published by psychologists such as William James. It also examines the importance of the ghostly figure in establishing the mental decline and the strength of emotions in either the ghost-seer or the ghost himself. Traditional threads of literary history – including suicide as a result of love or jealousy – are woven into a medico-socio engagement with the era’s scientific considerations which ultimately allows for a myriad of interpretations depending on the reader’s own context and personal beliefs. The Gothic ghost embodies his own emotion, and the emotions of others, and is indicative of the

mental breakdown which goes hand in hand with an eventual suicide. Suicide and the Gothic are, therefore, once again coupled in these works of fiction.

The diversity of chapters in this thesis shows the myriad ways in which suicide theory changed in the nineteenth-century. Engaging with prevalent suicide theory from the era, as well as original sources in newspapers, journals and medical texts, I explore the changing perceptions of suicide in the late nineteenth century. Suicide became a phenomenon which evoked fascination but which also served as a warning to society and a mode of death capable of engaging with all contemporary concerns. Suicide therefore 'fit' with the late-nineteenth-century climate, pervaded as it was with anxieties and fears, and the alleged increased levels merely served to symbolise even further humanity's downfall as they faced the dawn of the new century.

Conclusion

Late-nineteenth-century suicide theory was changing; no longer associated with brimming firestones and the desecration of corpses, suicide was instead approached by the medical, social and psychological fields. Suicide was linked with strong emotion, excess, disillusion, hopelessness, isolation, moral decline, physical and mental degeneration, ancestral curses and pathological behaviours. As discussed, the second wave of the Gothic at the end of the nineteenth century shared the same connections. Both suicide theory and the adapted characteristics of the transitional Gothic genre are interwoven through their similarities. As a result, suicide is a significant trope of late-Victorian Gothic fiction. I argue that the similarities between the over-arching motifs of the era's Gothic fiction – particularly degeneration, biological determinism and the question of the nature of free-will – mean that suicide is an important and incredibly significant mode of death, not just for the stories' degenerate characters but for secondary characters too. And yet, ironically, the subject of suicide remains almost as taboo as it did over a hundred years ago when these stories were written. Jekyll states that Hyde could have faced the gallows- but instead, he commits suicide. Dorian was close to redemption, and yet he had to die. Helen Vaughan, Lady Elton, Pauline and Sibyl Vane are all

women who commit suicide. The nature of the New Woman or fallen woman has been explored in that era and, indeed, in Gothic literature itself (Smith and Wallace 2009) and yet these suicides remain largely untouched. Each protagonist of the novels I discuss commits suicide rather than face any other form of death or retribution. In light of the Gothic preoccupation with death and the taboo, as well as its engagement with the fears and fascinations of its corresponding era, then the suicide question in late-Victorian Gothic fiction is one that needs answering, which this thesis will do as it examines representations of suicide in their historical, cultural and social context.

Chapter 1: A Thankless Inheritance and its Necessary Eradication

The language of degeneration theory in the late nineteenth century was influenced by the resurgence of the Gothic at the same time (Rafter 2010; Hurley 1996; Dryden 2003). Degeneration theories destabilised the human form, exposed the savagery of human nature and demonstrated an underbelly of the monstrous, the grotesque and the perverse, all living within Western society. Thus, the Gothic and science become inextricably linked, influencing each other during the late-Victorian era. However, despite the quantity of research on the influence of degeneration theories upon Gothic fiction and, indeed, the reverse, there has been surprisingly little research into the link between the Gothic, degeneration and the act of suicide itself.¹ This chapter will investigate the increasingly popular view among nineteenth-century sociologists, physicians and alienists that suicide was a symptom of degeneracy, and the consequential idea that suicide was a logical means of removing the degenerate through natural selection. This is a necessary precursor to chapter two, which will examine how these ideas informed Gothic fiction in the era, and places suicide firmly within the realms of the Gothic.

Was Suicide Considered a Sign of Degeneracy?

Victorian Britain oversaw major advancements in science, machinery, trade and transport. Cities were expanding and Britain ruled the Empire. However, as the century began to wane, there developed an undercurrent of pessimism amongst Britain's inhabitants. Britain faced competition from other Western countries which threatened its imperialism. Meanwhile theories of evolution had postulated the transient nature of mankind and humanity's close

¹ Research includes work by Chamberlain (1985), Pick (1989), Hurley (1996), Edmundson (1997), Greenslade (1999) and Rafter (2010).

relationship to animals. Consequently, degeneration theories gained popularity and expanded to encompass social ills and perceived deviances from normality.² Alleged degenerate individuals or groups of individuals underlined fears about the weakness of the nation as well as the potential for the widespread dissolution of Western society.

In her investigation into the emerging suicide statistics of the Victorian and Edwardian eras, Olive Anderson writes:

By the end of the century psychiatric Darwinism linked suicide firmly with two key ideas of the time. First, suicide was seen as the last resort of those beaten in the struggle for survival, a struggle always seen as fiercest in modern city life and secondly, “true” suicide, that is, self-destruction without rational aim, was held by eugenicists to be invariably the result of physical degeneracy, and that too was always considered to be the most severe in big cities (Anderson 1980, 170).

Anderson suggests that suicide was often linked with degeneracy as a sign of the condition. The alleged rise in suicide rates seemed to reinforce the perception that degeneration was spreading, as M. Mohana and George Robinson show: ‘towards the end of the [nineteenth] century ...under the influence of degeneration theory, a number of abnormal behaviours, including suicide, were considered a stigma of degeneration’ (Mohana and Robinson 1990, 4).³ Henry Maudsley was an authoritative figure on the subject of degeneration and as an alienist he also contributed to the study of suicide. He frequently linked suicide and degeneration and considered suicidal tendencies a symbol of degeneracy. For example, he noted: ‘of five children from an insane mother and a drunken father, one was suicidal, two suffered imprisonment for crimes, one daughter

² See Searle 1971, and Pick 1989.

³ For an in depth and useful discussion on suicide statistics, see Bailey 1998.

was insane, the other was imbecile. Suicide, crime, insanity and imbecility were *thus different manifestations of a morbid type*' (Maudsley 1872, 409).⁴ Maudsley clearly indicated that suicide was a manifestation of degeneracy. Connections between inheritance and 'degenerate' behaviour became an essential aspect of the late-nineteenth-century debate on degeneration. Simultaneously, a belief in the biological determinism of human nature became the building block for the eugenic and Social Darwinist assertions, which are explored later in this chapter.

The degeneration theory, as it was utilised in the late nineteenth century, embodied concerns about alleged pathological conditions in society. The theory suggested that if humans could evolve, they could in fact devolve, progress would halt and society could go into decline. Morel undertook a detailed examination of mental deficiency and its perceived causes and concluded that the prevalence of social ills like suicide, crime, alcoholism, sexual perversions and insanity was indicative of a declining moral standard in Western society. Morel was profoundly influenced by theories of evolution which existed before Charles Darwin's publication of *On the Origin of Species* in 1859. In particular, Morel favoured the Lamarckian view. In the early nineteenth century, Jean-Baptiste Lamarck asserted that species evolved via acquired characteristics so that small changes made to their design during their own lifetime were passed onto offspring, meaning that offspring could inherit characteristics as a result of parental vices. As a result, said Morel, degeneracy could change over the generations of a family. He also asserted that degeneracy could include both the physical and the mental: 'The incessant progression in Europe, not only of insanity but of all the abnormal states which have a special

⁴ My emphasis. In 1857, a French psychiatrist and leading degeneration theorist, Benedict Morel, had used similar words when referring to symptoms of degeneration as epitomising those 'deviations from the normal human type that are hereditarily transmitted'. See Benedict Morel. *Traité des Dégénérescences Physiques, Intellectuelles et Morales de l'Espèce Humaine et des Causes qui Produisent ces Variétés Maladies*. Qtd. by Ackerknecht 1959, 48-9. For a detailed description of Morel's Treatise, see Pick 1989, 41-54.

relation with the existence of physical and moral evil in humanity, was ...a fact which struck my attention.’⁵

By the latter half of the nineteenth century, sociologists, psychiatrists and pessimists largely viewed Western civilisation as being under threat from the spread of a degenerate race. Any one individual, or groups of individuals, who was perceived as abnormal in any way could be accused of threatening social progress or being responsible for the prevalence of crime, prostitution, decadence, violence and immorality in the urban centres during the era. The idea was supported by the works of the eminent Maudsley, whose perception of degeneration grew increasingly pessimistic over the decades, culminating in his work *Body and Will* (1884). In this text he states: ‘alongside the process of evolution there has always been in operation a process of degeneracy, and the simple question is whether this process will eventually gain the upper hand’ (Maudsley 1884, 318). By the 1880s, Maudsley was questioning whether or not degeneracy could potentially spread more rapidly through society than evolution could allow society to progress, undermining any potential evolutionary growth. Maudsley’s general air of doom which he had adopted by the 1880s lends his work a Gothicised atmosphere, expressing the threat of the past upon the present and the dark side of human nature and ‘progress’ (Chamberlain 1985) for which the Gothic was renowned (Edmundson 1997, 4).

In *The Modern Gothic*, Linda Dryden notes that the ‘catch-all’ nature of the ‘disease’ of degeneration, and the fact that it was considered hereditary, led to a widespread concern about the future or potential extinction of the human race (Dryden 2003, 10). This concern was reinforced by the English translation of Max Nordau’s widely read *Degeneration* in 1895.⁶ Nordau argued that degenerates are ‘not always criminals, prostitutes, anarchists and pronounced lunatics; they are often authors and artists’ (Nordau, 1895, vii-viii). He viewed

⁵ To nineteenth-century alienists the term ‘moral’ often meant ‘mental’ rather than the ethical sense. Quoted by Pick 1989, 54.

⁶ This influential book was published in German in 1892, and translated into English in 1895.

their ‘aesthetic fashions’ as forms of ‘mental decay’ and to him they deviated from convention in such a way that they too were a threat to society (Nordau 1895, vii-viii). A review written not long after the English publication of *Degeneration* explains Nordau’s thoughts with regards to the artist: ‘the [artist] has fallen way to his morbid imagination ...he has cheap but efficacious plans for abolishing poverty, banishing evil, reconstructing human nature, squaring the circle and unifying all religions’ (Max Nordau’s New Book, “Degeneration” 1895). The work of the artist was thus a farcical attempt to attack social situations; in Nordau’s mind this was to the detriment of Western civilisation. Nordau saw the decadent artist as emasculated and ‘unfit for the labours of common life’ (Nordau 1895, 301). To Nordau, degeneration included the effeminate, the weak and the pleasure seekers of society – an idea which will be discussed in detail in chapter four of this thesis.

Ideologically, Nordau was profoundly influenced by the Italian criminologist Cesare Lombroso, who introduced his theories on degeneration in 1876. Nordau dedicated *Degeneration* to Lombroso, his ‘dear and honoured master.’ Lombroso identified the criminal as a Gothic savage possessing primitive stigmata harking back to a point on the evolutionary ladder prior to the evolution of mankind. This atavism was a reaction to the evolutionary concerns that man was related to the animals, and therefore had the capacity to revert back to his animalistic instincts and brutal inclinations.⁷ This relatively recent revelation that humans were allegedly related to beasts begged the question who would survive in society’s struggle for existence? There seemed every possibility that anyone possessing the savage instincts of a primitive and barbarous ancestry might be the better suited to win life’s new competition, generated by industrialisation and urbanisation. This could potentially create a

⁷ See, for example, Lombroso’s *Criminal Man*. Originally written in 1876, it was revised five times by Lombroso. In each edition, he expanded on his ideas about innate criminality and refined his method for categorizing criminal behaviour. In his introduction, Lombroso deduced ‘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.’

new race of animalistic degenerates, such as Stevenson's imagined Hyde in his 1886 novella (discussed in chapter two).

Rafter demonstrates how Lombroso's work was influenced by the Gothic: 'skulls and brains, anatomical and physical anomalies, cruelty and savagery, deviant sexuality, insane criminals...and other Gothic elements abound in Lombroso's work' (Rafter 2010, 274). Suicide is also one of these elements. *Criminal Man* includes a chapter on suicide, linking the innate (Gothic) traits of the criminal with those of the suicidal, stating that '[suicide] demonstrates the irresistible violence of the passions that drive criminals' (Lombroso 1876, 103). Lombroso alleges that the primitive impulses that exist within a degenerate criminal may also lie within a suicidal individual. Suicide was, after all, still considered a crime. Likewise, the British alienist Samuel Alexander Strahan defined suicide as one of the signs of degeneracy, a dark group to which the insane, criminal, physically afflicted and murderers were all perceived to belong.

Strahan stated that suicide could fall under two categories – the rational and the irrational. In cases of rational suicide, reason allegedly remains intact, and is called upon to decide between life and death. Irrational suicides, on the other hand, are driven by an inherited instinctive impulse: 'He is impelled to act by an impulse. He dies, in fact, because of a fatal defect in his organisation, a defect which absolutely forbids his survival' (Strahan 1892, 65). Like Lombroso and Maudsley, Strahan Gothicised his suicide theory by drawing in ideas about degeneration and loss of reason, believing that anyone with this impulse was doomed, and 'must be looked upon as a degenerate specimen of the family ...[suicide is] defined as one of the signs of a markedly degenerate condition' (Strahan 1892, 65-66). Strahan argued that suicide was a condonable form of death as the suicidal impulse renders the sufferer 'unfit' to participate in the struggle for life. A suicidal person allegedly lacked the essential strength of the will to live which was so necessary to survive life's endless competition (Strahan 1892, 69). A defect such as this, to Strahan, marked an individual as degenerate. The *New York Times* reviewed *Suicide and Insanity* in 1894, noting that: 'Dr Strahan holds to the theory that a large percentage of those who kill themselves are degenerate persons' ("Suicide and its Sources" 1894). The

article concludes that ‘such a person ...is acting from an impulse which is “merely one of the eliminative processes whereby nature rids herself of the unfit. In other words, he takes himself out of the world because he is not fit to live in it.”’ The individual is impelled to remove himself from a world where he causes only harm. Although written in 1892, and therefore after the publication of some of the canonical texts discussed in the following chapter, Strahan’s work shows the context in which the Gothic was re-emerging, and demonstrates how these Gothicised sociological and medical theories were influenced by the texts before them just as the authors of the Gothic were increasingly influenced by the theorists. Influenced by popular theorists such as Maudsley (see next paragraph), Strahan’s work conveys a view that was gaining in popularity and intensity.

Strahan’s concept of hereditary degeneration came in the years following the publication of the new theory of inheritance developed by the German biologist August Weismann in the 1880s (discussed further below). His *Essays on Heredity* altered the nineteenth-century debate on hereditary transmission, arguing against the importance of acquired variations to evolution and insisting instead that germ cells were passed unchanged from parent to offspring (Winther 2001). Likewise, Strahan wrote that: ‘the suicidal impulse...is but rarely acquired; ...in the vast majority of cases it is not the produce of one generation, but is inherited from ancestors’ (Strahan 1892, 134). He quotes a passage from Maudsley’s *The Pathology of Mind* (1867b), conveying the influence that the eminent psychiatrist had upon his fellow alienists: ‘It is impossible to deny that a man may suffer irremediable ill through the misfortune of bad descent ...the idiot is not an accident, nor the irreclaimable criminal an unaccountable causality.’ To this, Strahan added ‘neither is the true suicide’ (Strahan 1892, 134). Strahan asserted that the suicidal impulse is not a direct result of the environment but instead another sign of inherited deficiency. If those possessing the suicidal impulse were to propagate then they would assist the spread of degeneration, because ‘the offspring of the suicidal is frequently of a very degenerate character’ (Strahan 1892, 77). Thus if a suicidal person were to not follow-through with the act, they may reproduce

another degenerate, perpetuating the perceived problem within late-Victorian society.

Strahan was informed by Maudsley, who likewise believed that degeneracy was pre-determined through inheritance and that suicide was a symptom of degeneration. A fatal inheritance was a crucial theme in Gothic tradition (Botting 1996), and thus the scientific emphasis on hereditary nature in theories about degeneration and suicide again emphasises the ease at which lines between alleged rational scientific theory and the imaginary world of the Gothic collided. Critical works on Maudsley are few and far between, with the most comprehensive by Michael Collie, dating back to 1988. However, more recently, Justin Sausman published an article asserting that Maudsley believed free-will could not control instinctive reactions (Sausman 2007, 44). Although Sausman gives no weight to the contradictions inherent in Maudsley's work, it is true that Maudsley's main premise does seem to have been founded upon biological determinism.⁸ For example, in *Responsibility in Mental Disease*, Maudsley states: 'The "wicked" are not wicked by deliberate choice...but by an inclination of their natures which makes the evil good to them and the good evil' (Maudsley 1874a, 24). Likewise, in *Body and Mind*, he utilises the rhetoric of the 'evil ancestral' curses prolific in Gothic tradition and writes: 'in consequence of evil ancestral influences, individuals are born with such a flaw or warp of nature that all the care in the world will not prevent them from being vicious or criminal, or becoming insane ...no one can elude the destiny that is innate in him' (Maudsley 1870, 75-6). This suggests that, to Maudsley, whichever degenerate 'symptom' an individual inherits his outcome will be predisposed, and his phrasing links degeneration and suicide theory firmly with the Gothic. Maudsley's frequent merging of science and Gothic earns him Rafter's title of 'Gothic criminologist' (Rafter 2010, 278) and demonstrating the nineteenth-century relocation and internalisation of Gothic tradition. The

⁸ In *Body and Will*, for example, Maudsley describes suicide as 'free will' – see the introduction to this thesis – which contradicts the determinism argument.

numerous links between Gothic discourse and suicide theory underline the importance of examining the suicides of the Gothic protagonists seen in the upcoming chapters.

If, as Maudsley alleges, suicide is indeed a symptom and an outcome of degeneration, then this phenomenon, too, is sometimes inevitable. A prison chaplain at Clerkenwell Jail, J. W. Horsley (1850-1910), makes a similar claim in 'Suicide', published in the *Fortnightly Review* in 1881: 'The temperament and dispositions ...which prompt or incline to suicide, are no doubt matters of transmission from parents who have not taught or transmitted the power of self-government and the reverence for life which they themselves did not possess' (Horsley 1881, 509). In 1889, L. Gordon Rylands – who believed that a criminal nature was innate – also expressed the view that suicide was one of the signs of inherited degeneracy: 'Many unfortunate persons have bequeathed to them by their parents morbid affections of the brain which compel some to homicide, some to suicide, some to drunkenness, and its consequent vicious and degraded mode of life, reducing others to idiocy or raving madness' (Rylands 1889, 35). Suicide and similar social pathologies were increasingly seen as unavoidable outcomes of an inherited nature (see "Biological Determinism" below which addresses this shift in the discussion of heredity further).

The physician Robert Reid Rentoul predicted a bleak outlook for Britain if degeneration was not curbed. He wrote that the number of social ills within society was increasing rapidly, with suicide, infanticide, prostitution, criminality and murder all on the increase. These occurrences allegedly denoted the widespread degeneration of humanity. Rentoul was influenced by Nordau, with whom he forged a friendship and Rentoul believed that any deviance from convention should be classed as degenerate (Rentoul 1906, 11). This includes the suicidal, who, to Rentoul, should be referred to as 'degenerate with suicidal tendencies' (Rentoul 1906, xi). Rentoul argued that degenerates posed a threat to society and as a result should be removed or prevented from procreation and thus the potential spread of the 'condition.' He says that if society were honest then overall most suicides should be celebrated as a solution to degeneracy:

Many of these [degenerates], in a passing phase of sanity, recognising the hopelessness of their lives ...end their lives ...by what we glibly term “suicide.” But not one case of suicide occurs but tells every *honest* thinker that someone has broken a law of health, a law of common-sense, and the eternal law of justice to offspring (Rentoul 1906, 7).

Suicide is, he stated, a means of preventing the spread of degeneracy to offspring and as such a benefit to society. Although written in the early twentieth century, Rentoul’s argument follows those discussed above: that degenerates, incapable of change or adaptation, face only one fate – destruction. By the late nineteenth century, suicide had therefore developed a new significance in terms of safeguarding national efficiency and became, as Adna Weber claimed in 1899, ‘one of the processes of natural selection’ (Weber 1899, 402-3).

Suicide as Natural Selection

Social Darwinism

Social Darwinists utilised Charles Darwin’s theory of evolution and, in particular, natural selection to argue against charity work and social reform for the lower and poverty-stricken classes who, in middle-class ideology, collectively made up the largest and most threatening mass of degenerates. Conditions in the labouring-classes often created a breeding ground for disease and death, with alcohol and opium regularly abused to obtain some relief from monotony and suffering (Harrison 1991, 196-200). In conditions such as these, ‘seething at the very centre of our great cities, concealed by the thinnest crust of civilisation and decency, is a vast mass of moral corruption, of heart breaking misery and absolute godlessness [...]immorality is all but the natural cause of conditions like these’ (Mearns 1883, 1-7). The slums which housed the labouring-classes were often viewed as areas of corruption and immorality (Hawkins 1997, 5) and late-Victorian Gothic fiction relocated to these urban centres as a result (Dryden 2003, 48-9). William Greenslade, who has

researched the degeneration theory of the late-nineteenth century, writes: 'down in the darkness, the struggle for life was producing new species of mankind which signalled an all too successful adaptation' mirroring views from the era (Greenslade 1994, 39). For example, the physician John Milner Fothergill wrote that London's poor had devolved into a new 'race of dwarfs' (Fothergill 1889, 114). In the 1870s, races of 'little people' were discovered in Central Africa (Silver 1999, 117). This 'racialised' the concept of the evil and malevolent dwarf, which came to be equated with degeneracy and the idea of a new sub-species or race (Silver 1999, 117). William Booth also compared the lower classes to the so-called primitive races: 'Darkest England, like Darkest Africa, reeks with malaria. The foul and fetid breath of our slums is almost as poisonous as that of the African swamp' (Booth 1890, preface). This Gothicised 'race' of underclass did indeed come to be viewed by many of the middle classes as a different species threatening the futurity of their own society. Dwellers of the slums were often portrayed as degenerate and immoral – and biologically different to the middle-class professionals. The underclass was also increasing in size leading the middle classes to be fearful of a country overrun with the degenerate and unfit, rife with a population of the weak, feeble, murderous, sexually deviant, alcoholic or the mentally deficient, reflecting the imagined Gothic 'world of cruelty, lusts, perversion and crime' (Edmundson 1997, 4). For those who believed in the theory of biological determinism, social reform could not be relied upon to reverse this situation. As Dorothy Porter notes: 'Social Darwinist vision of the survival of the fittest fanned fears, in the fin de siècle years, that the so-called "race apart" might be the tip of the iceberg of degenerates, a vast horde of the unfit dragging the nation down into inevitable biological decline and final extinction' (Porter 1991, 160). In fact, to the Social Darwinists, social reform would *add* to the problem because it would assist the alleged unfit citizens and thus interfere with natural selection.

In any discussion on Social Darwinism, a reference to Thomas Malthus (1766-1834) is essential. Malthus informed the works of Darwin and, later, Francis Galton, and Malthus' views on charity and social reform informed the Social Darwinist debate.⁹ He was a political economist, who believed that the population was growing too fast for the provision of adequate water, food and space for every individual. Therefore, he believed that a 'strong and constantly operating check' was needed to ensure the population levels remained within a sustainable proportion (Malthus 1797, 20). These checks would allegedly come in two forms – 'positive check', including premature death, and 'preventative check' meaning restrictions on birth rate. Different forms of death, therefore, were viewed by Malthus as essential in ensuring the progress of the human race.¹⁰

Alfred Russell Wallace was a British naturalist who worked with Darwin.¹¹ In his autobiography, he recounts reading Malthus and realising the importance of the 'checks' on population size:

Why do some die and some live? And the answer was clearly, that on the whole the best fitted live ...this self-acting process would necessarily improve the race, because in every generation the inferior would inevitably be killed off (Wallace 1905, 361-2).

Social Darwinists such as Herbert Spencer applied natural selection to mankind, justifying the struggle for life by insisting that 'survival of the fittest' means an essential competitive struggle which is natural and necessary under

⁹ See the letter written by Darwin citing Malthus' influence on his ideas about natural selection, 'I happened to read "Malthus on Population" the idea of natural selection flashed on me.' Qtd by Haeckel 1892, 137. Karl Pearson, Galton's protégé, who wrote that Malthus was 'the strewer of seed which reached its harvest in the ideas of Charles Darwin and Francis Galton' – Pearson, 'Annals of Eugenics' 1 (October 1925). Qtd. by Richardson 2003, 59. See also Jones 1998, 1-19. On page 10 Jones writes that 'Darwin and Galton shared a preoccupation with Malthus.'

¹⁰ For more information on the social consequence of Malthus' theory, see Peterson 1999 and Barry 2007.

¹¹ For detailed discussion on their relationship and collaboration, see Bowler 1983 Henkin 1963. For more recent scholarship, see Shermer 2002 and Bowler 1990.

the laws of natural selection.¹² Similarly, economist and Social Darwinist William R. Greg suggested:

We have kept alive those who, in a more natural and less advanced state, would have died – and who, looking at the physical perfection of the race alone, had better have been left to die...thousands...are suffered to transmit their terrible inheritance of evil to other generations, and to spread it through a whole community (Greg 1868, 359).

Greg argued that humanitarian efforts were interfering with natural selection and preventing the necessary elimination of the more ‘unfit’ characters. Social Darwinists believed that by interfering with nature society was creating a civilisation of degenerates who would ordinarily be unable to survive without human intervention.

Italian physician Henry Morselli drew on Malthus and Social Darwinism in his 1881 text *Suicide: An Essay on Comparative Moral Statistics*.¹³ In his preface, Morselli states that he will be applying the evolutionary theories of Darwin, Spencer and Wallace to ‘an enquiry into the psychological phenomenon of voluntary death, and the ethnological, biological and social characteristics’ (Morselli 1881, v-vi). As a result, the text offered the first sociological examination of suicide in Europe using statistics. In its ‘Literary Notices’, *Popular Sciences Monthly* wrote that following the publication of Morselli’s work into English, ‘it at once took high rank as an authoritative

¹² The term ‘survival of the fittest’ was coined by Spencer in 1852.

¹³ This text was translated into English and published in Britain in 1881 as an abridged version in the *International Scientific Series* vol. 36. The ISS was a project which published about evolutionary naturalism launched by Kegan Paul. The text was also reviewed in many journals, such as a review by Franklin T. Richards in 1881. *The Academy* 495, Oct. 29, 332-333 and reviews in: the *London Quarterly Review* 58(115), Apr. 1882, 279-280; *The Athenaeum* 2823, Dec. 3 1881, 742; *The British Quarterly Review*, 75(149), Jan. 1882, 207-9. It was discussed in detail in various journal articles including Anon.1888. Curiosities of Suicide. *All the Year Round* 43(1045): 546-8 and WM Knighton. 1881. Suicidal Mania. *Contemporary Review* 39: 81-90. Morselli’s work is described as a ‘well-known book’ which influenced suicide theory after it – see Anon. 1900. The Morals of Suicide. *The Academy* 1458: 312-313.

presentation of the subject [of suicide]' (279). Morselli investigated the effects of various conditions, both external, such as climate, and biological, such as sex, on suicide levels throughout Europe. He concluded that rapid urbanisation and the consequent pathological effects on mental states was a significant factor in increasing suicide rates.¹⁴ However, he asserted that the predisposition to suicide and the way in which individuals responded to anxiety or struggles in their lives was biological. He stated that nothing in the human response is spontaneous, and that if the motive to suicide was enough to overcome the instinct for self-preservation then it was already 'the necessary cause of a natural effect' (Morselli 1881, 289).

Morselli incorporated Malthus' principle of population into his thesis:

To restore the balance between consumer and products, it is necessary that a greater number of individual's should die prematurely ...as Malthus said ...one generation shall be driven into its grave before its time, to give space and nutriment to its successor (Morselli 1881, 365-6).

These 'premature deaths' would be the fate of those defeated in life's battle and thus subject to the mechanisms of natural selection. He included in this anyone with weak mind and immoral nature, who would be more likely to succumb to base passions and desires. A lack of self-control would render these individuals prone to vice and corruption and so they would become distracted and susceptible to losing in life's competition. Such natural selection was especially important, he stated, in 'civilised' countries where the 'strong' members have been conscripted into the military, and thus those left to propagate were all too often the weaker, less fit members of society; the underclass; or the criminals (Morselli 1881, 363). Heredity and transmission of

¹⁴ These factors will be looked at in chapter four of this thesis.

characters allegedly meant future ‘progressive physical and moral weakness of generations’ (Morselli 1881, 364). So suicide was not just perceived as natural but advantageous. It was an effect of the ‘same law of evolution to which all living-beings are subject ...[and] the inevitable result of the struggle for existence’ (Morselli 1881, 361). Morselli asserted that the loser by the law of natural selection, unable to assist society by any means, should succumb and leave their respective society to those more able and fortunate as would and should occur in nature where a ‘continual elimination’ takes place (Morselli 1881, 357). Suicide was merely a natural means of removing the unfit and degenerate from society, made even more necessary due to social reform and charity. And it was not just the infirm and the weak that were given the means to survive against nature. Morselli believed that late-nineteenth-century urban centres also harboured ‘those whose passions, those proceeding especially from animal wants, make them prey to corruption, to vice, and misery’ (Morselli 1881, 379). Morselli’s references to passions, vices and the underlying animalistic nature of humanity lend his text a similar Gothic undertone to those of Maudsley and Strahan by deconstructing the stability and the strength of human nature.

The feminist and social theorist, Jane Hume Clapperton (1832-1914) published similar thoughts to Morselli in 1885, writing that ‘social evolution’ had ‘disfigured’ civilisation because:

We have lively predatory instincts, keen pursuit of gain, treachery, cunning, gross injustice, brutal selfishness, rampant in our midst ...vices, not virtues, help one on ...the lies and tricks of trade [...] society must enter on some different path, ere we can say that all is going well to bring about in human nature moral, intellectual and physical ‘survival of the fittest’ (Clapperton 1885, 28-31).

Clapperton was in the unusual position of being a feminist and a female writer who overtly shared concerns about the social problems in England with her male counterparts. Like Morselli and Strahan, Clapperton based her ideas for

social reform around evolutionary theories and eugenics. Clapperton argued that nineteenth-century Britain could only progress and attain happiness if the morals of society changed. Individuals living as they did, selfishly pursuing individual gains and lacking any altruistic nature, meant that immorality and ‘predatory instincts’ would compete, win the battle and survive to propagate.

There were thus two types of ‘unfit’ in late-nineteenth-century Europe, in accordance with these theories. Firstly, charity meant that more people were surviving who, if ignored, would naturally die, thus eliminating their weakened characteristics. Secondly, the perceived immorality of parts of late-nineteenth-century society meant that the characters favoured by natural selection were potentially cruel or corrupt. The nation would therefore possibly be left with two kinds of degenerates – the morally repugnant, narcissistic and ‘predatory’ reprobate and the physically and mentally weak and feeble. Both were an apparent threat to an already weakened national efficiency.¹⁵

In 1890, Strahan, who examined hereditary diseases in great detail, wrote that:

The tendency of the age is toward the cultivation and spread of ...hereditary diseases, for while our artificial life, with all its feverish haste and worry, is prolific of nervous degeneration, the customs of civilised society, as at present constituted, are designed to bar the course of Nature and prevent, so far as is possible, the operation of those laws which weed out and exterminate the diseased and otherwise unfit in every grade of natural life (Strahan 1890, 331).

¹⁵ See the introduction to this thesis for further detail on late-Victorian Britain’s fears about national efficiency.

Strahan asserted that, naturally, an organism which demonstrates any sign of unfitness would be eliminated immediately through the acceptable mechanism of natural selection. In the case of humans, he claimed, 'we fight[...]against the inexorable law which condemns the unfit to extinction' (Strahan 1890, 332-4). In 1892, he made the leap that natural selection included suicide as a mode of death: 'what has been called voluntary death becomes merely one of the eliminative processes of natural selection' (Strahan 1892, 30). To Strahan, the laws and morals in place condemning suicide were merely preventing some of the less fit from fulfilling an evolutionary plan for progress. Nordau would go on to make similar claims in 1895: 'every city possesses its club of suicides [...]Degenerates must succumb ...They can neither adapt themselves to the conditions of Nature and civilisation, nor maintain themselves in the struggle for existence against the healthy' (Nordau 1895, 537-41). If individuals were naturally unfit for survival, then this should be accepted to ensure the nation's progress and efficiency. Nordau sums this up: 'the feeble, the degenerate will perish ...[and] must be abandoned to their inexorable fate. They are past cure of amelioration' (Nordau 1895, 550). Whatever 'fate' nature chooses should, to theorists such as Nordau, be condoned rather than prevented, as degeneration could not be reversed. The notion of the hereditary nature of degeneracy which allowed for a spread of degeneration through propagation was well established in the late-nineteenth century, as was the belief that a pre-determined character could not be changed. Degeneration could not be cured, alleged the biological determinists.

Biological Determinism

Clapperton stated that 'the power of nurture is limited. It can direct the forces of nature, but it cannot alter the intrinsic quality of the raw material which nature provides' (Clapperton 1885, 365-6). Deterministic approaches to the heredity debate became more powerful in the late-nineteenth century. This was partly to do with the research of August Weismann (1834-1914) and partly to do with evolutionary discourse on atavism and free-will. In 1883, the German professor in Zoology, Weismann, published the first of his essays on inheritance, which had implications on arguments for social reform and eugenics. Entitled 'On Heredity', the theory maintained that heredity substance

passed between generations without external influence. Weismann claimed that the body was made up of two types of cell, the germ cells and the somatic cells. Somatic cells had no role in defining the traits of offspring. Germ cells, on the other hand, supposedly carried the germ-plasm which housed inherited matter and would transmit their material unchanged between parent and offspring. Germ-plasm travelled ‘uninfluenced by that which happens during the life of the individual which bears it’ (Schwartz 2008, 73). Weismann agreed that variations were part of organic life and did occur between organisms, but that these variations were down to the blending of germ-cells between both parents rather than through adaptation to environmental influence (Winther 2001). This new, and seemingly convincing, heredity argument supported the concept of the irreversibility of pathological and degenerate qualities which evoked a pessimistic outlook for the spread of degeneration.

Criminology and psychiatry were equally informed by the theory of biological determinism. Lombroso was one of the first criminal anthropologists to postulate the idea of the ‘born criminal.’ Lombroso identified suicide as a social evil which, in most cases, co-existed with other forms of atavistic criminality. The degenerate was, to Lombroso, a Gothicised throwback to bestial ancestors, both physically and mentally. The individual suffered an arrested evolution which left him lingering on the evolutionary ladder somewhere between animal and the ‘higher’ man. *Jekyll and Hyde* conveys these anxieties, as I will show in the following chapter, in the form of Hyde as Lombroso’s primitive and ‘ape-like’ ‘born criminal’ (Arata 1996, 33). It became increasingly common to associate degenerates with atavistic beings in the post-Darwin era. For example, Edmund Du Cane, Chairman of the Directors of Convict Prisons, used evolutionary discourse in a speech to the National Association for the Promotion of Social Science in 1875, describing criminals as:

Entirely those of the inferior races of mankind – wandering habits, utter laziness, absence of forethought or provision, want of moral sense, cunning dirt, and instances may be found in which their physical characteristics approach those of the

lower animals so that they seem to be going back to the type of what Professor Darwin calls 'our arboreal ancestors'.¹⁶

However, this was a concept which already existed in Gothic convention, and was merely exacerbated by nineteenth-century theories on evolution. The inescapable curse of an ancestor's crime and the savagery of the Gothic villain are seen amid the narrative of the traditional Gothic texts. For example, Manfred in *The Castle of Otranto* (1764) is described as 'savage' (Walpole 1764, 22; 94). The Gothic 'savage' villain evolved as a result of evolutionary theory into the 'born criminal' with his associated social ills and perceived as a victim of his ancestry and heredity, bestowing this anthropological criminology with nuances of the Gothic.

Nicole Rafter, in *The Criminal Brain*, gives an overview of the social and cultural context in which biological theories about the nature of the degenerate criminal came to be and tells us that Maudsley's 1874 text *Responsibility in Mental Disease* became one of the most cited texts on the subject of the born criminal (Rafter 2008, 101). In his earlier texts, Maudsley believed that man's nature is a result of his ancestry and thus inescapable. Maudsley's assertion was that all social pathologies were irreversible so little could be done to 'cure' society, writing that 'punishment is of no avail to produce permanent reformation' (Maudsley 1870, 76). Mark Jackson writes: 'Maudsley's articulation of the biological determinants of both individual and social pathologies proved persuasive ...[in] informing late Victorian ...approaches to the related problems of racial degeneration, national efficiency, [and] imperial decline' (Jackson 2002, 234). Like Maudsley, Rylands also concluded that 'the words punishment and vengeance are tragically ludicrous' in society's degraded beings, and that death is the most 'merciful' solution in these cases (Rylands 1889, 251-2). As Christine

¹⁶ Qtd. by Louis Knafla, 2003: 151.

Ferguson notes, the prevailing view was becomingly increasingly dark: ‘if criminality is anatomically and hereditarily produced, how do we cure it? We do so by transforming the born criminal into a dead criminal’ (Ferguson 2007, 78).

If an individual was destined to succumb to the fate that inheritance had secured, then it suggests that free-will amounted to little. The psychology of this determinism actually denied the possibility of free-will and the concept became, to determinists, a ‘causeless cause’ (Sausman 2007, 45). Chapter three of this thesis addresses this issue further; however, it does deserve a mention here because of its connections with determinism. Morselli believed that it would be dangerous to society if individuals were able to act on their own free-will because all actions, positive or pathological, were essential for evolutionary progress: ‘Civilisation would be impossible if man, instead of *being obliged* to be what he is, could transform himself according to his *will* ...Each man has his part in the evolution of humanity’ (Morselli 1881, 269, 274). Darwin’s cousin, Francis Galton (1822-1911), also believed that humans possessed ‘only illusory powers of free-will.’¹⁷

Matthew Campbell blames the widespread publication of deterministic views such as those above for further increasing anxiety, writing that biological determinism gave middle-class Victorians a sense of ‘powerlessness’ over the fact that they could not change ‘Nature’ (Campbell 1999, 3). An example of such ‘common-place’ (Campbell 1999, 3) ideas is Richard Proctor’s (1837-1888) ‘Hereditary Traits’, published in 1878, which uses biological determinism to conclude that:

Hereditary predisposition to theft, murder, and suicide, has been demonstrated in several cases ...the demonstrated fact that a thief or murderer has

¹⁷ Galton’s ‘Papers’, Quoted by Richardson 2003, 66.

inherited his unpleasant tendency should be a *raison du plus* for preventing the tendency from being transmitted any farther. In stamping out the hereditary ruffian or rascal ...we not only get rid of the 'grown serpent', but of the worm which 'Hath nature that in time would venom breed' (Proctor 1878, 430).

The article demonstrates such 'fatalist' overtones as portrayed by the determinists. Neil Davie states that for the 'fatalist camps' it was felt that 'little could be done except to sit back and wait for ...the problem [to] be removed from the public sphere altogether' (Davie 2003, 16-17). For the purpose of his thesis overall, Morselli differentiated between suicide and crime as two separate phenomenon but felt that crime and suicide would, throughout Europe, often be interchangeable, co-existing within the weak-willed 'criminal man' of 'deformed mind': '[suicide and crime] have an analogous signification; it is always the weak who gives place to the stronger if it is a question of crime, and it is a weak character who is destroyed in the struggle for life when it is a question of suicide' (Morselli 1881, 371). Bloodshed, violence or death, he asserted, are necessary for overall progress, as death indeed 'stamp[s] out' the degenerates and their defective, inherited qualities.

A leading proponent of biological determinism and heredity was Francis Galton (Brookes 2004, 201).¹⁸ His investigations into heredity and its influence became renowned, and from his initial ideas stemmed his later-coined term 'eugenics' – a means of removing the threat of the alleged degenerate from society. In 'Darwinism and Death', Weikart observes: 'It was at this time [the late-nineteenth century] that significant debate erupted over issues relating to the sanctity of human life, especially ...suicide. Darwinism played an

¹⁸ Frustratingly, although an interesting text, Brookes gives no references to where he has sourced his material – there are no footnotes and there is no bibliography.

important role in this debate, for it altered many people's conceptions of the importance and value of human life' (Weikart 2002, 327). Weikart refers to the increasingly popular use of eugenics in the late-nineteenth century as a means of potential social reform.¹⁹ Darwinism had changed opinions on the value of individual human life.²⁰ The historian Geoffrey R. Searle reiterates that eugenics was an 'off-shoot' of Social Darwinism and that the eugenicists advocated altruism over egoism – they rejected individual needs over the needs of the race as a whole (Searle 1998, 26). Thus, an act was beneficial if it defended the collective requirements of society to progress.

Eugenics

Christine Ferguson reminds us that Galton was one of the 'mainstream British thinkers' to come out in support of Lombroso and the ideas behind criminal anthropology and determinism: 'in an 1890 *Nature* article, [Galton] agreed with Lombroso that there were certain anatomical features that "predominate among all large groups of criminals [such as] cranial characteristics, physical insensibility, moral insensibility and emotional instability."'”²¹ Similarly, Lombroso was informed by Galton's own *Hereditary Genius*, published in 1869 (Murphy 2007, 28). Interestingly, as we have seen Lombroso's theories have Gothic connotations; in *Hereditary Genius*, Galton references the Gothic novelist Matthew 'The Monk' Lewis, suggesting both theorists had an understanding of Gothic traditions (Galton 1892, 144). Both Lombroso and Galton developed the premise of their arguments from theories of hereditary determinism. Galton believed that hereditary information was passed from parent to offspring in the sperm and the egg and would remain largely unaffected by external changes. In *Memories of My Life*, he wrote:

¹⁹ See, for example, the ideas of the nineteenth-century epidemiologist and medical statistician, William Farr, discussed by John Eyler 1979. Also advocating eugenics was Walter Bagehot (1872) and the sociologist Benjamin Kidd, who promoted eugenics in his 1894 text *Social Evolution*, while Karl Pearson was equally supportive of the concept in *The Grammar of Science* (1892).

²⁰ See introductory chapter of this thesis for detail.

²¹ Galton. 1890. Criminal Anthropology. *Nature* 42, 75-6. Quoted in Ferguson 2007, 76. Ferguson calls the ascendance of eugenics 'one of the darker periods in Western scientific history'.

‘heredity [is] a far more powerful agent in human development than nurture’ (Galton 1908, 266). Depending on how it is preserved, he said, inheritance has the power and strength to either destroy or form great nations. His theory was formed by studying the ancestry of middle or upper-class families, noting that specific talents or genius did appear to be transmitted through the generations. His findings were published in *Hereditary Genius*. By claiming that talent was inherited through generations, allegedly with no interference from the environment, he argued that artificial selection would ensure the production of a more efficient race.²² This led him to his eugenic standpoint.

Galton accepted that variation did exist amid individuals as they possessed different talents and strengths. However, the reverse also meant that some individuals suffered weak minds or criminal nature and it was this form of variation which needed removing: ‘The hereditary taint due to the primeval barbarism of our race...will have to be bred out of it before our descendants can rise to the position of free members of an intelligent society’ (Galton 1883, 56). For Galton, there were two options available in order to breed out injurious characters; firstly, the encouragement of the union of stronger characters through ‘good’ marriages and, secondly, the prevention of the propagation of any negative characters. In his 1865 essay, ‘Hereditary Talent and Character’, Galton wrote:

In strength, agility and other physical qualities, Darwin’s law of natural selection acts with unimpassioned, merciless severity. The weakly die in the battle for life; the stronger and more capable

²² The term ‘race’ was developed in the nineteenth century against the backdrop of the degeneration theory to underline the superiority of certain classes (in particular the white middle and upper classes). The term became a means of denoting the ‘other’ or the deviant and often used to differentiate between the alleged primitive lower classes and the middle class. Biologically and physiologically, theorists such as Galton saw ‘racial variations’ between classes. In some instances, such as ‘race improvement’, the term was used to refer to the white British population. For detailed information on the development of the term ‘race’ in the nineteenth century, see: Hudson 1996 and Stepan 1985

individuals are alone permitted to survive (Galton 1865, 323).

If, as Galton believed, character traits were biologically determined, then a change in environment would not suffice. If a predisposition to degenerate tendencies was innate then no amount of education or moral training would change the outcome.

Galton began to develop the idea of race improvement in 'Hereditary Improvements', which was published in *Fraser's Magazine* in 1873, but it was not until 1883 that Galton coined the term 'eugenics' itself. Galton's theory of eugenics involved encouraging the union and propagation of 'fit' characters, and the prevention of the breeding of those with 'unfit' characters. He believed that: 'stern compulsion ought to be exerted to prevent the free propagation of the stock of those who are seriously afflicted by lunacy, feeble-mindedness, habitual criminality' (Galton 1908, 311). Anyone who argued against this would be classed as 'enemies to the state, and [would have] forfeited all claims to kindness.'²³ Brookes observes that 'his words were chilling ...was he hinting at penury, sterilisation, or even death?' (Brookes 2004, 201). Olive Anderson makes a similar connection, stating that to the eugenicists self-destruction 'was not a waste of the nation's human resources but a beneficial elimination of the least fit of the race's breeding stock' (Anderson 1987, 70). The 'stamping out' to which Proctor referred was a key concept. Even before his introduction of eugenics, Galton stated that: 'every animal ...has to undergo frequent stern examinations before the board of nature, under the law of natural selection; where to be "plucked" is not necessarily disgrace, but is certainly *death*' (my emphasis)' (Galton 1865, 323).²⁴ He remained a fervent advocate at the power of natural selection and believed that those who could not compete would be removed from the organism's society naturally through

²³ Galton, 'Hereditary Improvements'. Quoted. by Brookes, 2004: 201.

²⁴ In the nineteenth-century, the term 'plucked' was used to denote disgraceful failings in examinations at school whereby the student was removed from the institution.

death. Like the Social Darwinists, he queried why this was allowed to occur in other species or races but not within Western civilisation:

One of the effects of civilisation is to diminish the rigour of the application of the law of natural selection. It preserves weakly lives that would have perished in barbarous lands ...There seems no limit to the morbid tendencies of body or mind that might accumulate in a land where the law of primogeniture was general, and where riches were more esteemed than personal qualities (Galton 1865, 326).

Galton looked back on the concept of eugenics as an idea which 'cooperates with the workings of Nature by securing that humanity shall be represented by the fittest races. What nature does blindly, slowly, and ruthlessly, man may do providently, quickly, and kindly' (Galton 1909, 42). Eugenics would supposedly give natural selection its power back, whether this be at the expense of the weaker humans: 'It may seem monstrous that the weak should be crowded out by the strong, but it is still more monstrous that the races best fitted to play their part on the stage of life should be crowded out by the incompetent' (Galton 1865, 410). In 1884, the Swedish sociologist Ludwig Gumplowicz published *Social Philosophy in Outline*, stating that:

To comply with the obvious will of nature is the highest morality. With a perceptible voice nature calls back into its bosom those who are sick and weary of life. To follow this call and to make space for healthy people filled with zeal for life is certainly

no evil deed, but rather a good deed, for there are not too few people on the earth – rather too many.²⁵

Likewise Galton claimed that ‘natural selection ...achieves the good of the whole with scant regard to that of the individual’ (Galton 1908, 323). Galton underlined the bigger picture – for the greater good of society as a whole, sacrifices must be made. In a climate where concerns over national efficiency were rife, ‘Galton ...impressed those who began to take the perceived threat of racial degeneration seriously in the 1890s, and who were receptive to hereditarianism themes’ (Fichman 2002, 55). For example, in 1891, Victoria C. Woodhull Martin published an article entitled ‘The Rapid Multiplication of the Unfit’, which claimed that ‘the best minds of today have accepted the fact that...if imbeciles, criminals, paupers, and [the] otherwise unfit are undesirable citizens, they must not be bred.’²⁶ The solution seemed simple: eradicate the degenerates to save the human race. The physician Havelock Ellis observed: ‘It is evident that [Galton] was on the way to the conclusion that it is negative eugenics with which alone we can be, directly that is to say, actively concerned’ (Ellis 1931, 204-5). Negative eugenics, says Donald Childs, constituted the removal of unfit stock and the ‘unfit’ would be eliminated by sterilisation or euthanasia (Childs 2001, 3).

To remove the degenerate criminal, Lombroso said: ‘there is no choice but to resort to that extreme form of natural selection, death’ (Lombroso 1876, 348). To Lombroso, the atavistic degenerates within society should be removed because they could not be cured. Death as means of natural selection had gradually begun to be viewed as an ameliorative measure to remove the dangers within Western civilisation which could be seen as a threat to the strength of nations and the future of the human race. Morselli saw suicide as ‘a sad law of necessity’ (Morselli 1881, 374). Likewise, in 1885, the British

²⁵ Quoted by Weikart 2002, 337-8.

²⁶ Quoted by Kevles 1985, 85.

doctor William Westcott wrote that: ‘in some cases death is distinctly the lesser evil’ (Westcott 1885, 5). Thus, to eugenicists and other late-century social reformers and physicians, suicide meant progress as being suicidal was a form of degeneracy and therefore the degenerate is removed. Strahan wrote that ‘anyone can imagine cases in which the suicide, instead of injuring society, confers a distinct favour upon it by leaving it’ (Strahan 1893, 216). A reviewer of Morselli’s work in the *London Quarterly Review* summarised this: ‘Suicide, with every other ill that flesh is heir to, is the necessary outcome of evolution.’ (Morselli’s *Suicide* 1881, 279-80).

Morselli references Maudsley throughout his suicide study, demonstrating Maudsley’s international eminence. Maudsley understood that death was the natural conclusion to life’s struggle: ‘so amongst nations individuals decay and fall down in the struggle for life as the dead leaves fall from the living branch’ (Maudsley 1867a, 490). Maudsley argued that this naturalness of human end actually extended to suicide, and that moral judgement should not undermine the rationality of condoning suicide:

[Suicide] is natural in motive and logical in fact, whatever may be thought of it from a moral standpoint [...] Considered objectively, as a physical event, suicide is a natural event of the human dispensation, just a necessary incident from time to time ...and no more out of keeping then than any other mode of death (Maudsley 1892, 50-55).

Maudsley argued that any judgement casting suicide as a sin or a symptom of madness was down to the fact that mankind ‘has never yet sincerely reconciled itself to accept death as a fit event, and deems it nothing better than madness for anyone to do that in quiet consciousness so long as he can avoid it’ (Maudsley 1892, 55). To Maudsley, if suicide was as natural as any other form of death, then it was also necessary as a mechanism of natural selection and an integral part of evolution.

This chapter has established that in some circles the act of suicide was deemed a part of natural selection and a mode of death which should not be

prevented. Natural selection was believed by many to assist the progress of society. Therefore, if suicide was a mechanism of natural selection and an alleged symptom of degeneration, then suicide potentially became a benefit to society rather than a sin against it. Morselli questioned, 'in what ways ought the loser by the law of natural selection to succumb and to leave the place to others who are abler and more fortunate?' (Morselli 1881, 360). After all, he notes in a statement corresponding to the ideas of the eugenists, 'weak and deformed beings do not assist the species, because they would transmit disadvantageous or useless characteristics' (Morselli 1881, 360). Morselli completes his essay with the statement that it is man's obligation to sacrifice himself: 'when in the struggle for life every man will carry in his conscience the feeling of duty, which is that of sacrificing his own egoism to the well-being of the whole race' (Morselli 1881, 374). To Morselli, suicide would be an altruistic and befitting method of ensuring the progression of mankind before racial degeneration took hold completely.

In *Body and Will* Maudsley set out a doctrine which questioned whether or not free-will was truly free. His explorations led him to a chapter on degeneracy and suicide. He believed that degeneration could well eventually override evolution due to the conflict between man's base and primitive passions and his reason and will. Caught in this conflict were altruism and egoism. Egoism was allegedly the selfish atavistic traits in man, while altruism derived from the evolved moral sense and the social nature of humans. Maudsley believed that all human beings were born with primitive characters and 'egoistic passions' which they received from their ancestors (Maudsley 1884, 251). Man could not escape these innate traits and everyone allegedly possessed 'germs of immoral tendencies' (Maudsley 1884, 253) – which is a reference made by Dorian as he gazes at his ancestral portraits (to be discussed in Chapter two). At the same time, morality, reason and social qualities such as altruism were seen as products of evolution which rendered the human race superior and governed those baser instincts. Altruism was a by-product of moral sense and social influence and worked for the greater good of the community. Self-sacrifice was so often seen as essential for the betterment of the collective race. In the suicide theories of Morselli and Strahan, this self-

sacrifice constituted suicide. Evolutionary discourse had permeated debates about social pathologies and self-destruction had not escaped its influence. Late-Victorian fears about the potential decline of Britain's stock in a society haunted by anxieties pertaining to the alleged spread of degeneration were becoming more widespread. These fears were underpinned by the perceived irreversibility of innate hereditary and determined behaviour. In this context, the concept of an altruistic self-sacrifice or a natural weeding out of the country's unfit degenerates was welcomed by the aforementioned theorists. Proctor sums this up in 'Hereditary Traits': 'If a man finds within himself an inherent tendency towards some sin, which yet he utterly detests, insomuch that while the spirit is willing the flesh is weak, or perchance utterly powerless, he must recognise in his own life a struggle too painful and too hopeless to be handed down to others' (Proctor 1878, 431). Late nineteenth-century suicide and degeneration theory hark back to the Gothic villain of the eighteenth century; for example, Ambrosio the monk is weak, and his 'passions overpowered [his] virtue', resulting in him becoming powerless to stop his heinous sins (Lewis 1796, 122). The theories however are equally influenced by emerging scientific thought in the nineteenth century as well as changing attitudes towards suicide, and thus evolve to reflect these significant changes which suggest that suicide is a wholly acceptable outcome for these weak and degenerate [and Gothic] human beings, who must be stopped as they are powerless to stop themselves.

Conclusion

This chapter has contextualised one of the late-nineteenth-century suicide debates which saw suicide as a very real symptom of degeneration. The suicidal, therefore, were viewed as degenerate beings who could not contribute to society. Indeed, many late-Victorians – particularly the middle-classes – feared that degenerates could bring about the decline of British society as a whole. Fittingly, the belief among many alienists and physicians like Maudsley, Morselli and Strahan was that suicide was not just a symptom of degeneration but equally a mechanism of natural selection, designed as a means of eliminating the degenerate and unfit. The nineteenth-century theorists discussed in this chapter saw the benefits of not preventing this mode of death,

at least in certain cases and situations. There were, of course, other theories which will be looked at throughout this thesis.

Gothic narratives engage with current debate and concerns. The genre is generally recognised as cyclical, re-emerging at times to respond to cultural anxieties and fears (Hurley 2002, 194). The next chapter will show how authors who used motifs and conventions of the Gothic including Stevenson, Wilde and Machen were informed by such theories as those discussed above, and the consequential relevance of suicidal degenerate characters in their fiction. It becomes clear that the protagonists are degenerates who cause death and injury to others while living immoral and self-gratifying lives. It is therefore no coincidence that all must end their own lives to prevent further contagion and safeguard others. The authors refute any option of redemption. Clearly suicide was viewed in some circles as a solution to the degenerate problem. The Gothic protagonists which I discuss are portrayed as biologically-determined 'unfit' degenerates, thus their suicide is indeed a symptom of this condition and an appropriately shocking means of ending their reign of terror.

Chapter 2: Degenerate Suicides in late-Victorian Gothic Fiction

Recent scholarship has given attention to the degeneration theories in the era and the corresponding emergence of a ‘new’ wave of Gothic literature. Stephen Arata (1996) examines the effect of the late-Victorian era’s perceived decline on late-nineteenth-century fiction, underlining the multiplicity of readings that degeneration theory allows due to the difficulty in defining the term. The various disciplines upon which degeneration encroached ranged from biology, criminology, psychology and art. Likewise, scholars identify the late-nineteenth-century Gothic link with fears of a dangerous lower-class ‘race’ (Ledger and Luckhurst 2000); the relocation of the era’s Gothic fiction to urban environments (Dryden 2003); the loss of stability of the human identity and the emergence of the ‘abhuman’ (Hurley 1996); or the connection between immorality, aestheticism and degeneration (Dawson 2007). However, contemporary research does not address the incidences of suicide in late-Victorian Gothic fiction, nor does it acknowledge the emergence of suicide as a Gothic trope. Chapter one discussed the popular nineteenth-century consideration of suicide as a symptom of degeneration and thus a necessary outcome. The suicides in the novels discussed below give an insight into the era’s debates and attitudes towards the phenomenon of suicide and degeneration by exploring the representation of some late-nineteenth century Gothic characters and the possible link between these degenerate figures and their suicides.

Jekyll and Hyde (1886)

Arata (1996) discusses the similarities between Hyde and the late-nineteenth-century perception of lower-class degenerates, likening the

descriptions of Hyde to Cesare Lombroso's atavistic criminal man.¹ Julia Reid (2006) outlines Stevenson's interests in evolution, inheritance and the 'savagery' of man's ancestors. Neither, however, examines Jekyll's suicide, despite suicide becoming increasingly integrated into degeneration theory. This section investigates whether Jekyll/Hyde is representative of a late-nineteenth-century degenerate. By determining Stevenson's engagement with wider nineteenth-century theories, I begin to unravel the significance of Jekyll/Hyde's suicide.

Henry Maudsley believed that the moral sense, which encompassed such faculties as social instincts, will and reason, elevated humans to a position above that of the animals and that without the moral sense: '[man is] stripped of all his essential human qualities and degraded almost to his bare animal instincts' (Maudsley 1867b, 115-16).² The Gothicism of his statement can be seen in traditional Gothic novels such as *The Monk*, in which Ambrosio appears to lose all sense of moral reason which culminates in the animalistic hunt of his 'prey' Antonia, his 'wild' and savage murder after which he is described as 'a monster of cruelty, lust and ingratitude'. His 'good' instincts had been overthrown by his 'base' ones (Lewis 1796, 384-85; 65). In his psychiatry, Maudsley alleged that instinctive impulses were transmitted through inheritance, and that criminals and the insane were 'as much manufactured ...as are steam trains and calico-printing machines' (Maudsley 1874a, 30). His determinism excludes the possibility of free-will and he believed that degenerate individuals 'cannot ...regenerate' (Maudsley 1884-5, 5) and that degeneration was a 'transformation ...into an ...abnormal kind' (Maudsley 1884, 241). Without the alleged higher human faculties, an individual would supposedly irreversibly function as primitively as his 'brute'

¹ See chapter one of this thesis.

² The concept of the 'moral sense' is addressed further in chapter three of this thesis. It was essentially a nineteenth-century term which encompassed thoughts, emotions and feeling as well as social instinct, will power and the ability to reason. In short, the 'moral sense' was considered to be those evolved mental faculties which separated humans from the animals.

ancestor (Maudsley 1870, 52). With reference to Gothic convention, Rafter shows that, just as the Gothic deconstructs the familiar and the good, ‘criminal anthropology turned the criminal into a creature utterly different from normal man’ (Rafter 2010, 282). The science of the era, therefore, was often moulded by the sensationalism of the Gothic genre and its obsession with deviation and sin, cruelty and murder. In turn, this then offered a social context in which the Gothic resurgence could take place. For example, similarities between Maudsley’s view and *Jekyll and Hyde* are evident.³ Jekyll’s moral sense is eradicated by his ‘draught’ which strips away his ‘respectability’ and allows him to ‘spring headlong into a sea of liberty’ (Stevenson 1886, 56). The upper-class doctor becomes his hidden ‘other’, a physical manifestation of primitive instincts and desires which then undermine the ‘higher’ human faculties.

Stevenson’s interest in evolution developed while studying at Edinburgh University. During this period Thomas Huxley delivered ‘the most publicised event of 1868’ (Bibby 1972, 63) in Edinburgh, a lecture entitled ‘On the Physical Basis of Life’. Huxley claimed that all life descends from protoplasmic substance. In 1863, Huxley had claimed that humans were related to the ape: ‘it is quite certain that the ape which most nearly approaches man...is either the Chimpanzee or the Gorilla’ (Huxley 1863, 86). Huxley’s work on the human relationship to the ape preceded Darwin’s own *The Descent of Man* (1871) in which Darwin underlined the likelihood that man had descended along with other species from a common ancestor and that man himself had descended from the ape. Absorbing these standpoints, which were increasingly common by the latter part of the century, Stevenson’s Hyde resembles an ape; he is ‘troglodytic’, ‘ape-like’ and appears ‘like a monkey’ (Stevenson 1886, 16, 20, 39). Arata says that the middle and upper classes adopted the term ‘degeneration’ to describe deviances within the lower classes

³Maudsley was often published and reviewed in periodicals like the *Fortnightly Review*, one of the most widespread review journals of the latter part of the nineteenth century. Stevenson and Wilde both published in the *Fortnightly Review*. As a reader of the *Fortnightly Review*, and with Maudsley being reviewed in many non-specialist journals of the era, Stevenson may well have come across his work.

but now found the concept turned upon themselves as their own vulnerability was exposed (Arata 1996, 34). Through Hyde, Stevenson links the beast and the degenerate and postulates the existence of both within the upper class (Jekyll's world).

Stevenson's interest in evolutionary discourse can be seen in some of his other texts both fiction and non-fiction. In *The Manse* (1887) Stevenson considers the relationship between himself, his grandfather, and their ancestry:

What sleeper in green tree tops ...concludes my pedigree? Probably arboreal in his habits ...in him [his grandfather] ...there was an aboriginal frisking of the blood that was not his; tree-top memories, like undeveloped negatives, lay dormant in his mind (Stevenson 1887b, 119).

Stevenson acknowledges a connection between humans and animals, and explores the idea that beneath 'civilised' man a primitive nature lies 'dormant'. Similarly, in *Pastoral*, Stevenson mused:

A certain low-browed, hairy gentleman ...he is often described as Probably Arboreal ...our civilised nerves still tingle with his rude terrors and pleasures; and to that which would have moved our common ancestor, all must obediently thrill (Stevenson 1887a, 104).

Stevenson describes his grandfather's memories as infused with images of an arboreal life, connecting humans and animals through his description of the ancestral tree of life and the primitive blood coursing through all 'civilised' men. Beneath the 'civilised' exterior of 'man' lies the barely-hidden potential for raging desires and 'pleasures' which would render humankind no less base and instinctual than the ape from whence they came. The similarities between *The Manse*, *Pastoral* and *Jekyll and Hyde* are evident:

[Jekyll] thought of Hyde, for all his energy of life, as of something not only hellish but inorganic ...the

slime of the pit seemed to utter cries and voices
...the amorphous dust gesticulated and sinned
...what was dead, and had no shape, should usurp the
offices of life (Stevenson 1886, 65).

The 'dormant' Hyde had previously been without physical form but could now 'usurp' the 'civilised' Jekyll. Hyde represents Jekyll's predisposition to sin which was strong enough to 'usurp' the moral 'offices' of life. Arata notes that the similarities between Hyde and Cesare Lombroso's Gothic 'born criminal' (Lombroso 1876) are behaviourally and physiologically evident (Arata 1996, 34). Lombroso believed that the degenerate was biologically determined, an idea that is evident in *Jekyll and Hyde* through Jekyll's admission that Hyde had always existed within him. Arata claims that Lombroso's work would have been instantly recognisable to Stevenson's readership. Donald Lawler says the same: 'Lombroso's basic ideas had gained currency by the 1880s through...evolutionary psychologists such as Stevenson's friend James Sully.'⁴ Referring to the relationship with Sully, Lawler suggests that Stevenson would himself have had access to ideas on criminal anthropology. Lombroso alleged that the criminal acted on impulse, motivated by their bestial roots and an instinct to kill. These degenerates resembled 'savages', remaining morally and physically undeveloped due to an arrested evolution (Lombroso 1876, 91). Likewise, Hyde is described throughout the story as 'pale and dwarfish' and 'something hardly human' (Stevenson 1886, 15). Lombroso concluded that a degenerate was 'an atavistic being who reproduces in his person the ferocious instincts of primitive humanity and the inferior animals' (Lombroso 1876, introduction). This nature was, says Lombroso, a direct result of a biologically-determined inheritance: 'the most horrendous and inhuman crimes have a biological, atavistic origin in those animalistic instincts' (Lombroso 1876, 91). Maudsley had previously stated: 'no doubt such animal traits [in humans] are

⁴ Lawler 1988, 273. Sully references this friendship in his autobiography (1918, 215).

marks of extreme human degeneracy' (Maudsley 1870, 51). These 'animal marks' were perceived to be transmitted through inheritance. In 1878, Stevenson and Richard Proctor published articles in the same issue of *Cornhill Magazine*.⁵ 'Hereditary Traits' discussed the concept of the inheritance of vices and biological determinism of criminal or immoral behaviour:

Hereditary predisposition to theft, murder, and suicide, has been demonstrated in several cases ...If a man finds within himself an inherent tendency towards some sin, which yet he utterly detests, insomuch that while the spirit is willing the flesh is weak, or perchance utterly powerless ...his own life [is] a struggle too painful and too hopeless to be handed down to others ...the question has been asked, "Why should we act otherwise with beings who, if human in form, are worse than wild beasts?" (Proctor 1878, 430-1).

Proctor felt that if an individual is predisposed to sin then he should be prevented from transmitting this trait. Jekyll also 'found within himself' the tendency to sin: his instincts are concealed by an upper-class desire to be 'distinguished' but ultimately he is powerless against his hidden predispositions (Stevenson 1886, 52). The concern that a man's bestial instincts could govern his behaviour led to a debate about the treatment of criminals. Proctor continued:

The demonstrated fact that a thief or murderer has inherited his unpleasant tendency should be a *raison du plus* for preventing the tendency from being

⁵ Proctor 1878, 411-431. Stevenson published 'AES Triplex' in the same issue, an article which candidly discusses death and the need to face life. Readers of this edition of the *Cornhill Magazine*, therefore, would have been faced with Stevenson's eloquent words on death and life, while simultaneously reading Proctor's essay urging the eradication of those with hereditary predisposition for pathological behaviours.

transmitted any farther. In stamping out the hereditary ruffian or rascal ...we not only get rid of the "grown serpent", but of the worm which 'hath nature that in time would venom breed' (Proctor 1878, 431).

Removing the individual from society was, to Proctor, the only way to prevent the spread of this propensity to violence. He believed that suicide could be a pre-determined hereditary action. Lombroso wrote that '[suicide] demonstrates the irresistible violence of the passions that drive criminals' (Lombroso 1876, 103). He feared that if an individual was capable of violence against himself then he could be capable of violence against others. Suicide thus became a means of 'stamping out' the degenerate.

Hyde is portrayed as a violent degenerate: while murdering Sir Danvers Carew, 'Hyde broke out of all bounds and clubbed Carew...next moment, with ape-like fury, he was trampling his victim under foot, haling down a storm of blows, under which the bones were audibly shattered' (Stevenson 1886, 20). The savagery of this act corresponds with Lombroso's image of the atavistic criminal. In his typical Gothic style, Lombroso wrote that the degenerate felt 'the irresponsible craving of 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' (Lombroso 1876, introduction). Lombroso completely dehumanised his villain, creating the monster so revered in the Gothic traditions of the era, such as the 'savage, inhuman monster' of Manfred (Walpole 1764, 108). Like Lombroso's degenerates, Hyde, too, is unprovoked in his murderous antics and 'drink[s] pleasure with bestial avidity from any degree of torture to another' (Stevenson 1886, 57). Jekyll's potion did not create Hyde; it merely provided a means for this character to emerge from where he lay dormant.

Jekyll fights a 'perennial war' (Stevenson 1886, 52) between his two personas but Jekyll is ultimately unable to refrain from temptation – to quote Proctor, his 'flesh is weak'. Hyde's savagery becomes progressively worse and his actions 'monstrous' (Stevenson 1886, 57). Jekyll is consequently unable to control Hyde's usurpation and the degenerate character gains the upper hand: 'I

had gone to bed Henry Jekyll, I had awakened Edward Hyde' (Stevenson 1886, 58). Attempting to regain control, Jekyll uses Hyde's fear of death to threaten suicide (Stevenson 1886, 65). However, it is not Jekyll but Hyde who commits that final act. Jekyll writes that he only has enough draught left to remain Jekyll for a short time and after that Hyde will resume control forever. He wonders how Hyde will react when left to face the forthcoming 'doom' alone: '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 1886, 66). When Utterson breaks down the study door, he looks upon the 'body of a self-destroyer' – Edward Hyde (Stevenson 1886, 41). Jekyll's prediction was therefore correct; Hyde has 'release[d]' himself.⁶ Stevenson portrays suicide as the appropriate means of removing the uncontrollable and progressively evil Hyde from society. Jekyll had been unable to control his degenerate nature; this corresponds with the contemporary debate about suicide being a symptom of uncontrollable degeneracy – alongside murder and immorality – and thus necessary.

⁶ Mighall defines this use of the term 'self-destroyer' as indicative of 'the strong moral condemnation of the act of suicide' (Mighall 2002, 188). Utterson is a respectable, upper-class lawyer who outwardly condemns the act of suicide. After all, self-murder remained a crime until 1961 and thus Utterson, in his desire to conform wholly to the Victorian gentlemanly ideal, must be shown to condemn the act. Throughout the novel, Utterson strives to find rational explanations for events taking place, maintaining order and reason, adhering to a general Victorian belief that the darker-side of humanity belonged to the working-class masses rather than an upper-class doctor. For example, his conclusion about all Poole has seen: 'Your master, Poole, is clearly seized by one of those maladies that both torture and deform the sufferer...hence the alteration of his voice' (Stevenson 1886, 38). In immediately condemning the suicide, Utterson has done what is expected under the façade of respectability to which he remains clinging – an upper-class façade that Stevenson works to undermine through Jekyll's degeneration. Even upon finding Jekyll's suicide note, Utterson tells Poole to 'say nothing of this paper' in order to preserve Jekyll's 'credit' (Stevenson 1886, 44). To him, suicide would be something to be ashamed of, despite it releasing Jekyll from the evil grip of Hyde and saving society from Hyde's monstrous actions. Barbara Gates refers to the double life which Utterson leads: 'like many eminent Victorians, Utterson leads a mildly double life and feels mildly apprehensive about it' (Gates 1988, 118). Utterson's condemnations, therefore, are an example of Victorian hypocrisy, whereby Utterson would rather see Jekyll's sacrifice as a sin rather than accept the necessity of his actions and the fact that if it could happen to Jekyll, it could happen to any Victorian gentleman.

Nicole Rafter gives an overview of the biological theories about criminal nature in the nineteenth century, in particular the ‘coercive’ eugenics evolved from them. Rafter notes the popularity of the expansion of theories of criminality in evolutionist terms following Darwin’s *Origin* and underlines Francis Galton’s contribution to eugenics and hereditary improvement in this field (Rafter 2008, 113). Maudsley attended Galton’s lecture on eugenics and developed eugenic overtones in his own work – the concept of ‘checking’ the unfit corresponded with the deterministic view that ‘there is a destiny made for man by his ancestors’ (Maudsley 1874a, 22).⁷ Against this backdrop, eugenics offered a means of sterilising degenerates and promoting a stronger society.

Galton believed that eugenics simply promoted the actions of natural selection.⁸ Proctor drew upon Galton’s ideas to advocate the ‘stamping out [of] the hereditary ruffian’ (Proctor 1878, 430). Stevenson read Galton; Reid states that Stevenson and his wife Fanny had a copy of Galton’s *Records of Family Faculties* (1884) on their bookshelf which had been annotated (Reid 2006, 65) and in ‘Pastoral’ Stevenson makes reference to ‘Mr Galton’ (Stevenson 1887a, 90). Stevenson’s Gothic story ‘Olalla’ (1885a) explores eugenicist ideas. It is the tale of a young soldier who falls in love with Olalla, who resides in an isolated house with her ‘degenerate’ mother, and her child-like brother Felipe. The mother is herself the offspring of ‘mad’ father (Stevenson 1885a, 184). Terrifying incidences occur at night in the isolated mansion. While attempting to discover what is happening there, the narrator finds a collection of portraits depicting various levels of physiological degeneration within the family line and begins to realise the extent of the power of inheritance in the spread of degeneration: ‘never before had I so realised the miracle of the continued race ...the weaving and changing and handing down’ (Stevenson 1885a, 198). It becomes apparent that the mother is of vampirical nature, as ‘bestial’ and driven by blood-lust as Hyde. The narrator realises that Olalla’s bloodline is

⁷ For evidence that Maudsley attended this lecture, see Torrey and Miller 2001, 116-17.

⁸ See chapter one of this thesis; also Galton’s *Essays in Eugenics* (1909).

tainted with a 'savage and bestial strain' (Stevenson 1885a, 209). She herself admits 'the hands of the dead are in my bosom; they move me, they pluck me, they guide me. I am a puppet at their command' (Stevenson 1885a, 211).

He is unable to prevent himself falling in love with Olalla. She, however, prefers a life of celibacy, because: 'Man has risen; if he has sprung from the brutes, he can descend again to the same level ...the seed passed on, it was wrapped in flesh, the flesh covered the bones, but they were the bones and flesh of brutes ...we are condemned, to go further downward' (Stevenson 1885a, 211). She fears that the 'disease' of degeneration would continue to spread, and asks: 'Shall I repeat this spell? ...shall I hand down this cursed vessel of humanity?' (Stevenson 1885a, 216). In 'The Manse' Stevenson considered ideas about inheritance: 'Now I often wonder what I have inherited from this old minister ...he moves about in my blood' (Stevenson 1887b, 112). 'Olalla' precedes his later musings but while 'The Manse' speaks positively of hereditary connection, in 'Olalla' Stevenson explores a darker idea, playing to contemporary fears. His narrative states: 'we are all ...the inheritors of sin; we must all bear and expiate a past which was not ours' (Stevenson 1885a, 216). Immorality and degeneracy are shown to be hereditarily innate and thus cannot be expiated. This concept harks back to Gothic tradition of the eighteenth century, which typically expressed 'a fateful burden of the past upon the present ...often by ...violence [and] madness' (Marc-Harris 2008, 19) but is developed to reflect the anxiety of the concept of biological determinism and irreversibility of human nature which haunted the Gothic of the late-Victorian era. The eugenic concept suggested that premature death was natural and thus deaths like suicide were a form of natural selection. Lombroso claimed 'there is no choice but to resort to that extreme form of natural selection, death' to remove degenerate criminals (Lombroso 1876, 348). Because, if immorality or degeneracy was hereditary, what could be the cure?

Stevenson believed that the writer 'should tell unsparingly of the evil and sorrow of the present' (Stevenson 1885b, 56). In representing Hyde as an atavistic and violent degenerate who commits suicide, a year after publishing 'Olalla', Stevenson explores 'present' views on the subject of degeneracy, inheritance and suicide. The *Pall Mall Gazette* – to which Stevenson

contributed – published a lengthy review of Henry Morselli’s work in 1882, stating: ‘[Morselli] ...writes in the spirit of determinism that approaches to that of fatalism about the necessary production of the phenomena of suicide’ (Morselli’s suicide, 1882, 12). Jekyll cannot restrain his degenerate counterpart or undo the effect of the potion. In the context of the ‘spirit’ of the age regarding biological criminality and the ‘stamping out’ of degenerates, this left no conceivable outcome other than death. David Punter recognises that Stevenson has ‘difficulty in seeing any alternative structure for the psyche: once the beast is loose, it can resolve itself only in death’ (Punter 1996, 244). Leslie Stephens, who was Stevenson’s friend as well as the editor of the *Cornhill Magazine*, advocated altruistic suicide: ‘[if an individual’s] life could not serve others, and was only giving useless pain to his attendants’ should he not be free to commit suicide?’⁹

If suicide was a sign of deficiency, like other degenerate symptoms, then, in the climate of eugenics and Social Darwinism, sometimes it was more of a crime to allow the suicidal to remain in unnatural life. *Jekyll and Hyde* can be placed within that dark context of late-nineteenth-century concern. Hyde is too powerful and must be stopped.

The Picture of Dorian Gray

First published in *Lippincott’s Magazine* in 1890, Wilde’s *Dorian Gray* was then published in book format in 1891. Recent scholarship (Dawson 2007) on Wilde’s *Dorian Gray* considers this novel within the contemporary concerns of the era regarding degeneration and aesthetic decadence, drawing on the work of degeneration theorists such as Max Nordau (1895) and, as Dawson notes, Maudsley’s own recriminations of the doctrine ‘art for art’s sake.’¹⁰ Despite a diversity of criticism on *Dorian Gray* and degeneration, however, there has been little sustained research about Wilde’s portrayal of

⁹ Leslie Stephen. 1882. *Science of ethics*. London: Smith, Elder. Qtd. by Gates 1988, 165.

¹⁰ This is discussed in chapter five of this thesis.

Dorian as irredeemable and his subsequent suicide.¹¹ Wilde frequently dismissed the moral platitudes of contemporary fiction and yet he paradoxically ended the story with the clear moral that one cannot escape conscience.

The parallels between Dorian Gray and Jekyll and Hyde are evident, and I will draw on these throughout this chapter (see also Murray 1987). Dorian egoistically pursues his own pleasures by increasingly immoral means. He resembles Hyde's atavistic physiology, because the physical signs of sin are inscribed onto his portrait, Dorian's Gothic 'Other'. Dorian's deterioration is a progressive regression beginning with vanity and culminating in a violent murder, drawing the same links between degeneration, violence and eventual suicide as *Jekyll and Hyde*. This section examines Wilde's *Dorian Gray* in relation to the themes of degeneration, irreversibility, and Dorian's suicide. It is worth noting here that Dorian's death is not willed, as I will discuss in this chapter and more so in Chapter three. However, it is he who aims the dagger at his 'Other's' heart and in doing so, kills himself; this is reminiscent of the views of the biological determinists that suicide is not always willed – sometimes it is merely an inevitable consequence of a pre-determined nature. I examine Wilde's interests in both science and psychology but also acknowledge the manner in which he subverts reality to adhere to his aesthetic ideal 'life imitates art far more than art imitates life' (Wilde 1891a, 39).¹²

Wilde's interest in science was developed while he was at Oxford in 1874 (Wainwright 2011, 494). Wilde wrote his own scientific thoughts in a collection of notebooks collated by Smith and Helfand, who also claim that Wilde had extensive knowledge of the evolutionist Thomas Huxley (1825-

¹¹ Other examples of research into degeneration in *Dorian Gray* include Michael Wainwright's 2011 examination of the debate on heredity and how it impacts upon Wilde's aestheticism, and Nils Clausson's 2003 article demonstrating how Wilde subverts the concept of self-development through the lowering of Dorian to degenerate status.

¹² Heather Seagrott says with regards to Wilde's interest in psychology: 'Wilde was... conversant with scientific theory... Wilde often discussed scientific theory in terms of the relatively new science of human psychology' (1998, 741).

1895).¹³ In Huxley's 1868 lecture 'On the Physical Basis of Life', published in the *Fortnightly Review* in 1869, Huxley states:

Under whatever disguise it takes refuge, whether fungus or oak, worm or man, the living protoplasm not only ultimately dies ...but is always dying and, strange as the paradox may sound, could not live unless it died (Huxley 1869, 136).

Huxley heeds the importance of death in the life-cycle of organisms. Charles Blinderman notes the similarities between Huxley's lecture and an article on William Morris published by Wilde's mentor, Walter Pater (1839-1894), in the *Westminster Review* in October 1868. Blinderman observes that both authors refer to protoplasm as 'supplying continuity among living things' (Blinderman 1982, 480). Likewise, Wilde agreed with the hypothesis that man descended from a simple organism, protoplasm, and includes the 'human mind' in his description:

Neither in the world of thought or in that of matter is the past ever annihilated: progress in both must be made by slowly graduated stages from simple sensations and formless protoplasm, to the highest differentiated organism and the poorest abstractions of thought (Smith and Helfand 1989, 125).

Wilde wrote that each individual is formed by their past, so the past cannot be escaped. His references to protoplasm suggest an affinity with Huxley's publications, and his musings denote a deterministic outlook. Smith suggests: 'in his appropriation of evolutionary theory in the notebooks, Wilde accepted and used [the] hypothesis ...[of] the inheritance of acquired characteristics'

¹³ See their discussion notes in their edition of Wilde's *Notebooks* (1989). In a later essay entitled 'Protoplasmic Hierarchy and Philosophical Harmony: Science and Hegelian Aesthetics in Oscar Wilde's Notebooks' (1991), Smith recognises the influences of Huxley's ideas on protoplasm in *Dorian Gray*.

(Smith 1991, 205). His views on the inherited nature of degenerative tendencies are certainly evident by 1897; during this period when he was incarcerated he wrote to his lover Lord Alfred Douglas a letter which in 1902 became the essay 'De Profundis.' Wilde wrote: 'that dreadful mania you inherit ...you had yourself often told me how many of your race there had been who had stained their hands in their own blood; your uncle certainly, your grandfather [...]many others in the mad, bad line from which you come' (Hart-Davis 1962, 429-33). Although ambiguous in context due to his emotional state, Wilde's words intimate an awareness of issues relating to inheritance, pathology and suicide.

Significantly, Wilde had come across George Romanes' article 'Mental Differences between Men and Women' (1887). In 'Literary and Other Notes III', written for *The Woman's World* journal in 1888, Wilde said that he had read Romanes in the *Nineteenth Century* journal and learnt from him (Clayworth 2004, 117). Romanes underlined the complexities of human nature and the importance for men to exercise self-control. Romanes also referenced Galton and made it clear that he believed there was a natural law of inheritance which determined characters (Romanes 1887, 661). It is interesting to note that Wilde had read about such emerging scientific theories when considering these motifs in *Dorian Gray*. When Dorian stands in front of his portrait and notices the mutation of his image following Sibyl's death, he wonders 'might there not be some scientific reason for it all?' (Wilde 1891b, 86).¹⁴ This question can be extended to his overall degeneration, as Wilde explores the heredity behind his title character's behaviour. Dorian exclaims that 'man was a being with myriad lives...whose very flesh was tainted with the monstrous maladies of the dead' (Wilde 1891b, 113-14), linking his identity with those of his ancestors to underline the inescapability of one's biological determinism. In 1890, the same year in which Wilde was writing *Dorian Gray*, he mused in 'The critic as

¹⁴ Sibyl also commits suicide, driven to her death by Dorian; this is discussed in chapter five.

artist' that: 'the scientific Principle of Heredity ...[has] shown us that we are never less free than when we try to act ...[Heredity] is within us. We may not see it, save in a mirror that mirrors the soul' (Wilde 1891a, 382-3). The will, therefore, could be irrelevant if an internal heredity influence eradicates any real freedom of choice.

The inescapability of heredity was a concept on which Maudsley published widely:

There is a destiny made for man by his ancestors, and no one can elude ...the tyranny of his organisation. The power of hereditary influence in determining an individual's nature ...has been more or less distinctly recognised in all ages (Maudsley 1874a, 22).

Maudsley's theories were widely published and became known amongst authors interested in the psychology of human nature.¹⁵ In Wilde's narrative we see how similar views are explored. As Dorian considers the portraits adorning the corridors of his home, Wilde returns to his 'scientific reason' for Dorian's degeneracy: 'was it young Herbert's life that he sometimes led? Had some strange poisonous germ crept from body to body till it had reached his own?' (Wilde 1891b, 114). With the term 'germ' Wilde harks back to his Oxford notes above. It was also a term used by August Weismann to denote the deterministic aspect of heredity.¹⁶ Weismann had denied the possibility for reform by asserting that germ cells carried the inherited matter and would transmit their material unchanged between parent and offspring without external influence. Variations would occur as a result of the merging of parental germ-cells, and the eventual abnormality in the offspring would not necessarily be the same as parental, but would be as negative. Wilde's choice of word is significant as it underpins the suggestion generated by Dorian's

¹⁵ For information on Maudsley's literary influence, see Collie 1988, 57-74.

¹⁶ See chapter one of this thesis for more detail.

eventual demise: the irreversibility of his degeneration. The question then postulated is whether Dorian's vanity is a predisposition transmitted from a tainted blood line, as Dorian realises 'the future was inevitable. There were passions in him that would find their terrible outlet' (Wilde 1891b, 96), suggesting that his actions are automated scientific responses that cannot be controlled.

Theories about determinism implied that free-will was illusory and denied the prospect of moral responsibility. As Wilde himself said, the 'Principle of Heredity' frees man from the 'trammelling burden of moral responsibility' (Wilde 1891a: 382-3). Likewise, Wilde's short story 'Lord Arthur Savile's Crime' engages with ideas of determinism. Arthur visits a palmist who tells him he is destined to commit a murder. Devastated, Arthur resolves to murder somebody and ensure the deed is done prior to his impending marriage. However, he finds it impossible to commit that fated act. As he watches children playing, he considers his lack of choice about murdering someone, questioning: 'were these children of sin and misery predestined to their end as he to his? Were they, like him, merely the puppets of a monstrous show?' (Wilde 1887, 36).¹⁷ The story underlines Wilde's interest in the 'puppeteer' nature of determinism which he explores in *Dorian Gray* – and which Olalla has made reference to in terms of her own inevitable bloodline (see *Jekyll and Hyde* section above).¹⁸ Arthur questions whether 'escape' from some pre-determined 'secret sin' is possible and concludes that it is not. As Dorian discovers, the only 'escape' is through death. As chapter one of this thesis shows, suicide was frequently linked by alienists as an act carried out as the result of determinism and degeneration, and this coupling will be referred to later in this section.

¹⁷ This was first published as 'Lord Arthur Savile's crime: A story of chiromancy' in *Court and Society* 11 May 1887.

¹⁸ While at the same time, of course, the satirical nature of the story mocks the suggestion of determinism, reiterating Wilde's determination to undermine any single specific reading of his texts.

Wilde's Preface to *Dorian Gray* warns his reader against ascribing a moral to this tale, as Wilde states: 'it is the spectator, and not life, that art really mirrors.' *Dorian Gray* therefore has multiple readings even under the specific umbrella of science and determinism as Wilde subverts any specific endorsement and draws another contemporary evolutionist view into his text. Wilde had written earlier that morality developed from 'what [W. K.] Clifford calls the "Tribal Self": individualism, private property, and a private conscience...do not appear till late in all civilisations: it is the Tribal self wh. is the first mainspring of action, and canon of right and wrong: a savage is not only hurt when a man treads of his own foot, but when the foot of the tribe is trodden on' (Smith and Helfand 1989, 129-30). Wilde explores the 1877 theory of morality penned by W. K Clifford, an exponent of evolution who drew on Darwin's *Descent* to coin his theory. Consciousness was, for Clifford, derived from two aspects of 'self' – the 'individual' and the 'tribal'.¹⁹ The 'individual self' satisfies immediate desires, while the 'tribal self' subverts these desires for the good of the 'tribe'. Clifford stated that initially the 'tribal self' began as an aspect of the consciousness which bettered the progress amongst primitive tribes: 'the tribe ... can only exist by aid of such an organic artifice as the conception of the tribal self in the minds of its members' (Clifford 1875, 8). As a consequence of natural selection favouring 'piety', self-judgement and conscience developed from the 'tribal self'.²⁰ Hereditary transmission ensured that as mankind evolved he retained this 'tribal' aspect of nature. The 'individual self' could sometimes take over, as the impulse towards egoistic gratification was stronger, but eventually conscience and self-judgement would return (Clifford 1875, 9).

¹⁹ Victorian physicians used the term 'consciousness' to describe the phenomenon which gave rise to external awareness and the possession of thought, feelings, emotion and perception. Consciousness was what made someone themselves. See Vanessa Ryan 2012 for more information.

²⁰ As distinct from consciousness; conscience was seen as an innate sense of right or wrong mostly impelling the individual to act morally which is why, in Clifford's theory, it was referred to as the 'tribal self' – the innate part of oneself allowing an individual to act in the manner appropriate to his or her society.

The ‘moral’ of *Dorian Gray*, Wilde wrote in response to criticism, is ‘all excess ...brings its own punishment...Dorian Gray, having led a life of mere sensation and pleasure, tries to kill conscience, and at that moment kills himself (Hart-Davis 1962, 259).²¹ Conscience, as per Clifford’s theory, derived from the ‘tribal self’ which meant putting the needs of one’s society above individual desire. By satiating his own interests, Dorian operates under the ‘individual self’. Clifford predicted that the ‘tribal self’ would retain its place in a man’s consciousness eventually, which happens to Dorian as his conscience begins to emerge towards the end of the novel. The portrait represents the ‘tribal self’ and lies hidden in the attic of Dorian’s consciousness. As the ‘individual self’ in Dorian attempts to retain its strength by overpowering the ‘tribal self’, it, too, must die. The ‘tribal self’ and its derivative the conscience was considered an essential aspect of man’s consciousness.

When studying at Oxford, Wilde commented on the views of Aristotle regarding free-will:

[Aristotle] was fully conscious of the fact that the will is ...a certain creative attitude of the mind which is ...continually influenced by habits, education and circumstance; so absolutely modifiable, in a word, that the good and the bad man alike seem to lose the power of free will; for the one is morally unable to sin, the other physically incapacitated for reformation (Wilde 1884, 141).

Free-will and biological determinism are both undermined by the suggestion of these words that the will is influenced by external sources and therefore never free, and people’s behaviours can be dictated by influences around them, be it a

²¹ Chapter six will also explore the idea that ‘excess’ leads to ‘punishment’, in relation to negative emotions.

palm-reader, education or circumstance.²² In the case of Dorian, it is Henry who dictates his friend's direction. Dorian has a biologically-determined predisposition to vanity but Henry helps the seed to grow, as Dorian himself realises: 'He was dimly conscious that entirely fresh influences were at work within him. Yet they seemed to have come really from himself' (Wilde 1891b, 19). The 'chord' within Dorian that allows Henry to manipulate him has always existed, Henry merely stimulates Dorian's weaknesses and Dorian lacks the will to withstand the 'curious and throbbing' pulses (Wilde 1891b, 19). He was born with weaknesses that existed within him which were then exploited by Henry's assertions. Henry draws Dorian into his hedonistic ideal, believing that by adhering to society's moral code, the passions will never be indulged and that selfishness is the only way to be fulfilled: 'unselfish people are colourless. They lack individuality' (Wilde 1891b, 61). In evolutionary terms, if all individuals were uniform then natural selection would not be able to favour a particular advantageous character. Douglas Mao notes that, through Henry, Wilde explores the concept that social conformity and abstaining from sin may actually be detrimental to progression (Mao 2008, 234). In 'The Critic as Artist', revised in 1891, Wilde referred to sin as essential to evolution:

What is termed Sin is an essential element of progress ...Through [Sin's] intensified assertion of individualism, it saves us from monotony of type ...Self-denial is simply a method by which man arrests his progress, and self-sacrifice a survival of the mutilation of the savage (Wilde 1891a, 128-9).

Gowan Dawson draws parallels between this essay and a speech delivered by Clifford to the Royal Institution in 1868, in which Clifford claims that society's

²² This paradox shows once again Wilde's need to subvert a definitive truth to remain loyal to his aesthetic doctrine. Heather Seacrott acknowledges this: 'For Wilde, art...represents and exploits opposition and variety: art's remarkable power comes from its opportunity to produce "diversity of opinion"' (1998, 756).

evolutionary progress depends on each individual's rejection of 'propriety' (Dawson 2007, 69). Wilde continues to draw on Clifford's controversial views in *Dorian Gray* as Dorian justifies his egoistic pursuit of pleasure:

As he looked back upon man moving through History, he was haunted by a feeling of loss...There had been mad wilful rejections, monstrous forms of self-torture and self-denial ...whose result was degradation (Wilde 1891b, 104).

The passage suggests that 'tribal' altruism was not beneficial to society, a theme which Wilde continued in 'The Soul of Man under Socialism', in which he suggests that self-sacrifice is detrimental:

The majority of people spoil their lives by an unhealthy and exaggerated altruism ...Evolution is the law of life, and there is no evolution except towards Individualism. Where this tendency is not expressed, it is a case of artificially arrested growth, or of disease, or of death (Wilde 1891c, 127).

Wilde satirises theories such as those of Morselli who had concluded that suicide should be viewed as a means of self-sacrifice for the benefit of society: 'every man will carry in his conscience the feeling of duty, which is that of sacrificing his own egoism [and life] to the well-being of the whole race' (Morselli 1881, 374). Far from sacrificing egoism, characters such as Lord Henry instead argue for the necessity of individualism, trumpeting the idea that one becomes 'strangled' by society's enforced morality and resulting repression.

Wilde's assertion that selfishness is the key to individuality subverts the concept of the altruistic – 'tribal' – self. This subversion questions any definitive moral message. In one reading, Dorian's suicide represents the consequences of the 'individual self' attempting to override the 'tribal self'. In another, it demonstrates an irreversibility of a pre-determined nature. Wilde continuously and ambiguously destabilises these readings, evoking multiple

readings of *Dorian Gray* by drawing in different aspects of contemporary theory. On 8 July 1890 he wrote to the editor of *Scot's Observer*: 'An artist, Sir, has no ethical sympathies ...Each man sees his own sin in *Dorian Gray*. What Dorian's sins are nobody knows. He who finds them has brought them' (Hart-Davis 1962, 265-66). Paradoxically, however, to the journalist Arthur Fish he wrote: 'I think [*Dorian Gray*] will be ultimately recognised as a real work of art with a strong ethical lesson inherent in it' (Hart-Davis 1862, 264). Wilde continuously refused a monolithic authorial opinion, creating instead an ever-changing dialogue of contemporary debates.

Clearly part of Wilde's 'message' conversely refers to the dangers of excessive passion and desire – or to revert back to Wilde's interest in Clifford's theory, the dangers inherent in the dominance of the 'individual self.' The idea that conscience was necessary for human evolution contradicts Henry's hard-line individualism. Dorian's egoistic desire for youth and new sensations dominate him and subvert his conscience until ultimately his life is sacrificed under the domination of excess desires. Maudsley believed that vanity was one of the pathological egoistic passions which would mark degeneration:

Vanity, like other egoistic passions ...must not grow beyond a certain mean; the further it exceeds that measure, the further it puts the individual as a social element out of the reach of the controlling, modifying, directing influences of the social organisation; until at last he becomes a morbid element, useless or injurious in it (Maudsley 1884, 286).

Maudsley felt that vanity had a 'social origin', beginning through praise from others (Maudsley 1884, 286). Both Basil and Henry feed Dorian's vanity. Maudsley stated that when vanity flourished, the individual degenerated beyond the influence of society. The obvious 'moral' to which Wilde had referred recapitulated the concept of the pathological consequences of a selfish and pleasure-seeking existence through the descent and death of Dorian.

Linda Dryden notes the similarities between *Jekyll and Hyde* and *Dorian Gray* (Dryden 2003, 118-120). Dorian's beauty means the animalistic nature of his degeneracy is easily overlooked. There are nevertheless parallels between Hyde's murder of Carew and Dorian's murder of Basil. As discussed above, Hyde's murderous attack is described in terms of its sudden and animalistic savagery. Likewise, Dorian murders Basil in a fit of passion:

Suddenly an uncontrollable feeling of hatred for Basil Hallward came over him ...The mad passions of a hunted animal stirred within him ...He rushed at him and dug the knife into the great vein that is behind the ear, crushing the man's head down on the table and stabbing again and again (Wilde 1891b, 120).

Both Dorian and Hyde suffer uncontrollable and feral bouts of anger, like Lombroso's Gothic 'born criminal'. Unlike Hyde, Dorian's frenzied attack is the result of his paranoia over persecution. Like Hyde, however, it is an impulsive and instinctive response and Dorian's behaviour becomes increasingly base, marked by the changes to the portrait: 'the face painted on the canvas could grow bestial, sodden, and unclean' (Wilde 1891b, 98). Again, in chapter eleven, the narrative states:

The worship of the senses has often ...been decried, men feeling a natural instinct of terror about passions and sensations that seem stronger than themselves, and that they are conscious of sharing with the less highly organised forms of existence (Wilde 1891b, 104).

Wilde explores some of the concerns of his era regarding the animalistic physiology of the degenerate criminal and that human nature is, beneath the evolved human faculties, base and carnal while retaining the rhetoric of gothic villainy.

In March 1883 Wilde was asked by his friend Robert Sherard if he would save a man if he jumped in the river. Wilde replied that ‘his suicide would be ...the definite result of scientific process, with which I would have no right whatsoever to interfere’ (Sherard 1905, 50). This suggests that suicide was an act which should not be interfered with. Increasingly, theorists of both suicide and degeneration had begun to consider suicide a necessary consequence of evolution and, in the majority of cases, a ‘scientific’ and hereditary condition, as chapter one details. Morselli wrote: ‘[suicide] is a hard but unavoidable consequence of human evolution and unconscious natural selection ...[in those] who are weak, degenerate ...in whom only the basest passions are developed’ (Morselli 1881, 275). If suicide was a natural act for someone ill-adapted to continue living in Western society without injury or harm to themselves or others, as discussed in this chapter and the previous, then Dorian’s death is seemingly a natural outcome of his life of self-gratification and passion. He does, after all, cause harm and corruption to those around him and his death is the end result of a determined ‘scientific process’.

Wilde’s interest in the subject of determinism is shown again in *Dorian Gray*:

There are moments, psychologists tell us, when the passion for sin ...so dominates a nature that every fibre of the body, as every cell of the brain, seems to be instinct with fearful impulses. Men and women at such moments lose the freedom of their will. They move to their end as automatons move. Choice is taken from them (Wilde 1891b, 150).

The ‘individual self’ has the power to dominate the ‘tribal self’, to use Clifford’s terminology. Clifford argued that the ‘tribal self’ would eventually retain control. However, arguments like Morselli’s denote an increasing belief

among late-nineteenth-century alienists that perhaps the socially-conscious ‘self’ would not regenerate.²³ Read within this deterministic context, the passage above suggests that Dorian is compelled to commit suicide as a pre-determined part of his passionate nature. Suicide was seen as an outcome of degeneracy but also a symptom of it, and thus Dorian’s death is an end which fits with Wilde’s description of his ‘moral’ and with the contemporary concerns of his era.

Again subverting Henry’s words throughout the novel on the importance of egoism, towards the end of the novel the narrative suggests that an irrepressible pursuit of pleasure could thwart the ability of an individual’s ‘higher’ senses to resist impulses: ‘the passions must either bruise or bend. They either slay the man, or themselves die’ (Wilde 1891b, 159). Stevenson, like Wilde, referred to humans as automatons (Stevenson 1884, 93). Stevenson and Wilde explore the idea that instinct lies within the oppressed exterior of man, but when released with no guidance in place the force can be destructive. Jekyll and Dorian are ultimately driven to kill their ‘Other’ as the only means of preventing the progressive degeneration of moral sense including freedom of will. Huxley discussed the semi-automata of man and animal but believed that man had enough will to make some of his own choices (Huxley 1874, 555-581). In contrast, Wilde and Stevenson show that suppression was not always something someone had the will to master. Jekyll, for example, was not strong enough to battle his own desires and died at the hands of his degenerate ‘Other’. Dorian’s death comes from his attempt to kill his ‘Other’. In both stories, it is the degenerate side of the persona – the side representing overbearing instinct and passion – who is ultimately responsible for their suicide; Dorian and Hyde. This engages with the ideas of some late-nineteenth-century physicians that suicide was another symptom and outcome of

²³ See chapter one of this thesis for more detail.

degeneration, and sometimes the only method of ensuring the end of that degenerate individual.

The portrait is Dorian's soul and he realises 'it had been like a conscience' (Wilde 1891b, 176). The portrait and Dorian are one. Dorian tries to separate himself from the portrait in stabbing it: 'It would kill the past, and when that was dead, he would be free' (Wilde 1891b, 177). However, Wilde indicates that man cannot amputate himself from his conscience, his soul, or his past. The only means of finding his eventual longed-for peace was for Dorian to die, to 'kill this monstrous soul-life, and without its hideous warnings, he would be at peace' (Wilde 1891b, 177). Conscience can only be put to rest through death. Stevenson had written in a letter to Edmund Gosse in 1886 that 'the sods cover us, and the worm that never dies, the conscience, sleeps well at last' (Colvin 1900, 12-13). We know that Wilde had read Stevenson's letters and both authors suggest that the conscience could not die while the person to whom it belonged remained alive.²⁴ Wilde saw the soul as man's beauty.²⁵ If it could not be cleansed, then man could not live with it. His soul is scarred with sin, so Dorian must die.

Dorian's suicide is a passionate attack on the object which he holds responsible for his pathological decline. His suicide is carried out in a fit of anger under the grip of his passionate 'individual' self. He attempts to regain his morality by saving Henrietta but, ultimately, his altruistic 'Other' cannot stave off the violent instincts which have already caused so much death and destruction. His death is his final egoistic act, as it relieves *himself* of torment: 'it was the living death of his own soul that troubled him' (Wilde 1891b, 175). His suicide can be read in one respect as an outcome of natural selection, the inability of a tormented and ruined man to survive. Wilde had developed an interest in the evolutionary and the deterministic context in which he was

²⁴ Wilde writes about reading Stevenson's letters in his letter to Robert Ross (Hart-Davis 1962, 520).

²⁵ In a lecture given in 1882 he proclaimed 'What is the soul? It is the essence of perfect beauty' (Mikhail 1979, 104).

writing. His portrayal of the degenerate portrait plays to this all the more. Dorian covers his portrait with the purpose of: 'hid[ing] something that had a corruption of its own, worse than the corruption of death itself – something that would breed horrors and yet would never die' (Wilde 1891b, 96). The concept of continuing to 'breed horror' has eugenic connotations suggesting that Dorian must be killed to prevent this monstrous prospect.

Wilde drew his interests in science, evolution, inheritance and psychology into *Dorian Gray*. Dorian's suicide is a plot device which, as we will see in subsequent chapters, can be interpreted in a multiplicity of ways. The narrator states, 'man was a being with myriad lives and myriad sensations, a complex multiform creature' (Wilde 1891b, 113). So, too, is Wilde's story and the interpretation of suicide itself.

***Wormwood* (1890)**

Despite her maintaining a literary career spanning into the twentieth century, literary scholarship on Marie Corelli (1855-1924) has been sparse. William Stuart Scott wrote the first biography on Corelli in 1955 (Scott 1955) and since then there has only been a smattering of recent criticisms.²⁶ Carol Davison draws parallels between *Wormwood* and the Gothic genre, noting the significance of the portrayal of the hidden dangers within the labyrinthine streets of Paris (Davison 2010, 68-85). *Wormwood* is discussed in more detail in subsequent chapters (namely, chapter four and five) but I wanted to draw attention to Corelli's representation of the degeneration theory. Gaston suffers degenerative 'decay' after embarking on a quest to make 'an end of conscience' through absinthe (Corelli 1890, 135). Dorian turns to opium to escape the realities of his conscience while Gaston finds solace with his 'blessed balm' (Corelli 1890, 135). The protagonist, Gaston, does not commit

²⁶ For example, Federico (2000) and MacLeod (2004), the latter of whom includes an extensive biography of Corelli in the introduction to her edition of *Wormwood*.

suicide but embarks on a deadly journey of self-destruction resulting in the suicide of his 'Other', Gessonex.

Gaston had been a kind person before becoming addicted to absinthe following his heartbreak when his fiancée Pauline de Charmilles falls in love with Silvion Guidel. Gaston is introduced to absinthe by Gessonex, who is to Gaston as lethal as Henry is to Dorian. Corelli hints at the inevitability of Gaston's destruction: 'my casual meeting with [Gessonex] had been foredoomed!' (Corelli 1890, 145). Corelli's understanding of ideas about inheritance permeating the late-nineteenth century are evidenced by Gessonex's 'experiment' on a degenerate boy who is described as:

A towzled half-naked creature...crouched in one of the darkest comers, biting a crust of bread and snarling over it in very much the fashion of an angry tiger-cat ...[with] the countenance of a mingled monkey and savage, — brutish, repulsive, terrible in all respects (Corelli 1890, 259-60).

Corelli was a contributor to the *Belgravia* magazine in the 1880s. In 1881 the *Belgravia* published Andrew Wilson's 'The Mind's Mirror', an article which considered the theories of Carpenter, Spencer and Maudsley when discussing the evolution of the mind. Wilson outlined the common anthropological depiction of degeneration: 'Every act and expression is not originally of the man but of the truly animal' (Wilson 1881, 366). Wilson quoted Maudsley's *Body and Mind*: 'we can trace animalism in savagery; and in the degeneration ...the unkinding, so to say, of the human kind' (Wilson 1881, 366). Gessonex tells Gaston that the animalistic boy was 'a production ...of Absinthe and Mania together' (Corelli 1890, 267). His grandfather had committed suicide, leaving a son who suffered from absinthe-induced mania. He married an exotic dancer and impregnated her before committing suicide. The boy's story corresponds with Maudsley's case studies: 'Of five children from an insane mother and a drunken father, one was suicidal, two suffered imprisonment ...one daughter was insane, the other was imbecile. Suicide, crime, insanity and imbecility were thus different manifestations of a morbid type' (Maudsley

1870, 409). Gessonex's 'experiment' explores the pathological outcome of the hereditary transmission of degenerate characters, and suggests that suicide is a symptom of degeneration. Corelli explores the atavistically degenerate and suicidal outcomes should procreation between the 'unfit' occur, a fear utilised by the eugenicists to underpin their own argument.

In alcoholism, Maudsley saw an arrest of the moral sense: 'nowhere can be found a more miserable specimen of degradation, of moral feeling and impotence of will than is presented by the person who has become the abject slave of either of these *pernicious indulgences*' (Maudsley 1867b, 270 – my emphasis). Gaston's will is overthrown by his addiction: 'I was a passive slave to some unseen but imperative master of my will!' (Corelli 1890, 157). Without the 'human' faculties of moral sense and will, man was allegedly bestial; Gaston acknowledges this idea, stating in his narrative that 'we are mere animals' (Corelli 1890, 12). The problem with Darwin, Gessonex says, was that '[Darwin] traced ...man's ascent from the monkey – but he could not calculate man's descent to the monkey again' (Corelli 1890, 182). The narrative suggests that Darwin's *Origin* had been too progressive, ignoring the possibility of evolutionary reversion. Like Dorian and Hyde, Gaston and Gessonex cause harm to others. Gaston's descent is atavistic: '[Absinthe] can ...kill all gentle emotions, and rouse in a man the spirit of a beast of prey!' (Corelli, 1890: 149). As seen above, Maudsley described degeneration as the 'unkinding' of an organism, and thus Gaston's degeneration is further reinforced by his admission that 'my former ideas and habits of life were completely and absolutely reversed' (Corelli 1890, 182). 'Reversed' to a brute, as Gessonex states: 'I know now how we can physiologically resolve ourselves back to the primary Brute period, if we choose – by living entirely on Absinthe!' (Corelli 1890, 263). Corelli paints a dark picture of a modern descent into the vice-ridden urban underworld.

Like Jekyll's 'draught', Gaston and Gessonex have their own potion, '[a] pernicious drug that of all accursed spirits ever brewed to make of man a beast, does most swiftly fly to the seat of reason to their attack and dethrone it' (Corelli 1890, 378). As per Maudsley's belief that dethroned reason led to degeneracy, Gaston makes the same claim: 'Reason...can easily be perverted

to false and criminal ends' (Corelli 1890, 164). His continued indulgence of absinthe intensifies the degeneracy of his character and Gaston kills Silvion: 'I laughed, as I sprang at him anew, and shook him furiously to and fro as a wild beast shakes its prey' (Corelli 1890, 245). Like Hyde, Gaston lives by savage impulse. Consequently, 'the savage cannot be gotten out of him' (Corelli 1890, 267), suggesting a fatalistic irreversibility of degeneration.

Gaston questions the existence of the concept of 'conscience' in a satirical passage:

Whosoever has Absinthe for his friend...has made an end of conscience ...let us not forget to thank the fine progressive science of to-day! ...we are merely physical organizations of being ...this Conscience that is so much talked about, is nothing after all but a particular balance or condition of the grey pulpy brain-matter (Corelli 1890, 149-50).

Corelli's narrative mocks the increasingly secular reduction of self-conscious phenomena to science and in contrast Dorian, Jekyll, Gaston and Gessonex are all persecuted by a seemingly very-real conscience, increasingly needing more toxins to repress it. Gaston orders 'the elixir that my very soul seemed a thirst for!' (Corelli 1890, 163-4). Similarly, Dorian needs opium to diminish any lingering self-consciousness: 'memory, like a horrible malady, was eating his soul away ...he wanted to escape from himself' (Wilde 1891b, 149). Poisonous substances are used in an attempt to repress their humanity. Gaston and Gessonex are pursued by the spectre of conscience in much the same manner as Dorian. Gaston declares: 'I felt the horrible monster at my heels ...a creature from whom there was no possible escape' (Corelli 1890, 373-5). Gaston's 'Other', Gessonex, also finds himself pursued by this creature; Gaston notes how Gessonex looks over his shoulder as he walks (Corelli 1890, 281) and later, after Gessonex commits suicide, Gaston 'wondered what sort of creature the Absinthe-fairy had sent to him so persistently that he should have seen no other way out of it but suicide' (Corelli 1890, 318). Persecuted Gessonex, whose actions are mirrored by Gaston throughout the novel, shoots himself.

Barbara Gates says that the depiction of persecution in Gothic suicides represents minds ‘tormented by grotesque hallucinations [...] ultimately they are driven to their deaths’ (Gates 1988, 109-111), as Gessonex is driven to his.

Gaston’s vice-driven life culminates in a Gothic, atavistic ‘Hyde-like’ degeneracy:

I am a slinking, shuffling beast, half monkey, half man, whose aspect is so vile, whose body is so shaken with delirium, whose eyes are so murderous, that if you met me by chance in the day-time you would probably shriek for sheer alarm! (Corelli 1890, 418)

Andrew Wynter wrote: ‘it is true that nature ...sometimes – out of mercy to the race – takes the matter into her own hands ...by extinguishing the ...habitual drunkard’ (Wynter 1875, 71-3). Extinguished before the effects of alcohol-induced degeneracy spread, the effects of which we see with Gessonex’s ‘experiment’. Those slaves to such vices were, says Corelli’s narrative: ‘the canker of the city – the slaves of mean insatiable madness which *nothing but death can cure*’ (Corelli 1890, 418; my emphasis). Just as for Hyde, Dorian and Gessonex, there is one outcome for self-indulgence where conscience and degradation haunt every step. They descend to a point of degeneration from which there can be no return and ‘nothing but death can cure.’

The Great God Pan (1894)

As with Corelli, the scholarship on Arthur Machen (1863-1947) is limited. Linda Dryden recognises the Gothicised London which Machen creates (Dryden 2003) while Kelly Hurley describes Machen’s representations of the post-Darwinian mutability of the Gothic monster (Hurley 1996). Adrian Eckersley underlines the connection between Machen and the theory of degeneration, although not in relation to hereditary or suicide theory (Eckersley 1992). More recently, Kimberley Jackson (2013) has used some of Machen’s lesser-known stories to indicate that he actually challenged the late-nineteenth-century degeneration theory (although the fact that it exists so prevalently in his more widely-published texts suggests otherwise). I have found no research

focussing on the male suicides in *The Great God Pan*, which I examine in detail in chapters four and five. This section attempts to gauge an understanding of Machen's interest in degeneration and inheritance which will potentially show why Machen's main degenerate character commits suicide.

Until his move to London in 1885, Machen lived in Wales. He came to appreciate his environment, believing that the world around him acted as a veil to a secret world (Machen 1922, 24-5). In his writing, Machen wanted to capture these mysterious secrets. In *The Great God Pan*, Dr Raymond tells his companion Clarke: 'the shadows ...hide the real world from our eyes' (Machen 1894, 14). Raymond tells Clarke that he will be attempting to 'lift the veil' concealing the real world. His experiment involves rearranging some nerve cells in the brain of his subject, Mary, which will allow her to see the God Pan. It allegedly works and there is an unseen union between Mary and Pan, which leaves Mary a 'hopeless idiot' but impregnated (Machen 1894, 22). Helen Vaughan is the product of an unnatural union between a God who is an atavistic hybrid of man and animal and a woman enfeebled by idiocy. Helen herself becomes sexually promiscuous and immoral. She engages upper-class men in depraved behaviour which leads to their suicide and carries with her an aura of evil.

Machen was an avid reader. He read his father's entire collection of periodicals and journals such as *Chamber's*, the *Cornhill Magazine* and the *Welcome Guest* (Machen 1922, 35). Machen thus came across articles in the 1870s and 1880s on degeneracy and evolution. Proctor's 'Hereditary Traits', for example, with its definite views on the inheritance of degenerate tendencies, appeared in *Cornhill* in 1878. Similarly, in the years to which Machen refers, *Cornhill* published articles on eugenics and dual consciousness,

while *Chamber's* published about suicide.²⁷ Machen was also influenced by Wilde and Stevenson. His letter of 1894 to his publisher shows that he had read *Jekyll and Hyde* (Dobson 1993, 238), while his autobiography conveys his enjoyment of Stevenson's *New Arabian Nights*²⁸:

[In] 1894 ...I set about the writing of the said "Three Impostors", a book which testifies to the vast respect I entertained for the fantastic, "[New Arabian Nights](#)" manner of [R. L. Stevenson](#) (Machen 1923, 14).²⁹

Likewise, Machen dined with Wilde twice in 1890 as *The Great God Pan* was taking shape. Machen wrote that he had read 'Dorian Gray' in *Lippincott's Magazine* and 'was a good deal impressed by it' (Valentine 1995, 29). *The Great God Pan*, *Dorian Gray* and *Jekyll and Hyde* all convey the dangers in 'lifting the veil' and consequential degeneracy: Jekyll's potion exposes the base realities beneath his civilised exterior, and when Dorian actively 'lifts' the cover from his portrait, he is exposed to the truth of his depraved character. Likewise, Helen is the consequence of Raymond's attempt to uncover the realities of human life on earth, uncovering instead the realities of evolutionary reversal.

The result of an unnatural conception, Helen Vaughan's situation is reminiscent of late-nineteenth-century theories concerning the inheritance of pathological tendencies. Helen's character demonstrates the ways in which degeneracy could manifest from generation to generation. Strahan wrote: '[Heredity] can have but one result, and that is, the cultivation and increases of insanity, and other nervous diseases and degenerations ...epilepsy ...suicide,

²⁷ For example: Eliza Lynn Linton. 1873. Our civilisation. *Cornhill Magazine* 27, 671-78; R A Proctor. 1873. Do we have two brains? *Cornhill Magazine* 31, 149-66; Anon. 1884. Suicide. *Chamber's Journal*, 1(19), 291-295.

²⁸ *New Arabian Nights* was a compilation of three stories written by Stevenson which includes 'The Suicide Club', discussed in chapter four.

²⁹ See also David Trotter's introduction to his 1995 edition of *The Three Imposters*. Trotter clearly details Stevenson's influence on Machen and his inspiration on Machen to develop his Gothic style. Machen's *Three Imposters* was also based on Stevenson's *The Dynamiter* (Dryden 2003, 109).

hysteria, idiocy' (Strahan 1892, 87). Helen's suicide is in keeping with the idea that suicide is the end result of a degenerate nature. For example, Strahan stated: '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' (Strahan 1892, 85-6). The *Chamber's* article 'On Suicide' asserted: 'a great number of those who put an end to their own lives are members of families in which instances of suicide or insanity have occurred' (On suicide 1884, 295). Helen's mother was insane – and we know that Machen read his father's *Chamber's* collection prior to 1885 (Machen 1922, 35).

In *The Novel of the Black Seal*, Machen further explores the concept of inherited degeneracy. Professor Gregg searches for evidence of an ancestral race called 'The Little People'. The belief of their existence is founded on a degenerate boy, Jervase Cradock, whom Gregg describes as 'not too sharp [and] has fits at times' (Machen 1895a, 38). These 'fits' adhere to Strahan's assertion that epilepsy was a symptom of degeneration and heredity. As Jervase fits he makes a sound 'like the cry of a wild beast in anguish' (Machen 1895a, 38). Gregg discovers that Jervase has 'something of the blood of the "Little People"' (Machen 1895a, 41) as he was fathered by one of 'The Little People' following the violation of his mother. Jervase is degenerate, his face 'blackened to a hideous mask of humanity' as his body 'writh[es] like a wounded blind-worm, and an inconceivable babble of sounds [comes] bursting and rattling and hissing from his lips' (Machen 1895a, 38). Machen shows the effects of unnatural unions, exaggerating the late-nineteenth-century eugenic concerns pertaining to the prevention of unsuitable relations which aid the spread of degeneracy. Hyde and Helen are threatened with exposure and capital punishment should they not take their own lives. They are 'unfit' to live and suicide is the only means of ridding them from society without exposing the existence of such degeneracy to civilisation as a whole. Helen and Hyde must take their lives before their respective societies came to realise the truth about what lies beneath the veil of humanity. Mark Valentine states that Machen's degenerates tap 'deep sources of unconscious dread for the Victorians' (Valentine 1995, 41). They represent a mysterious and threatening past in a

climate concerned about the implications of man's evolutionary history and of the threatening nature of inheritance; Machen admitted that he felt that the human mind 'may be a survival from the rites of the black swamp and the cave' (Machen 1923, 17). To Machen, the past could encroach upon the present, a typically Gothic concept. The idea of the continuation of atavistic beings resonates with the late-nineteenth-century eugenicist view that degenerates must be halted before they are able to spread and cause harm.

Jervase's death conveys a protoplasmic reversion denoting Machen's knowledge of Huxley's protoplasmic theory (see above). Jervase's body swells and then 'something pushed out from the body there on the floor, and stretched forth a slimy, wavering tentacle' (Machen 1895a, 41). The description conveys the concern over the mutability of the human form, an idea also explored in the *Great God Pan*. Villiers meets an old friend, Herbert, who tells him that he married a woman who 'corrupted' his soul (Machen 1894, 42). This alleged 'corruption' denotes the fears concerning the contagious influence of degenerates upon society. Machen portrays Helen as possessing a 'strange beauty' and, later, as 'at once the most beautiful woman and the most repulsive' (Machen 1894, 27, 41, 47). Physiological denotations of degeneracy featured prevalently in the late-nineteenth century, but Machen suggests that beauty was capable of concealing degeneracy. In *The Black Seal* Professor Gregg writes: 'human flesh may now and then ...be the veil of powers which seem myriad to us – powers which, so far from proceeding from the heights and leading men thither, are in reality survivals from the depths of being' (Machen 1895ba, 38). Likewise, in *Novel of the White Powder* (1895), Francis Leicester has, by the power of a strange white potion reminiscent of Jekyll's own liberating-draught, transformed into a pleasure-seeking, careless and indulgent young man, before degenerating further into a 'symbol and presence of all evil and all hideous corruption' (Machen 1895b, 204). Ultimately, his fate sees him devolve into a 'putrid mass seething with corruption and hideous rottenness...melting and changing before our eyes' (Machen 1895b, 207). The human form could seemingly hide the hideous biological reversion from which the individual has evolved and can quickly devolve. This is further evidenced by Helen's death scene:

The firm structure of the body that I had thought to be unchangeable, and permanent as adamant, began to melt and dissolve ...I saw the body descend to the beasts whence it ascended ...I watched, and at last I saw nothing but a substance as jelly ...a horrid and unspeakable shape, neither man nor beast (Machen 1894, 98-99).

As Helen dies she devolves. Machen believed that: 'there is a considerable body of unimpeachable evidence in favour of the hypothesis that the human consciousness is occasionally displaced by the bestial consciousness' (Machen 1923, 103). As such, Helen is encouraged to commit suicide by Villiers. Dr Raymond admits that 'Helen Vaughan did very well to bind the cord about her neck and die', suggesting a necessity to the suicide for Machen's degenerate figure (Machen 1894, 104).

In *Glutting the Maw*, Sanderson writes that 'suicide is the consequence of ...a life brought into being by the wrong kind of procreation' (Sanderson 1992, 54). Helen certainly had 'the wrong kind of procreation'. Negative eugenics called for the removal of the threat of degenerate contagion. Raymond's words above intimate that Helen's suicide should be considered a positive outcome. Nordau claimed that 'only by each individual doing his duty will it be possible to dam up the invading mental malady' (Nordau 1895, 557). For characters such as Helen, this 'duty' is to commit suicide. After all, said Proctor, 'why should we act otherwise with beings who, if human in form, are worse than wild beasts?' (Proctor 1878, 430-1).

Conclusion

The four authors discussed explore the contemporary debate in the late-nineteenth century surrounding degeneration, inheritance and determinism. Degeneration theories became increasingly linked not just with Gothic convention but with the ideas postulated by the eugenicists and criminal anthropologists, who used the emergence of deterministic 'hard' inheritance to hypothesise a bleak future for mankind should the dangers of all kinds of degeneration not be stopped. In the texts studied above, the protagonists are

degenerates who cause death and injury to others while living immoral and self-gratifying lives. It is no coincidence that all must end their own lives to prevent further contagion. Suicide was seen by many theorists such as Morselli, Strahan and Maudsley as a symptom of degeneracy and by ending the lives of their degenerate characters through suicide, the authors in this chapter adhere to this concept.

The self-murder of the Gothic protagonists thus effectively expound the increasingly common view amongst late-nineteenth-century physicians that suicide was an essential component of natural selection. Suicide meant the death of the Gothicised inorganic or unfit individuals who could not adapt to the ethics of society as a result. Maudsley wrote: '[Suicide] is a supreme, final and ...fit act of adjustment to the outer world ...the mightiest equally with the meanest human events are no more than the smallest things in an infinite and unknown order of evolution and dissolution' (Maudsley 1892, 50, 55). If suicide was as natural as any other form of death, then it was also necessary as a function of natural selection, the only means of ensuring the prevention of the spread of degeneration. The warning was stark – if individuals gave in to their base desires, then they set themselves up for a conscience-less existence which could not be absolved. Suicide and degeneration co-exist in these Gothic worlds, establishing suicide as a part of the new Gothic tradition.

Nordau saw 'moral insanity' as the first indication of degeneration as the moral sense was eradicated through lack of use (Nordau 1895, 22-25).³⁰ The next chapter looks at *Jekyll and Hyde* and *Dorian Gray* under this term, analysing how Stevenson and Wilde responded to the changing medical and psychological views regarding the question of suicide into their texts.

³⁰ See also Eckersley 1992, 280.

Chapter 3: Suicide and Moral Insanity

This chapter explores the suicides of Jekyll/Hyde and Dorian Gray as consequences of moral insanity. Moral insanity was a nineteenth-century medical term for diseases of the mental faculties which did not affect intellectual capacity. I look at some of the nineteenth-century's widely-published ideas on moral insanity. Robert Mighall has briefly examined Stevenson's *Jekyll and Hyde* in relation to moral insanity (Mighall 2002, 147-149). However, Mighall does not extend his research to demonstrate the perceived link between moral insanity and suicide and, at just two pages long, his foray into Jekyll's alleged moral insanity is brief. Given the increased popularity of the term, as well as its connections with late-Victorian and traditional Gothic tropes, I examine the relationship between two of the era's canonical Gothic suicides and their character's potential 'moral insanity'.

In the late nineteenth century ideas about degeneration increasingly married with the perceived dissolution of the moral sense.¹ There developed a 'philosophy of the self which emphasise[d] the dual nature of man [and] the power of the will to prevent and control insanity' (Skultans 1975, 9). The will was perceived by Victorian psychiatrists to be a faculty of the moral sense and necessary for self-control (Maudsley 1884; Carpenter 1874; Bain 1859). As Roger Smith notes, 'the idea of weakening or loss of will [was] central to the prejudices and fears of the age' (Smith 2013, 39) and called into question the concept of moral responsibility. Jekyll and Dorian seemingly lose their will and moral sense through heredity, the hypocritical duality of their lives and indulgence in egoistic desires, which ends in the suicide of both protagonists. The impulsive suicide was much debated in the nineteenth century and this

¹ It is important to note from the outset that, in nineteenth century context, 'moral' also meant 'affective' – encompassing emotions/feelings, and not just ethics as today's audience might assume.

chapter will show how Stevenson and Wilde navigate the psychological attitudes of this era.

Moral Insanity²

Charles Darwin believed that ‘the moral sense or conscience’ was the most important human attribute which differentiated humans from animals (Darwin 1871, 120). The moral sense allegedly developed from inherent social instincts and included features such as the will and reason (Darwin 1871, 98). Henry Maudsley had connections with Darwin and his followers.³ He was invited to give two lectures to the Sunday Lecture Society, which had among its Vice-Presidents Darwin, Thomas Huxley and Herbert Spencer.⁴ The President of this society was William Benjamin Carpenter (1813-1885), whom Maudsley admired.⁵ Carpenter asserted that the will was essential to governing self-control and sound mind:

Between the state of the well-balanced mind, in which the habit of Self-control has been thoroughly established, so that its whole activity is directed by the moral will of the Ego – and that the raving madman, whose reasoning power is utterly gone, who is the sport of uncontrollable passions, and is lost to every feeling of [morality] ...vast as the interval may seem, there is an insensible gradation (Carpenter 1874, 657).

² The term ‘moral’ to the nineteenth-century alienists meant ‘mental’. Because of this, it had some connection with the ethics definition used today, but mainly was used to denote behavioural characteristics controlled by the faculties of the mind such as ‘moral sense’, encompassing aspects of character such as will, reason and intellect.

³ Both Darwin and Maudsley quoted each other extensively – for example in Darwin’s *The Expression of the Emotion in Man and Animals* (1872).

⁴ These lectures were entitled ‘Lessons in Materialism’ and ‘The Physical Basis of Will’. See Collie 1988, 119.

⁵ Says Turner 1988, 167.

Likewise, Maudsley argued that there was a risk of moral degeneration if individuals did not exercise self-restraint over egoistic passions. In Gothic tradition, villains lost control once reason was diminished; *Otranto*'s Manfred, for example, has two personas, becoming 'savage' when at the mercy and 'impetuosity of his passions' (Walpole 1764, 22, 27). In nineteenth-century theory, this overruling of the passions denoted a loss of will. To Maudsley, whose scientific work is filled with gothic rhetoric and imagery, mental pathology and degeneration existed hand in hand because the will was the 'highest moral sphere' of the moral sense. Without it, all 'higher' human faculties would regress (Maudsley 1884, 243). Moral (mental) degeneration could then allegedly spread through succeeding generations as hereditary transmission allegedly allowed for a diversity of degenerate progeny exhibiting various forms of mental derangement or pathological character. As scientific theory developed in the nineteenth-century, moral degeneration came to constitute the notion of ungovernable excessive passions as constitutive of a mental disease. Gradually, such 'moral insanity' became a term applied to wide varieties of socially objectionable conduct, used by theorists throughout the latter half of the century, including Spencer and Max Nordau, who wrote: 'the two psychological roots of moral insanity ...are, firstly, unbounded egoism and, secondly, impulsiveness ...these characteristics also constitute the chief intellectual stigmata of degeneration' (Nordau 1895, 18).⁶

The term 'moral insanity' was initially coined in 1835 as a means of explaining mental derangement which existed without delusion or insanity. Allegedly, someone could be rational, eloquent and reasonable while still performing acts of perceived insanity, like suicide, because the moral sense would be distorted while intellect remained intact. The patient would exhibit fury, violence, remorselessness and shamelessness but without delusion. In

⁶ With regards to Spencer, see *Principles of Psychology* (1855). Daniel Tuke, psychiatrist, said of Spencer: 'within the last few weeks he has told me that there is nothing in his psychology opposed to it, and that, in fact, he unquestionably believes in moral insanity' (Tuke 1891, 348).

1806, the French physician Phillipe Pinel (1745-1826) devised the term ‘manie sans delire’ to describe ‘insane people who at no moment whatsoever showed damage to the intellect, but who were carried away by some kind of furious instinct’ (Verplaetse 2009, 193). Pinel’s protégé was Etienne Esquirol (1772-1840) – much quoted by Maudsley and to whom the British physician James Cowle Prichard (1786-1848) dedicated his thesis on moral insanity in 1835 (Prichard 1835c).⁷ Prichard developed Pinel’s idea, asserting that a person suffering from moral insanity was subject to instinctive and involuntary impulses that would determine his behaviour. He defined moral insanity as:

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 hallucination (Prichard 1835c, 6).

Prichard believed that his theory explained why those who appeared reasonable would be subject to bouts of anger and remorselessness. The concept of moral insanity took hold and became a popular means of explaining alleged morally questionable acts, including suicide.

Maudsley validated Prichard’s concept of moral insanity in the *Lancet* in 1866, writing:

Dr Prichard described, under the name of moral insanity, a variety of mental derangement which has been the occasion of angry and contemptuous reprobation ...it [still] remains an unquestionable

⁷ Esquirol’s influence on Maudsley is discussed in Lewis 1951, 259-277; Esquirol was thus widely influential over the course of the century in his field, and admired by earlier psychiatrists such as Prichard and later eminent ones as Maudsley.

fact that there do occur in practice actual cases of mental disorder in which, without any illusion, hallucination, or delusion, the derangement is exhibited in a perverted state of what are called the active and moral powers of the mind (Maudsley, 1866b 406).

Maudsley's supporting case studies featured suicidal patients. Prichard's work on moral insanity thus remained in use across the century. In 1867 the French alienist Jules Falret (1794-1870) published the article 'On Moral Insanity' (Falret 1867, 516-546). He claimed that in 'normal' citizens the will remains continuously active and influential over a person's faculties while someone morally insane would display 'radical feebleness of will' (Falret 1867, 525-6). According to Falret, those suffering with moral insanity no longer possessed the will to govern their moral sentiments and would 'abandon themselves without reserve to all their impulses' (Falret 1867, 527). He believed that in some cases the passions were a necessary part of mankind's character and psychology but that in the morally insane – in the absence of the will and moral sense – these passions become 'exaggerated' (Falret 1867, 535). The victim essentially became a slave to their instincts and lacked the self-control to ensure suppression.

In 1860, the British psychiatrist Forbes Winslow wrote of moral insanity: 'the reason is dethroned and taken forcibly captive by animal impulses, and these, when in a state of supremacy, exercise undisputed and tyrannical sovereignty over the judgment, conscience and the will' (Winslow 1868, 62). Winslow's theory emerged in an era of psychiatric development, but nevertheless harks back to the Gothic of the eighteenth century, demonstrating the link between scientific and Gothic discourse which renders this investigation between science, medicine, the Gothic and suicide so important. Manfred, for example, is described as having two personas: 'his virtues were always ready to operate when his passion did not obscure his reason' (Walpole 1764, 33). The savagery of his passions effected tyranny over his 'virtues'. To Winslow, the 'tyrannical' Other – the instinct and the passion – would overpower the reason and conscience, as similarly occurs in the later Gothic texts *Jekyll and Hyde* and

Dorian Gray, demonstrating the influence of both present-day scientific theory and Gothic convention, and the connection between the two.

Daniel Hack Tuke (1827-1895) was a British psychiatrist and physician who was indebted to Prichard, writing that ‘he wrote the best work...in his day.’⁸ Tuke drew Prichard’s theory of moral insanity into the late-nineteenth century, developing his own definition:

Moral Insanity [is] a form of mental disorder in which there is a loss of control over the lower propensities, or in which the moral sentiments rather than the intellectual powers are confused, weakened, or perverted (Tuke 1885b, 175).

In 1891, he offered a more detailed analysis:

What happens is oftentimes ...a weakening of the higher centres, involving paralysis of voluntary power and so permitting an excessive and irregular display of feeling in one of the lower forms it assumes ...The higher levels of cerebral development which are concerned in the exercise of moral control are either imperfectly evolved from birth or, having been evolved, have become diseased and more or less functionless, although the intellectual functions are not seriously affected, the result being that the patient’s mind presents the lower level of evolution in which the emotional and

⁸ Tuke 1891, 344. Tuke was a popular psychiatrist, reviewed in such well-read journals as the *Westminster Review* 120, 240 in 1883 and the *Saturday Review* 34, 891 in 1872. In 1892, he published *A Dictionary of Psychological Medicine* which was contributed to by such scientific minds as G. H. Savage, who not only wrote a great deal on suicide, but also validated the claims of Prichard and was a close friend of Maudsley.

automatic functions have fuller play than is normal
(Tuke 1891, 349).

Tuke believed that there were two causes of moral insanity. One cause was the lack of moral sense due to an arrested development from birth. The second cause was a mental disease which degraded the moral sense. The novels *Jekyll and Hyde* and *Dorian Gray* incorporate both forms of moral insanity. In *Victorian Demons* (2004), Smith demonstrates the link between medical and sociological context and Gothic horror, showing the strength of the interdisciplinary connection between the literary world and medical cases and the influence that each had upon the other through their shared rhetoric. Likewise, the sections below explore how widely Stevenson and Wilde were influenced by the increasingly popular theories about moral insanity and how this is reflected in their respective Gothic novels, combining Gothic tropes with a late-nineteenth-century fascination with medicine, disease and mental health.

Jekyll and Hyde

The story of *Jekyll and Hyde* features both the atavistic degenerate and the moral degenerate. Jekyll is allegedly a respectable and intellectual gentleman.⁹ As seen in the previous chapter, his bestial counterpart, Hyde, demonstrates the presence of animalistic instincts within civilised men. In 1881, Andrew Wilson published 'The Mind's Mirror' in which he summarised late-nineteenth-century evolutionary concerns. He drew on Darwin's and Maudsley's views regarding the expression of emotions as proof of instinctive savage traits.¹⁰ Wilson quoted Maudsley's *Body and Mind* (1870) to show the link between Maudsley, degeneracy and Darwin:

'Whence come the savage snarl, the destructive disposition, the obscene language, the wild howl, the

⁹ See chapter five of this thesis discusses this further.

¹⁰ Andrew Wilson 188, 346-366. Wilson discusses Darwin's *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals* (1872) and Maudsley's *Body and Mind*; the former draws heavily upon the latter in his text. See chapter six of this thesis.

offensive habits, displayed by some of the insane? Why should a human being, deprived of his reason, ever become so brutal in character, as some do, unless he has the brute nature within him? We are”, concludes this eminent authority, “trace savagery in civilisation [and] in the degeneration of insanity, in the *unkinding*, so to say, of the human kind, there are exhibited marks denoting the elementary instincts of its composition’ (Wilson 1881, 365-6).

Wilson acknowledged Maudsley as an ‘eminent’ psychiatrist and his article demonstrates the ease with which science flowed into non-specialist literature. Chapter two of this thesis showed the interest which Stevenson had in evolutionary theory. The idea of the ‘unkinding’ as indicative of degeneration without reason is seen throughout *Jekyll and Hyde*. Hyde is an atavistic degenerate, consistently described as ‘dwarfish’, ‘savage’ and ‘ape-like’ (Stevenson 1886, 15, 20). Jekyll’s draught allows the degenerate the opportunity to emerge from where he previously lay dormant. Under pressure to conform, Jekyll was ashamed of any ‘irregularities’ and fought a ‘perennial war’ (Stevenson 1886, 52) internally to ensure that his primitive self was restrained. As early as Pinel it was recognised that a ‘war’ such as Jekyll’s would lead to ‘interior combat’, the result of reason existing ‘in opposition to a sanguinary cruelty.’¹¹ Although writing scientifically, the similarities between the Gothic tradition and Pinel’s ideas are evident: Ambrosio the Monk, for example, has vowed a life of celibacy until seduced by Matilda; at the sight of her bare breast: ‘A raging fire shot through every limb; The blood boiled in his veins, and a thousand wild wishes bewildered his imagination’ and Ambrosio realises; ‘my passions overpowered my virtue’ (Lewis 1796, 65, 122). Ambrosio battles these ‘passions’ and vows to restrain but is unable to do so and, like Jekyll/Hyde, his

¹¹ Pinel, 1808. *Manie, vesanies, aliénation mentale*. Quoted in Ian Goldstein, 1987: 173.

vices become progressively worse once unleashed, culminating in murder and rape – the ‘sanguinary cruelty’ to which Pinel had referred.

Maudsley, too, wrote of the inner battle causing the breakdown of will and reason. The victim, he said, suffers ‘agonies of distress during the paroxysms of its activity ...[as he]struggles ...to prevent his true will being overmastered’ (Maudsley 1884, 299). The war within Jekyll between good and evil hints at a mental derangement as he laments that ‘in the agonised womb of consciousness these polar twins should be continuously struggling’ (Stevenson 1886, 53). Jekyll’s mental arrangement vividly breaks down as degeneracy overpowers him and Hyde eventually overrides Jekyll’s will to restrain him. The description of Jekyll’s internal battle and the consequential suicide of Hyde mirror late-nineteenth-century views on moral insanity – which in turn retain nuances of traditional Gothic motif, and thus art and science are shaped by one another. Carpenter wrote that ‘the Will carries out fixed principles of action; which, having been adopted by the Reason, under the guise of Moral Sense, habitually rule conduct’ (Carpenter 1874, 419). In moral insanity the will was allegedly overpowered (as happens to Jekyll) which ‘render[s] the Ego no longer morally responsible for his act’. The term was so commonly used in courts of law as it raised the question of moral responsibility and questioned whether ‘higher’ faculties, particularly the will, were autonomous (Carpenter 1874, 671-2).¹² In ‘Lessons of Materialism’ (1874) Maudsley postulated: ‘there is no question in such case of moral guilt; it is not sin but disease we are confronted with.’¹³ Maudsley argued that without volition, there can be no moral responsibility only moral disease. The intrinsic ‘moral evil’ of earlier Gothic (defined by Rafter 2010, 281) is therefore explained through science as mental derangement; the inherent ‘sin’ of the Gothic villains become, to these

¹² See also R. Smith 1981. Smith gives a detailed interpretation of the Victorian use of both ‘impulsive’ and ‘moral’ insanity in the courts to decry legal responsibility and gives both the historical and social reasons for the increasing popularity of the terms in a legal setting.

¹³ Quoted in Sausman 2007, 45.

psychiatrists, a mark of the disease of moral insanity, with reason incapable of restraining the savage and passionate inner self.

‘Moral insanity’ became a frequently used term throughout the late-nineteenth century (Callender 2010, 244), endorsed by such well-published figures as Maudsley, Nordau and Tuke. Later nineteenth-century ideas were built onto Prichard’s original theory of moral insanity, as Tuke acknowledges: ‘the doctrine of Prichard has been in its essence adopted, and has indeed been more strongly emphasised in regard to congenital moral defects which Prichard recognised, but could not work out at so early a period of the study of moral disease’ (Tuke 1891, 347). Prichard investigated moral insanity by obtaining a variety of case studies from peers. I pause here to reflect upon the importance of case studies in a literary analysis. Medical case studies like those used by Prichard (discussed below) became a popular means of story-telling in the nineteenth century, with both literary texts and medical case studies drawing from and increasingly influencing one another. Literary tropes including Gothic language were often used to support psychiatric work: ‘the case histories are themselves literary narratives...medical examples are as likely to be drawn from literature as from life’ (Bourne Taylor and Shuttleworth 1998, 229-230; Wells 2003). *Jekyll and Hyde* shows the extent to which medical texts could also shape the field of literary works; entitled ‘The Strange Case’, *Jekyll and Hyde* reads structurally like something out of a medical journal (indeed, this was recognised by Wilde in his reference to the story as likening an article out of ‘*The Lancet*’ (Wilde 1891a, 10). Its position as a case study is further strengthened by Stevenson’s inclusion of not one but two physicians. Thus, *Jekyll and Hyde* is ‘partly a fictional case study’ (Mighall 2002, 143) but, placed within the context of moral insanity in the late nineteenth century, offers a very real insight into the era’s medical discourse. Because literary tropes and language and figures were so often used to support medical case studies, and, in turn, medical case studies were habitually absorbed into works of literature, the interdisciplinary correlation between the two provides an understanding of how the genres became shaped and influenced by their context.

The importance of Prichard’s case studies is thus evident. His work contains descriptions of subjects with similar characters to *Jekyll*, for example:

A gentleman of good connexions, of good education, and of mental capabilities far above the general average ...he was mild, kind-hearted, obliging, and generous ...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 alcohol, suspicious of his friends, wantonly extravagant, perverse in disposition, irritable and overbearing (Prichard 1836, 57-8).

Although initially a sociable character, the later Jekyll becomes a recluse. Following Hyde's murder of Carew, Jekyll locks himself away, telling Utterson 'you must suffer me to go my own dark way' (Stevenson 1886, 29). Utterson concludes that Jekyll's 'peace of mind and the whole tenor of his life were wrecked' (Stevenson 1886, 30). Jekyll had changed, caught in the grip of his 'addiction' to Hyde and the extravagant side of his persona. But the fact that Jekyll is able to coherently narrate his tale through his letter hints at the lingering presence of sanity, in keeping with the widely accepted view that 'his temper, his habits, his feelings being changed without intellectual weakness' (Tuke 1885b, 176). Similarly George Savage – who founded the *Journal of Mental Science* with Tuke in 1878 and who knew Maudsley professionally for fifty years – wrote in 1884 that the morally insane are a 'special class' of patients who exhibit no distinct intellectual loss, but who possess 'no moral sense' (Savage 1884, 288).

Pinel, who had influenced Prichard, also used case studies to record that patients suffering with 'manie sans delire' often suffered irresistible impulses to

violence. Savage drew on this idea just two years prior to *Jekyll and Hyde*'s publication, writing that 'cruelty and vindictiveness' was often a symptom of moral insanity (Savage 1884, 291). Similarly, Hyde's behaviour becomes progressively impulsive and violent, seemingly adhering to existing ideas linking moral insanity with violence.¹⁴ When murdering Sir Danvers Carew, 'Hyde broke out of all bounds and clubbed Carew to the earth ...with ape-like fury, he was trampling his victims under foot, hailing down a storm of blows, under which the bones were audibly shattered' (Stevenson 1886, 21). By the late nineteenth century, moral insanity was widely debated in journals and newspapers with reference to violent criminal behaviour and was commonly used as attempted defence for assaults and murder as moral responsibility was questioned.¹⁵ Savage wrote of the overwhelming blood lust of the morally insane, noting that the sight of blood 'produces strong ...excitement' (Savage 1884, 297).¹⁶ Jekyll describes the excitement derived from his own violent experience: 'I mauled the unresisting body, tasting delight from every blow' (Stevenson 1886, 60). The alleged anger and savagery in Hyde's attack of Carew reflects Prichard's belief that the morally insane could be so defined by the 'liability to violent fits of anger breaking out without cause, and leading to the danger or actual commission of serious injury to surrounding persons' (Prichard 1835a, 123). Stevenson draws moral insanity directly into his tale, as Jekyll the doctor self-diagnoses himself with moral insanity: 'no man morally sane could have been guilty of that crime [Carew's murder]' (Stevenson 1886, 60). Maudsley asserted that moral insanity was a result of 'evil impulses' which 'lie in the physical constitution of the individual' remaining dormant until an outside influence or, in this case, potion releases them (Maudsley 1872, 405).

¹⁴ E.g. Tuke says that the morally insane had 'proclivities to motiveless cruelty' (1891, 348).

¹⁵ Newspaper articles were frequently quoting murder or violent assault cases in which the defendant was claiming moral insanity. Some examples from the years prior to *Jekyll and Hyde* include *The London Standard*, 2 May 1885; *The London Standard*, 25 April 1885; *Lloyd's Weekly Newspaper*, 10 May 1885; *London Daily News*, 18 April 1882; *Reynold's Newspaper*, 23 April 1882.

¹⁶ Similarly, Tuke had also made the connection between wanton torture and lust to kill in his 1885 article Case of moral insanity or congenital moral defect, with commentary. *The British Journal of Psychiatry* 31, 360-366.

Demonstrating the literary and medical conflation, Hyde indeed represents these ‘evil impulses’ that lie within the seemingly respectable Jekyll.

Tuke and Savage – who had treated cases of alleged moral insanity admitted to their respective asylums – said that in between ‘bouts’ of moral insanity patients were seen to act quietly and calmly, or with remorse.¹⁷ Jekyll also suffers remorse; once his ‘lust for evil’ was satiated, Hyde becomes hidden within Jekyll again: ‘Henry Jekyll, with streaming tears of gratitude and remorse, had fallen to his knees’ (Stevenson 1886, 61). As Savage observed, sufferers experienced ‘recurring outbreaks of moral insanity’ and, when not in the throes of their condition, could resume the appearance of sanity. He believed that the morally insane were the prime example of ‘want of balance’ in which sufferers could not control ‘lower instincts’ and ‘animal propensities’ (Savage 1884, 292, 288). A year later, in 1885, Tuke stated that moral insanity was:

[a] form of mental disorder in which there is a loss of control over the lower propensities, or in which the moral sentiments rather than the intellectual powers are confused, weakened, or perverted ...a constitutional defect in the normal balance between the passions and the power of moral control or will (Tuke 1835b, 175).

Both psychiatrists believed that a harmonious relationship between the inherited primitive instincts and the ‘higher’ faculties of the moral sense was essential for good mental and physical health. Without this balance the ‘lower instincts’ gain control of the will, reason and intellect. Lack of ‘volitional control’ allegedly led to a lack of ‘self-restraint’, leaving sufferers to wantonly gratify their desires (Carpenter 1874, 658). In *Jekyll and Hyde*, Stevenson explores the concept that moral sense and intellect exist independently from each other, as Jekyll states:

¹⁷ Tuke worked at the York Retreat and Savage at Bethlem. For quotes, see, for example, Tuke 1835a, 6 and Savage 1884, 292 or 294.

‘from both sides of my intelligence, the moral and the intellectual, I thus drew steadily nearer to that truth ...that man is not truly one, but truly two’ (Stevenson 1886, 52). This medical man, Jekyll, has come to realise that human nature is actually derived from two separate entities; not just good and evil, or respectable and savage, or degenerate and evolved – but morally sane and insane, composed of the reason and moral sense to conduct a life of respectability but when stripped of this, exposing base instincts, each human possesses the ability to act in the manner of their very own ‘Hyde’. Without the moral sense, there could seemingly be no means of maintaining the tenuous balance between good and bad inherent within humanity.

Referencing the importance of balance, Stevenson wrote in his essay about morality, ‘Lay Morals’:

[The soul] demands that we should not live alternately with our opposing tendencies in continual see-saw of passion and disgust, but seek some path on which the tendencies shall no longer oppose, but serve each other to common end.¹⁸

Stevenson suggests that the lack of balance enforced by a double life is dangerous. Indeed, it is Jekyll’s ‘disgust’ at the existence of his instincts and passions that led him to create a potion to release them thus provoking a causal chain of injurious consequences. Jekyll begins to realise the importance of the internal balance as his narrative proclaims, ‘if this were much prolonged, the balance of my nature might be permanently overthrown’ (Stevenson 1886, 59). He explains again after his second relapse that his potion had stripped him of all of his ‘balancing instincts’ (Stevenson 1886, 60). Without balance, his mental health degenerates. Falret had emphasised that passions and instincts were necessary provided that restraint was exercised (see above). Likewise, Stevenson

¹⁸ Stevenson. ‘Lay Morals’. II, 179. Quoted by Saposnik 1971, 728.

intimates in the 'Lay Morals' passage quoted above that (balanced) passions are required for the unity of man's nature. By 'caging' these components of character and releasing them suddenly they 'came out roaring', tipping Jekyll's natural balance.

Tuke stated that in cases of moral insanity there would be a 'weakening of the higher centres' resulting in 'paralysis' of the will. Consequently: 'here we witness only the unchecked action of the lower level, consequent upon the dissolution of the higher' – reason and will are not in place to govern the primitive instincts (Tuke 1885b, 183-4). In his narrative, Jekyll describes his 'powers' as 'dethroned from their supremacy' by the potion allowing 'a second form and countenance [to] substitute ...[which] bore the stamp, of lower elements in my soul' (Stevenson 1886, 54). The potion strips away the moral sense, leaving the base instincts of the atavistic throwback represented by Hyde. Tuke quotes Symonds:

Mental derangement is confined to the moral feelings and the emotions ...the sentiments and passions of man have generally been considered subservient to the will and reason, and that any undue excitement of the former (the passions) has been consequently supposed to arise either from a criminal want of control on the part of the will, or from a deficiency of rational power (Tuke 1885b, 189).

Similarly, Jekyll is left with a defect in the balance between the passions and the power of the moral sense. Tuke asked: 'is it not, then, true that men are born with organisations which prompt them to the commission of acts like those committed by this unfortunate man, and that the lower instincts are in abnormal force, or the controlling power is weak? Such a man as this is a reversion to an old savage type' (Tuke 1885a, 365). Likewise, the atavistic part of Jekyll's countenance becomes stronger than the good part. Despite Jekyll's claim that he 'sought with tears and prayers' (Stevenson 1886, 61) to deny Hyde his appearance, he is too weak to repress those instincts. Jekyll's weakness becomes progressively worse as Hyde gains in strength and Jekyll is described as

‘languidly weak both in body and mind’ (Stevenson 1886, 65). To be ‘slave’ to the primitive instincts was allegedly to lose free-will and be rendered morally insane.

The more he indulges his instinctive desires, the more Hyde craves evil. While Jekyll’s sought-after pleasures were ‘undignified’, Hyde’s instincts ‘began to turn towards the monstrous’ (Stevenson 1886, 57). The ‘monstrous’ depiction bears similarities to Gothic descriptions in Maudsley’s *Pathology of Mind*, which was reviewed in a wide variety of journals in the latter half of the nineteenth century:

No one ever becomes suddenly a monster of baseness ...any more than he gets any other acquired taste in an instant; but by a course of wicked deeds, the first of which was done perhaps against the grain under some strong temptation, the next with less repugnance, and the next more easily still, such a deterioration of nature is wrought by degrees in him that the evil stirs not a repugnant feeling, but an actual desire to do it (Maudsley 1867b, 156).¹⁹

Maudsley believed that the evolutionary regression of an individual would often occur through a gradual disregard for moral behaviour and an internal pre-disposition for ‘evil’. Hyde’s degeneracy gradually worsens and by the end of Jekyll’s narrative Hyde has taken over and Jekyll is in danger of becoming a permanent ‘monster of baseness’. The ferocity of Hyde’s attack on Carew and the ‘ape-like’ fury with which it is undertaken likens Hyde’s actions to that of a wild animal. Through Hyde’s random ‘trampling’ and ‘clubbing’ of his victim

¹⁹ This text was reviewed, for example, in the *Saturday Review* twice: 25 May 1867 and 23 Nov. 1872; *The British Quarterly Review* 94 (1868:Apr.) 564-8; *Athenaeum* 2064 (1867: May 18) 659. Michael Collie points out that Maudsley’s influence spread well into the field of fiction: ‘Novelists...did not ignore him...In writing and publishing his books he had wanted to reach a non-medical as well as a medical audience. He succeeded’ (Collie 1988, 68). Collie claims that Maudsley’s influence particularly touched those interested in human behaviour, which includes Stevenson.

(Stevenson 1886, 20), Hyde demonstrates an uncontrolled and animalistic assault and degeneration into moral insanity.

Psychiatrists considered that those capable of such morally-insane violence might also be capable of suicide. 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’ (Prichard 1835c, 54). The two acts were both seen as closely-related symptoms of moral insanity by some psychiatrists as both acts allegedly involved an arrest of the moral sense. This is seen in a case study of the trial and death of George Townley. Townley murdered his fiancée in 1863. He was found to be of sound state of mind by Forbes Winslow, whose name we have already seen connected with suicide and with moral insanity, and in 1865 Townley committed suicide (Smith-Hughes 1958, ch. two). The trial had been widely covered in the newspapers and the concept of moral insanity was considered. One article commented: ‘he committed an outrageous murder because he was devoid of all moral sense...we should expect that such a character would end in self-murder. A man who murders his neighbour is very likely indeed to murder himself.’ The author of this article assumed a connection between diminished moral sense and suicide, concluding: ‘after a sustained absence of all checks and restraints on his passions, he has contrived to obliterate all moral perceptions, and is thoroughly brutalised...[and] totally deficient in the sense of moral responsibility’ (Moral insanity 1865, 216-217). Maudsley also argued that the criminal and the suicidal were not morally responsible because they were driven by an ‘impulse’ with mastery over the will (Maudsley 1874, 332). Like Prichard had hypothesised previously, suicide was seen not as an act of volition but one governed by internal impulses. Maudsley believed that impulsive actions like suicide were the result of an eroded will worsened by excessive vice (Maudsley 1874a,

100).²⁰ Jekyll's degeneration progresses as his moral faculties start to deteriorate, leaving no moral sense or will to govern volition. To Maudsley, the egoistic passions constituted 'some defect of...will' or a peculiarity of nature which, in excess, 'becomes vice' (Maudsley 1884, 285). If allowed the 'excess' of vice pursued by Hyde then moral derangement, mental and physical degeneration and suicide would be the potential outcomes.

Maudsley's view on the atrophy of will and moral sense by indulgence and gratification was shared by his peers. The British psychologist James Sully (1842-1923) stated that: 'will, in its higher forms, may indeed be said to begin with a power of checking the impulse of the moment, or...with a process of inhibition. The misery of the unlimited state of desire results not from an excess, but from a deficiency of will.'²¹ Sully and Stevenson were friends who both published in the *Cornhill Magazine* between 1876 and 1882. Sully referred to Stevenson as a 'brotherly companion' and noted a conversation Stevenson had entered into about free-will, showing his interest in the subject (Sully 1918, 215). The relationship between the two men leads Ed Block to suspect that Stevenson would have discussed his psychology with Sully and that their connection must be taken into consideration in any psychological study of Stevenson's work.²² Sully's ideas on the will seem to have been explored by Stevenson: Jekyll's lack of willpower is shown by his continual desire to consume the potion despite knowing the damage it would cause, coupled with his inability to prevent Hyde's increasing possession or keep his impulses restrained.

The initial liberation of instincts and desires would, according to Maudsley, cause the person to rejoice in their freedom from morality (Maudsley 1884, 296-7). This is true in the case of Jekyll, as Jekyll 'springs headlong into a

²⁰ For more remarks on similarities between criminality and suicides, see Maudsley's other later writing, in particular 'Remarks on Crime and Criminals' (1888, 159-167).

²¹ James Sully, *The Pessimists View of Life*. Qtd in Ed Block 1984, 441.

²² For detailed information on the connections between Sully and Stevenson see Ed Block 1982, 447.

sea of desire' (Stevenson 1886, 56). However, to Maudsley, the individual soon experiences a surge of irregular thoughts and feelings and feels impelled to partake in unusual acts. Likewise, the traditional Gothic villain Ambrosio the Monk had been 'confused and terrified at his weakness' when he awoke to his initial transgression and claims he is plunged into an 'abyss of misery' (Lewis 1796, 223). Despite his initial remorse, however, Ambrosio is unable to refrain from 'the cravings of brutal appetite' (Lewis 1796, 236). His battle is lost. In Maudsley's view, as the will becomes completely undermined the victim loses control, enduring 'agonies of distress' as he 'struggles ...to prevent his will being overmastered' (Maudsley 1884, 299). Maudsley believed that as degeneracy took hold the 'good' self would battle the bad self, resulting in a struggle for existence. Jekyll refers to the agony of this battle, proclaiming that no one has ever suffered such 'torment' (Stevenson 1886, 66).

Psychiatrists like Maudsley viewed the moral sense as an inherited product of evolution: 'the moral feeling has been slowly acquired in the course of human cultivation through generations as the highest effort of mental evolution; and in the course of family degeneration, we find its loss mark a stage in the downward course' (Maudsley 1874a, 159). Maudsley often used literary figures as case studies to illustrate his theories. He examined the behaviour and nature of the suicidal author Edgar Allen Poe to argue that individuals should not be judged too harshly for their actions because some individuals possessed a weaker frame of mind. They were not strong enough to overcome their flaws or difficulties. Maudsley wrote that 'the impossibility of any man producing himself, springing up by spontaneous generation just such a being as he might wish to be' is underlined by hereditary transmission (Maudsley 1860, 337). The link between inheritance and moral insanity became a prominent factor in discussions of the latter (Carlson and Dain 1962, 137-8). Chapter two of this thesis shows the interest held by both Stevenson and Wilde in the ideas of hereditary transmission. Like his fellow psychiatrists, Samuel Strahan believed that inheritance was significant in the configuration of an individual. He stated that hereditary variation meant that not everybody inherited strong enough willpower to withstand impulses and instincts. He asserted that education could only influence those with 'sufficient strength of will to enable them to choose

the good rather than the evil' but those without this strength 'attend upon the calls of their instincts and passions as does the unreasoning beast' (Strahan 1890, 337).²³ Likewise, the 'beast' Hyde attends to his instincts and desires because Jekyll lacks the strength of will to restrict his atavistic counterpart. He claims that he is in control, writing that he always has the option of ridding Hyde through suicide (Stevenson 1886, 65). However, as suggested in the previous chapter, the suicide is undertaken by *Hyde*, the impulsive side of Jekyll. Jekyll does not follow through with his threat to commit suicide instead of Hyde. He has to accept 'this, then, is the last time, short of a miracle, that Henry Jekyll can think his own thoughts or see his own face' (Stevenson 1886, 66). Because of his lack of will to withstand Hyde's dominance, Jekyll has to say goodbye to his own identity, leaving the outcome of the situation to the hands of his 'Other', Hyde. The fractured and disharmonious identity suffered by Jekyll conforms to Hurley's view that a prominent motif of late-Victorian Gothic was the 'anxiety about the nature of human identity' (Hurley 1996, 5), which could so easily be twisted, broken down or degenerated.

Jekyll, Hyde and suicide

Jekyll knows that the only concern preventing Hyde from taking over his persona completely is his fear of discovery and hanging. It is therefore Hyde's decision not to override Jekyll entirely; Jekyll has no control now and it is his 'Other' persona, *Hyde*, who commits suicide, evidenced by Utterson looking upon Hyde as 'the body of a self-destroyer' (Stevenson 1886, 41; see chapter two of this thesis). Jekyll says twice that he *can* be rid of Hyde through suicide, but he does not actually take this route. Instead, he waits for the potion to run out, and what follows, he says, is beyond his control: 'I am now finishing this statement under the influence of the last of the old powders...this is my true

²³ Education was often used by the Victorians to refer to the intake of knowledge throughout life and is not necessarily restricted to educational institutions. Strahan wrote after *Jekyll and Hyde*, so I do not imply that Stevenson has read this, I merely wish to underline the prevalence of such an idea.

hour of death, and what is to follow concerns another than myself.’²⁴ He gives himself up to Hyde completely.

Many psychiatrists in the nineteenth century believed that the morally insane were effectively destroyed by a constant internal battle between their impulsive desires or instincts and their remorse and shame (see above). A sufferer of moral insanity, as slave to his instincts, would allegedly succumb to an impulsively violent or pathological act without any sign of provocation as the moral sense is eradicated. In 1884, an article on suicide in *Chambers's Journal* reiterated: ‘the power of the will to conquer any impulse is the sole difference between a healthy and an unsound mind’ (On suicide, 293).²⁵ Likewise, Jekyll refers to himself as a ‘slave to my original evil’ (Stevenson 1886, 54). To the author of ‘Suicide’, being a ‘slave’ to instinct rather than the will has an injurious effect on the individual and could lead to their suicide. Strahan agreed with this view: ‘the determination to quit life is less frequently the outcome of reasoning than of morbid impulse which impels the individual to the act against his reason’ (Strahan 1892, 327). Jekyll is ‘slave’ to Hyde, who in turn is his instinctual and impulsive ‘original’. Thus, the suicide is carried out by the impulsive, degenerate side of the seemingly morally insane Jekyll.

Esquirol, the pupil of Pinel whose ideas informed Maudsley’s much later in the century, believed that suicide existed in two forms: one a form of world-weariness and the second a result of involuntary impulses: ‘Strong men...are impelled to suicide by an impulse so much the more strong’ (Esquirol 1845, 256-7). Similarly, Maudsley wrote that the moral degenerate ‘is the victim of a great self-feeling or egoism’ (Maudsley 1863, 3). Hyde is ‘strong’, to use Esquirol’s words – he certainly has the strength to overpower Jekyll. He is

²⁴ ‘Other than myself’ meaning Hyde (Stevenson 1886, 66).

²⁵ *Chambers's Journal* was a weekly penny magazine best known for its serialisations of novels, with authors including James Payn (contributed heavily), who was also the editor from 1850. Stevenson himself admired James Payn and his work, suggesting that he may indeed have been a *Chambers* reader – he referred to him as ‘a lively, pleasant, popular writer’ on page 51 of *Essays Literary and Critical*, published posthumously in 1924 by London: William Heinemann.

‘egoistic’, described by Jekyll as possessing ‘wonderful selfishness’ (Stevenson 1886, 66). He wants to live and ‘loves life’ (Stevenson 1886, 65) but is impelled to commit suicide by a single emotion – fear. He is terrified of facing the ‘gallows’ (Stevenson 1886, 65). To be hanged on the gallows would have exposed Hyde to the public’s hatred. Jekyll notes that Hyde ‘resented the dislike with which he was now regarded’ (Stevenson 1886, 65); suicide protects Hyde from the animosity of London’s society. Jekyll and Hyde, becoming one again, both suffer at the end of the novel with ‘depression’, as Jekyll writes: ‘the doom that is closing in on us both has already changed and crushed [Hyde]’ (Stevenson 1886, 66). The previously strong Hyde begins to descend into despair himself, plagued by fear. Morally degenerate, ‘crushed’ and fearful of public backlash, he takes his own life. As chapter two shows, it is the unwilling but necessary end result of a degenerate nature.

Hyde is ‘changed’ at the end and Jekyll changes following his consumption of the potion. Prichard wrote that, in the morally insane, ‘acts of suicide ...are generally preceded by a morbid change in the character and habits of the agent. Individuals ...become melancholy, torpid, morose, and feel an aversion towards their relatives or most intimate associates, become listless and indifferent’ (Prichard 1835b, 54). To Prichard, the founder of the term ‘moral insanity’, the condition encompassed the potential to regress into a melancholic state: ‘a considerable proportion among the most striking instances of moral insanity are those in which a tendency to gloom or sorrow is the predominant feature. All things present and future are to his view involved in dreary and hopeless gloom’ (Prichard 1835b, 121). In keeping with this concept, Jekyll becomes a recluse and is plagued by the constant threat of Hyde and haunted by the knowledge that he no longer possesses the strength to resist him: ‘at all hours of the day and night I would be taken with the premonitory shudder ...Under the strain of this continually impending doom and by the sleeplessness to which I now condemned myself ...I became, in my own person, a creature eaten up and emptied ...languidly weak in both body and mind’ (Stevenson 1886, 64). To Jekyll, all hope has gone, and he sees ‘doom’ closing in on himself and Hyde. He wonders ‘will Hyde die upon the scaffold? Or will he ...release himself at the last moment? God knows; I am careless’ (Stevenson 1886, 66). Jekyll cannot

even predict if his narrative will survive or whether Hyde will destroy it: ‘if my narrative has hitherto escaped destruction, it has been by a combination of great prudence and great good luck. Should the throes of change take me in the act of writing it, Hyde will tear it in pieces’ (Stevenson 1886, 65). The inner Hyde controls Jekyll right up until the last possible moment and starves him of any volition or choice. Hyde, the degenerate, impulsive and instinctual side of Jekyll, is the perpetrator of his death, while Jekyll, melancholic, despairing and weak-minded, gives up.

Oscar Wilde utilised many of Stevenson’s ideas, despite claiming that the latter’s story read too much ‘like something out of the *Lancet*’ (Wilde 1891a, 10). The next section looks at how the era’s concern about moral insanity, the psychiatric consequences of egoism and indulgence and the consequential suicide, is explored by one of the era’s most decadent artists.

Dorian Gray (1891)

In Wilde’s novel, the protagonist, Dorian Gray, trades his soul for the sake of everlasting youth, and, as a result, faces a moral decline which culminates in his unconscious suicide. His reason and logic are distorted by his vanity and egoism, in turn compounded by the influences of Lord Henry Wotton. As Dorian’s actions become progressively more erratic and morally debased, the narrative charts a descent into a chaotic and fear driven world. His will is overridden equally by Henry; a pre-disposition to egoistic vices such as vanity; and the yellow book which ‘poisons’ him with its content.²⁶ In 1885, George Bramwell published an article in the *Nineteenth Century* berating the common practice in legal courts for finding in favour of ‘temporary insanity’ for suicides (Gates 1988: ch. one), for these ‘persons are not wrong in their minds,

²⁶ The ‘wonderful novel’ which fascinates him for the eighteen years which the novel spans; the book was full of tales about ‘the awful and beautiful forms of those whom Vice and Blood and Weariness had made monstrous or mad’ (Wilde 1891b, 115), precluding Dorian’s own journey.

but in their passions, appetites or propensities' (Bramwell 1885, 898).²⁷ Sometimes, Bramwell continued, the passions responsible for suicide or homicide are known as 'moral insanity' (Bramwell 1885, 899). Bramwell defined the 'morally insane' as the 'morally unsound', occurring in cases where 'a man disregards his duty to others owing to the violence of his passions and appetites' (Bramwell 1885, 899). Disease of the passions and appetites should, according to Bramwell, be punished. After all, 'moral insanity' was becoming more prolific in cases of violent assault and murder reported in the era's newspapers. Bramwell noted the connections between moral insanity, violence and suicide and the alleged consequences of excessive gratification of passions and desires. Likewise Dorian, in his pursuit of this gratification, becomes increasingly violent before finally killing himself. In this portrayal, Wilde gives the impression of exploring his era's platitudes about the atrophy of the moral sense and will – after all, Dorian 'want[s] to be good' (Wilde 1891b, 79), but is not furnished with the will to be.

Dorian's initial egoism exists in the form of vanity. Maudsley asserted that vanity was one of the socially acquired egoistic passions which would constitute degeneration (Maudsley 1884, 287). Falret also viewed vanity as a symptom of moral insanity: 'from being reserved, modest and circumspect [the morally insane] become vain and proud' (Falret 1867, 527). Egoism was considered a symptom of certain forms of moral insanity, as Tuke stated: 'the higher levels of evolution with which the altruistic sentiments are associated have become the seat of such morbid changes as cause their inaction' (Tuke 1885b, 183-4). Altruism, generally viewed as essential to society's progression, would disintegrate.²⁸ As Dorian's vanity grows, his moral sense begins a marked deterioration as Dorian is careless of the injury he causes to others on his journey to gratification. His egoism is referred to throughout the novel; Lord

²⁷ Wilde himself published a few articles in the *Nineteenth Century*, with one coming just a few editions before Bramwell's piece (issue 17(99) May 1885, 800-19). The same issue as Bramwell's article also contained an article by Huxley, in whom Wilde was interested as chapter two of this thesis established.

²⁸ See Dixon 2008.

Henry derives his own amusement from Dorian's 'unconscious egotism' (Wilde 1891b, 81). 'Unconscious' suggests that Dorian has no control over his innate egoism, and is instead slave to the impulses his egoism generates with no will to withstand them. The will should allegedly exercise restraint over 'blind unreasoning instinct' (Carpenter 1874, 376). However, in the morally insane, there is supposedly an 'incomplete development of will' rendering an individual at the mercy of his impulses (Maudsley 1884, 284). Dorian becomes embroiled in a world of unrestricted appetite and decadence such as that described by Bramwell, and falls victim to an increasing moral decay which is inscribed on his 'other', the portrait.

The narrator in *Dorian Gray* states that 'drugs lull the moral sense to sleep' (Wilde 1891b, 78) and we are told that Dorian spends time frequenting the opium dens of London, thus seemingly suppressing the moral sense.²⁹ This style of living would, according to Maudsley's view, generate moral insanity because moral sense 'decays from misuse' (Maudsley 1870, 136-7). Tuke argued that moral insanity constituted '[a] form of mental disorder in which...the moral sentiments rather than the intellectual powers are confused, weakened, or perverted' (Tuke 1885b, 175). Such views were at one time restricted to specialist journals but by the late-nineteenth century the horror evoked by the blood-thirsty antics of the morally insane made lurid reading in more general non-specialist journals too. One such article, written by Savage, appeared in the *Fortnightly Review* in 1888 – a journal to which Wilde himself regularly contributed. Savage referenced the malevolence of the morally insane:

Some weak-minded persons are bloodthirsty and
cruel ...this ...is really one of morally insane persons
...a weak-minded patient ...a very slight and

²⁹ In chapter eleven the narrative states that sometimes Dorian would visit 'the dreadful places near Blue Gate Fields' made up of opium dens and brothels (Wilde 1891b, 112).

insufficient cause may lead to murderous acts
(Savage 1888, 451-2).³⁰

The violent propensities of the morally insane remained a popular topic and concern during this era, particularly following the savage murders carried out by Jack the Ripper in 1888. Similarly, Wilde vividly details the anger which envelopes his protagonist. In chapter nine, Dorian is overcome with rage when Basil attempts to see the portrait which Dorian has now locked in the attic. Basil notes: 'he had never seen him like this before. The lad was actually pallid with rage. His hands were clenched, and the pupils of his eyes were like discs of blue fire. He was trembling all over' (Wilde 1891b, 90). His anger palpably takes over, and Dorian admits that 'he felt he was on the brink of a horrible danger' (Wilde 1891b, 91). In a case study, Tuke described a morally insane patient whose manner almost mirrors Basil's description of Dorian, even down to the 'pallid' complexion: 'His countenance assumed a pallid hue, he became nervous and restless ...[he] lost control of himself, and indulged in the proclivities for which he was notorious' (Tuke 1885a, 363). Although we have no evidence that Wilde read the *Journal of Mental Science*, the description nonetheless serves to emphasise the common image of the morally insane in the latter half of the nineteenth century.³¹ Dorian begins to lose self-control and suffers 'vicious moods and the changing fancies of a nature over which he seemed, at times, to have almost entirely lost control' (Wilde 1891b, 102), with little will to recover that restraint. In murdering Basil, Dorian once again loses control: 'suddenly, an uncontrollable feeling of hatred for Basil Hallward came over him ...the mad passions of a hunted animal stirred within him' and Dorian impulsively grabs a knife and kills him, stabbing him 'again and again' (Wilde 1891b, 102). Unlike Hyde, however, Dorian's primal anger largely comes from his nervousness, fear and despair which have culminated by this point in his journey and stripped him

³⁰ This article also references Esquirol, Tuke, Pinel and Maudsley.

³¹ Indeed, there is no evidence that he did not read the *Journal of Mental Science*, considering his interest in science and psychology established in chapter two.

of his governing restraints. He loses control as he instinctively feels that Basil has ‘hunted’ him down late at night and forced Dorian to divulge the truth, setting in motion his panicked, impulsive, impassioned and morally insane response.

The description of Dorian as an ‘animal’ incorporates not just early Gothic imagery but also late-nineteenth-century theories which reduced the morally insane to ‘savages’ or ‘even less developed...allied in habits to the lower animals’ (Savage 1888, 451).³² Tuke and Maudsley shared similar ideas on the evolutionary aspects of moral insanity, with Tuke writing: ‘what is in startling contrast with modern civilised society may represent the normal tide-mark of a former barbarism. That some should at birth revert to the condition of a prior ancestry and that moral imbecility should appear; is surely consistent with all modern teaching on heredity’ (Tuke 1885b, 183-4). Maudsley believed that, in most cases, individuals were predisposed to certain actions which could then be exacerbated by the individual’s environment. As the previous chapter shows, Wilde explores the idea of hereditary transmission himself. In stabbing Basil, Dorian conveys the lack of moral sense needed to control his impulses and so represents this alleged morally-insane criminal type.

The concept of free-will featured in theories about moral insanity because many psychiatrists felt that moral insanity constituted a loss of will needed to control internal impulses, including the morbid impulse to suicide. In *Dorian Gray* – which appeared the same edition of *Lippincott’s* as an article by Edward Heron-Allen entitled ‘The Chiromancy of Today’³³ – the narrative states of free-will:

There are moments, psychologists tell us, when the
passion for sin ...so dominates a nature that every

³² In *Otranto*, for example, the villain Manfred is described as savage on a number of occasions (Walpole 1764, 22, 94, 108).

³³ Chiromancy – or palmistry – calls the idea of free-will into question by insisting that the future can be read - suggesting therefore that it cannot be changed.

fibre of the body, as every cell of the brain, seems to be instinct with fearful impulses. Men and women at such moments lose the freedom of their will ...Choice is taken from them (Wilde 1891b, 150).

The image is one of individuals as slave to their internal impulses. The desire to partake in a sinful activity overrides conscience and the individual is powerless to refuse. The passage bears similarities to the words of the advocates of the theory of moral insanity. In 1869, for example, Symonds wrote:

The sentiments and passions of man have been generally considered subservient to the will and reason, and that any undue excitement of the former (the passions) has been consequently supposed to arise either from a criminal want of control on the part of the will, or from a deficiency of rational power; so that, according to this view, a man of violent passions or eccentric conduct, unless proved to entertain some delusion or hallucination, must be either wilfully perverse or chargeable with moral delinquency.³⁴

Symonds asserts that, when the passions are allowed to rule, a person will lose their will too and every action becomes an impulsive response. This was certainly a theory applied to suicide. Wilde's narrator predicts the movement towards a 'terrible end' in the form of Dorian and the words 'the psychologists tell us' allow Wilde to acknowledge the prevalence of similar views in the field of psychology while at the same time distancing the narrator from the statement.

So was Dorian's death an impulsive suicide? Suicide was, as this chapter has shown, frequently depicted as the logical conclusion to moral insanity and

³⁴ Quoted. by Tuke 1891, 362.

criminality, governed as the individual was by his impulses. After all, the will allegedly ‘call[s] off the attention from the contemplation of ideas which ought not to be entertained’, but in moral insanity it is overmastered (Carpenter 1874, 671). Thoughts of suicide might therefore be indulged, particularly if the sufferer experiences the alleged prevalent symptom of moral insanity known as melancholia. Wilde does explore the idea that Dorian suffers ‘melancholy’ (Wilde 1891b, 176). Prichard felt that: ‘the most frequent forms [of moral insanity] are those which are characterised either by the kind of excitement already described, or by the opposite state of melancholy dejection (Prichard 1835a, 121). The myriad of forms in which moral insanity was presumed to exist rendered it an umbrella term used by psychiatrists to explain a variety of peculiarities. The morally insane person, therefore, could fluctuate between both excitement and melancholia. Likewise, Dorian vacillates between a variety of emotions; chapter eleven conveys the variety of feelings he suffers in a given moment in time: ‘madness of pride’; ‘terrible joy’; ‘contempt’; ‘wild gesture of despair’; ‘fear’ and ‘uncontrollable...hatred’ (Wilde 1891b, 123-5). Gradually, these conflicting affections become melancholia as Dorian passes his time at Henry’s home disillusioned and despondent, lamenting that ‘life had suddenly become too hideous a burden...to bear’ (Wilde 1891b, 163). It is too late for Dorian to heal and his descent increases with intensity until it leaves him exhausted. Maudsley and Carpenter asserted that initially an afflicted person would feel joy at their liberation following the failure of the will and morality but that eventually they will experience a surge of irregular thoughts and feelings impelling them to partake in acts previously unthinkable.³⁵ An imbalance of the cerebral centre could allegedly descend into melancholia, during which the afflicted person feels impelled to do harm to himself, but has no will left to override this thought, and may commit suicide (Maudsley 1884, 298).

³⁵ See Maudsley 1884, 296-7 or Carpenter 1874, ch. 9.

Dorian laments that the peasant who died in the shooting accident is better off than him, and questions ‘was there no hope?’ (Wilde 1891b, 161, 174). His moral decline, uncontrollable impulses and altered behaviours have all culminated in gloom and despondency. Psychiatrists such as the Philadelphian John Gray wrote of the causes behind suicides of the melancholic, stating that often ‘it is committed in a turbulent state of emotions under conflicting and harassing fears and apprehensions, or in a tempest of passion’ (Gray 1878, 53).³⁶ Ideas surrounding moral insanity were well-publicised enough to become used frequently in newspaper articles surrounding ubiquitous court cases. Drawing upon the theories pervading the era on the degeneration of mankind through moral insanity and suicide, Wilde portrays Dorian as trapped under a weight of multiple emotions and fears which increase in intensity as the novel progresses culminating in his suicide. Dorian does not consciously or even intentionally kill himself, suggesting that indeed there is no rational reasoning behind the act. Throughout the novel, his acts have been referred to as unconscious, impulsive, or uncontrolled. The fact that his own suicide is equally as unconscious – Dorian drives the knife through his ‘other’ self, the portrait – indicates that he had no control over his action. He dies as he lived – controlled by instincts within him, ungoverned by his own will. In a letter to the *Daily Chronicle* written on 30 June 1890, Wilde acknowledged that Dorian is ‘extremely impulsive’ (Hart-Davis 1962, 263) and so his suicide, just like Basil’s murder, comes down to that same, seemingly morally insane, impulse.

Conclusion

As outlined in the introduction to this thesis, Gothic fiction responds to its era’s anxieties, which in the nineteenth century included psychiatric concerns, the loss of stable identity and ever-increasing fears of degeneracy stimulated by an altered perception of civilisation and society. As skilled novelists, Stevenson and Wilde ensure their stories are products of their time,

³⁶ Gray was editor of the *American Journal of Insanity* and a forerunner in the ideas behind theories on biological causes of psychiatric conditions such as moral insanity.

drawing into their texts a host of contemporary debates, anxieties and theories. As canonical degenerate figures, Dorian Gray/the portrait and Jekyll/Hyde are representations of moral insanity and its effects, culminating in suicide, while simultaneously showing how outside influences and acquired character and egoistical passions accelerated the rate at which moral insanity could allegedly develop. Read alongside the concept of moral insanity, the two suicides are indicative of the ending in store for those who lacked moral sense; those who were governed by instinct and the primitive egoism rather than the evolved faculties of morality, altruism, and, as a result, free-will.

This chapter has seen how ideas on evolution also affected psychiatry and psychology, as alienists considered the concepts of free-will, moral sense, criminal anthropology and innate impulses. Some of the ways of looking at *Jekyll and Hyde* and *Dorian Gray* contradict ideas discussed in the previous chapter as the texts and their authors engage with multiple concerns and debates of the era. The century's most eminent thinkers were also guilty of contradictions, a device which Wilde in particular adopted throughout his work to parody the paradigms of his fellow Victorians.³⁷ I have attempted to show the various means in which both Stevenson and Wilde may have come across the increasingly popular ideas surrounding moral insanity in the late-nineteenth century, and the ways in which their texts can be read alongside these theories.

This chapter has seen the effect of internal impulses and instincts on the individual subject. Having now established the prevalent psychological theories about suicide, as well as the importance of the previous two chapters in establishing the social context of suicide theory, the next chapter is now equipped to examine the perceived suicide epidemic of the late-nineteenth century. The suicides I explore within late-nineteenth-century Gothic fiction engage with very real thoughts and fears regarding not just suicide but the future

³⁷ For example Maudsley himself was guilty of contradictions (see chapter one).

of humanity, of the upper and middle classes, and the effects of social governance and hypocrisies on the reasoned human being.

Chapter 4: Suicide and the Middle and Upper Classes

In *The Art of Suicide* Ron Brown notes that by the late nineteenth century suicide had become ‘a concern which fell within the realms of the “condition of England” question ...[which indicates] the social nature of suicide’ (Brown 2001, 153). Suicide was considered by some theorists to be a measure of social ills and some people began to ask the question ‘is life worth living?’¹

In the early to mid-nineteenth century, both fiction and non-fiction often represented the working class as victims, their suicides allegedly the result of poverty-stricken lives. Thomas Hood’s ‘The Bridge of Sighs’, published in the May 1844 number of *Hood’s Monthly Magazine*, called for sympathy for those who committed suicide.² Charles Dickens depicted suicide as a last resort for the working classes in his Gothic story *The Chimes* (Gates 1977, 98-99), and, in 1844, Friedrich Engels wrote about the conditions suffered by the working classes in England. He included a description of a working-class woman who committed suicide to avoid the workhouse (Engels 1844, 239). Conversely, as the century progressed and post-Darwinian fears began to link evolutionary processes of degeneration with the decline of society, the working classes came to be represented more as a threatening mass ‘teeming’ with ‘immorality’ (Mearns 1883, 3), with suicide inevitable for these ‘godless’ savages.³

Increasingly, however, by the late nineteenth century suicide was becoming seen as an affliction of the entire Western world rather than just its working classes, as this chapter will show. The suicide theorist Henry Morselli asserted that suicide was the ‘fatal disease of civilized peoples’ (Morselli 1881,

¹ From an article published in the *Nineteenth Century* in 1878 written by William Hurrell Mallock (1849-1923), who was a conservative but relatively influential novelist and non-fiction writer.

² Can be read in Quiller-Couch 1919, 101.

³ Mearns 1883, 3. See also Jack London 1901, 66. London wrote that suicide was unavoidable for this ‘breed of city savages’.

375). Reflecting these growing considerations on suicide, some Gothic fiction of the late-nineteenth century engages with the idea that suicide was actually a social ill affecting all classes, particularly the upper and middle classes. Hyde, for example, is upper class, despite his physical deformities placing him closer to the perceived working-class degenerate of the era. Hyde is an extension of the upper-class Jekyll; he lives well and is referred to throughout the text as a 'gentleman.' Likewise, Arthur Machen, Oscar Wilde, Marie Corelli and Frank Constable (1846-1937) explore the problems inherent in middle and upper-class society and how the alleged prevalent vices potentially culminate in suicide.

To these authors, London became a city where there existed 'a horror in the air' (Machen 1894, 77), where a veneer of respectability can mask immoralities within society at large. Max Nordau links vices and degeneracy in the middle and upper classes, writing: 'if [a man] is cultivated and well to-do...he commits misdemeanours peculiar to the upper classes which have as their object not the gratification of material needs, but of other types of craving' (Nordau 1895, 260). These 'cravings' included gambling, alcohol and sexual depravity and by the late nineteenth century, these vices were believed to have increased. The problem, according to Morselli, was that the growth in 'civilisation' and 'knowledge' led to increased wants, dissatisfaction and pessimism, all of which could result in the partaking of vices: 'with every year that passes new wants arise amidst the civilised classes...[but] every want of man...involves victims'(Morselli 1881, 289). That victim could be themselves, their peers, or both.

This chapter examines late-nineteenth-century Gothic tales like Corelli's *The Sorrows of Satan* (1896), Wilde's *Dorian Gray* (1891), Stevenson's *Jekyll and Hyde* (1886), his earlier story *The Suicide Club* (1878) and Machen's *The Great God Pan* (1894). I explore why the authors of these novels ascribe the phenomenon of suicide largely to the upper and middle classes. I will consider why 'civilisation' is held accountable for the mental disorders, nervous conditions, egoistic vices and disillusionment which permeate and influence these novels, novels which themselves have become social critiques of the consequences of late-nineteenth-century bourgeois lifestyles.

Suicide: an Epidemic?

Newspapers in the late nineteenth century began to sensationalise suicide. An article in *The Speaker* stated that ‘there is hardly a single daily newspaper now which does not contain the record of some remarkable suicide’ (To be or not to be? 1894, 678) while Reginald A. Skelton concluded that the ‘ubiquity of the newspapers’ reports sensationalised the act (Skelton 1900, 466). John Stokes explores how suicide was represented in the late-nineteenth-century media and how this informed literary texts. Stokes cites a series of *Daily Chronicle* articles written in response to the publication of the suicide letter of Ernest Clarke on 16 August 1893, entitled ‘Tired of Life.’⁴ This note, Stokes asserts, compounded fears of an impending suicide epidemic, indicating a diseased society (Stokes 1989, 120).

In 1876, the *Saturday Review* published a study of suicide, concluding that ‘it is a significant and painful fact that suicide is far from uncommon, and is said to be rapidly on the increase’ (The ethics of suicide 1876, 770). A decade later *Reynolds’s Newspaper* (1887) asked ‘whence comes this epidemic of suicide?’ Following the introduction of suicide statistics in the mid-nineteenth century, experts began to see an alleged correlation between expanding civilisation and increased suicide rates, and suicide was therefore cast as one of the social problems that plagued society.⁵ The Czechoslovakian philosopher Thomas Masaryk (1850-1937) wrote that: ‘the increase in suicide [i]s considered to be a reflection of the pathological state of societies which had lost their grounding in a firm moral code’ (Masaryk 1870, 31). This increasingly popular perception permeated fiction and non-fiction, while newspapers and literary texts fed from each other’s sensationalism. For example, the writer Matthew Shiel (1865-1947) published a set of Gothic short-stories in 1895 entitled *Prince Zaleski*. In ‘The S.S.’, Zaleski investigates a presumed suicide

⁴ Stokes 1989, 119; I will come back to this suicide note later in the chapter.

⁵ For a discussion of suicide rates in the nineteenth-century, see William Ogle (1886), who was Superintendent of Statistics at the General Register Office.

epidemic and notes: ‘never have I seen the populace so agitated, and yet so subdued, as with the sense of some impending doom. The glittering eye betrayed the excitement, the pallor of the cheek, the doubt [and] the haunting fear’ (Shiel 1895, all one page). The similarities between this passage and an article in the *Chambers’ Journal* are evident: ‘the over-excitement, sharp competition and fret of modern life have something to do with this deplorable growth of what is called suicide mania’ (On suicide 1884, 232). Likewise, ‘The Ethics of Suicide’ had earlier blamed the increase in suicide rates on ‘the extremes of misery incidental to a higher artificial stage of civilisation, and the hurry and restlessness of modern life’, which were seen to lead to nervous disorder (1876, 770).

Cerebral Energy

Late-nineteenth-century psychiatrists feared that the nervous energy of the race was being exhausted⁶ by excessive vices and sensations, all of which would supposedly deplete an individual’s energy supply, ‘leaving an exhausted nervous system incapable of all endeavours’ (Oppenheim 1991, 81). Francis Galton wrote about the consequences of the atrophy of energy: ‘[Energy] is the measure of fullness of life; the more energy the more abundance of it; no energy at all is death’ (Galton 1883, 17-18). He concluded that because energy allows an organism to undertake actions necessary for survival, it is favoured by natural selection. A lack of energy, therefore, would allegedly make ‘feeble and listless...idiots’ (Galton 1883, 18). Henry Maudsley believed that the ‘moral sense’ – which included reason and will – was the expression of working-together of all the body’s organs, necessary for the healthy functioning of the brain in civilised humans.⁷ As the last organ to evolve, however, Maudsley asserted that the brain was vulnerable. A defective organ allegedly could not supply energy to the brain, which would affect the moral sense (Maudsley 1884,

⁶ See also Morselli who asked ‘what is this want of energy...but a true and fitting defeat in the great battle of life?’ (1881, 368). He believed that internal energies diminished as they were overcome by destructive impulses.

⁷ See chapter three of this thesis for more detail.

302-4).⁸ Likewise, Morselli claimed that the brain was the organ evolution had perfected and was mankind's 'weapon' in his daily battle to survive; therefore the brain was allegedly the organ which would be most vulnerable to defeat and decay as it was 'weighed down' under the struggle to compete in life's battle (Morselli 1881, 362). George Romanes also wrote of the evolutionary theory behind the development of the will and reason, stating that if the brain was weakened it would affect the nervous system (Romanes 1887).⁹ The Royal Medico-Psychological Association stated: 'the internal nerves and the nerve cells of the mind connect with each other so as to form a network ...telegraphing ideas from cell to cell ...In proportion as this network becomes broken or weakened does the mind fail in its functions; the snapping of a few fibres, the sickening of a few cells, makes a serious difference' (1885, 15). Marie Corelli's degenerate character Gaston in *Wormwood* describes this effect of absinthe upon his cerebral centre in similar terms, including the fact that his nerve fibres 'had snapped in some strange way' (Corelli 1890, 181-2).¹⁰

Medical literature blamed modern civilisation for such mental disturbance. T. Clifford Allbutt, a nineteenth-century physician, wrote: 'living at high pressure, the whirl of the railway, the pelting of telegrams, the strife of business, the hunger for riches, the lust of vulgar minds for coarse and instant pleasures, [causes] the decay of those controlling ethics handed down from statelier and more steadfast generations' (Allbutt 1895, 214). Nervousness was attributed to all classes, stemming not just from the external consequences of city life, but also from a pursuit of pleasure and financial gain. Jean-Martin Charcot, a French neurologist who led an in-depth investigation into hysteria in the late nineteenth century, stated: 'when we speak today of neurasthenia ...we almost exclusively have in mind the man of the privileged classes, sated by

⁸ Maudsley 1884, 302-4; please note the contradictions between this, one of Maudsley's later texts, and his previous determinism – his determinism conflicts with the idea of free will.

⁹ As discussed in chapter two of this thesis, Oscar Wilde admits to having read this article.

¹⁰ *Wormwood* is addressed later in this chapter.

culture, exhausted by pleasures' abuses.'¹¹ The writer and explorer Hugh Stutfield worried that 'neurasthenia and brain exhaustion were driving the upper-classes among mankind post-haste to Colney Hatch ...an epidemic of suicide is to be feared as a result' (Stutfield 1895, 834, 843).¹² The upper-classes in particular were seen by critics as suffering pathological effects from a life of indulgence and ease. An article published in *Merry England* described an individual who committed suicide: 'A month ago ...society was a source of pleasure to him; he smoked his pipe and tossed off his glass of hot punch or negus with the noisiest of them ...played high jinks and indulged in all kinds of buffooneries' (Vaughan 1887, 445). A fictional example of such an idea, Dorian suffers nervousness in *Dorian Gray*, after a life of excess including fine dining, alcohol and sensual pleasure. His vain concerns made 'each delicate fibre of his nature quiver' (Wilde 1891b, 24). His nerves become progressively worse as he is persecuted by his sins: 'he gnawed nervously at his under lip'; 'he wanted his nerve still'; 'his forehead was throbbing with maddened nerves' (Wilde 1891b, 145; 145; 139.) Lord Henry tells Dorian 'it is in the brain and the brain only, that the great sins of the world take place' (Wilde 1891b, 18). This hints at the idea that brain controlled all other bodily activity, including nerve activity, with both at risk of decay. Loss of evolutionary energy and a consequential increase in suicides continued to be a central concern in the late nineteenth century for physicians, psychiatrists, social critics and authors alike.

Morselli was critical of the social laws inherent within late-nineteenth-century Western society, stating that without the restraints of society men would be less inclined to commit suicide: 'man would never have destroyed himself if he lived far from other men ...we cannot move without collision ...our wants are not satisfied if they clash against the interests of others' (Morselli 1881, 274). Dissatisfaction and disillusion then ensued. Rick Rylance notes that late-

¹¹ Charcot's 'Leçons du Mardi'. vol.2, leçon 12 (29 Jan 1889), quoted by Micale 1990, 377. For neurasthenia, see the following chapter for more detail; it was a brain condition which allegedly resulted in feebleness and exhaustion

¹² 'Colney Hatch' was a lunatic asylum opened in 1851 in Barnet, London.

nineteenth-century civilisation inhibited desires while it simultaneously manufactured expectations and wants, causing an obvious mental conflict (Rylance 2000, 119). The idea that pressure to conform was detrimental to mental health is seen in the ‘perennial war’ going on within Jekyll (Stevenson 1886, 95) and, in *Dorian Gray*, Henry tells Dorian:

Every impulse that we strive to strangle broods in
the mind and poisons us ...Resist [temptation] and
your soul grows sick with longing for the things it
has forbidden to itself, with desire for what its
monstrous laws have made monstrous and unlawful’
(Wilde 1891b, 18).

This internal conflict between restraint and desire was explored by psychiatrists like Maudsley, who were becoming increasingly pessimistic, postulating that a national decline was likely due to a ‘waning’ of evolutionary energy in individuals (Maudsley 1884, 322-7). The result of this was twofold. Firstly, loss of evolutionary energy allegedly reduced the supposed higher human faculties of will and reason, which he perceived as being able to prevent anarchism. Secondly, loss of energy promoted disillusion and apathy. Accordingly, he asked, ‘do not crushed sensibilities, disillusionment and despair cause many more suicides than cancer and other painful and hopeless diseases?’ (Maudsley 1884, 326). To Maudsley, egoism and ‘maladies of self-consciousness’ were afflictions of the ‘civilised’ man and thus ‘multiplication of suicides from life-weariness’ come from increased knowledge, wants, egoism and selfishness, all of which deplete ‘man’s’ energy. Consequently, individuals would stop pretending ‘through the systematic concealments of vice’ to care about society and ‘life will be viewed in its bare misery and vanity’ (Maudsley 1884, 327). Therefore, said Maudsley, ‘men will feel the wish ...to be delivered from the burden of the flesh and from the miseries of this sinful world’ (Maudsley 1884, 327).

When individuals give way to the ‘wish’ to escape life, Maudsley asserts that their suicide is an indicator of free-will (Maudsley 1884, 330). The idea that suicide is something that can *potentially* be chosen rather than a pre-determined

phenomenon was considered by Samuel Strahan. Strahan drew from Maudsley, writing: ‘where civilisation is highest there life is most artificial, and there we meet with the most rapid degeneration of stock ...There is a price put upon knowledge by nature, and it must be paid’ (Strahan 1893, 174).¹³ In part, Strahan blamed the enforced falsity of ‘civilised’ society for the alleged increase in suicide. He stated that the two types of suicide were the rational and irrational. The latter would be driven to commit suicide by an uncontrollable impulse (Strahan 1893, 34), whereas ‘rational’ suicide needed the evolved faculty of reason, as the individual would weigh up the ‘good and the evil of the situation.’¹⁴ Reason and awareness, therefore, could potentially be damaging on several levels, depending on how dire the individual’s personal situation. Reason cannot keep somebody happy if it merely provides an awareness of how disappointing and frustrating life can be.

‘The Curse’ of Reason

The correlation between suicide and the faculty of reason is explored in Frank Constable’s 1895 tale *The Curse of Intellect* (Constable 1895), in which a narrator, Clout, tells the story of a monkey, ‘the Beast’.¹⁵ A scientist, Power, captures the monkey and experiments upon him until the monkey becomes educated, at which point Power introduces him to English upper-class society. Like Jekyll, the Beast battles between the acquired knowledge of how he should behave and his innate instincts. Ultimately, the Beast cannot endure ‘civilisation’ and the novel culminates in his suicide.

The Beast is portrayed as an ‘Other’ to Power, a relationship comparable to that of Jekyll and Hyde, but one which is not far removed from that of the

¹³ Strahan quotes Maudsley throughout this text.

¹⁴ See also *To be or Not to Be?* (1894, 195-196), which is a coherent review of Strahan’s *Suicide and Insanity*. This form of suicide could therefore be construed as free-will.

¹⁵ This was first published in 1895 by William Blackwood in Edinburgh. Constable himself was a barrister, scientist and a socialist.

infamous early-Gothic scientist, Frankenstein, and his monster.¹⁶ Frankenstein bestows intellect upon his monster who gradually becomes consumed with anger and despair as he realises, in words used over half a century later by Maudsley, that ‘sorrow only increased with knowledge’ (Shelley 1818, 103).¹⁷ Like Jekyll, he battles reason and instinct. Similarly, the Beast is bestowed with knowledge by his ‘alter ego’ Power (Constable 1895, pt. one, ch. six). In his African forest, the Beast lived a simple life ‘free from the conscious restraint of any law...a life...of pure happiness’ (Constable 1895, pt. two, ch. one). Maudsley and Strahan both believed that suicide and mental deterioration would occur more in ‘civilised’ society because primitive ‘savages’ were able to live by the ‘instinctive happiness from reasonable life and the unaffected intercourse of living creatures’ (Constable 1895, pt. two, ch. one).¹⁸ In *Pathology of Mind* (1867) Maudsley wrote that ‘the savage’ was ‘free ...from the conventional restraints upon his natural passions’ imposed by ‘civilisation.’¹⁹ In a natural environment, then, the ‘savage’ was happier than the ‘civilised’ person because he did not suffer from a ‘conflict between urgent desire of gratification and the duty to suppress all manifestations.’ This conflict, said Maudsley, sometimes ‘prove[d] too great a strain upon the mind of a civilised person’ (Maudsley 1867b, 128-9). Constable considered a similar idea:

There can scarcely be any concrete question of right or wrong concerned in the struggles for existence of unconscious amorphous life ...but with evolution of man came the evolution of property, when abstract

¹⁶ See review by Droch 1895, 354. He writes that ‘this story forcibly reminds one of “Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde.”’

¹⁷ In *Body and Will* (1884), Maudsley writes: ‘the increase of sorrow that increase of knowledge is’ (327).

¹⁸ See Strahan 1893, and Maudsley 1867b. By ‘savages’ Maudsley refers to the primitive tribes of North Africa – from whence the Beast originates rather than the ‘savages’ of Mearns and Jack London (see above).

¹⁹ As we saw in chapters one and two, Maudsley felt that social restraints fed the appetite of the more natural ‘savage’ nature within mankind by repressing them too much. Conversely, he argued that too much altruism was detrimental, and, as this chapter will show, so did too much egoism. A careful balance between the two would instead bring the most satisfaction.

morality fell into the background and concrete
morality came to the fore (Constable 1904, 54).

Constable felt that ‘protoplasmic’ ancestors lived a simple life before humans evolved along with a society with morals and yet focussed on material wants and gratifications. The similarities between Constable’s *Curse* and Maudsley’s theories are evident. Maudsley argued that animals had a full energy supply because they retained their unity with nature, rendering them less inclined to suicide: ‘certainly it is not ...animals that commit suicide’ (Maudsley 1884, 327, 326). Strahan said: ‘it is a sad fact that suicide ...occurs in inverse ratio to ignorance. To the untutored savage it is almost unknown’ (Strahan 1893, 44).²⁰ Whereas, said the author of the article ‘Suicide’, published in *Blackwood’s*: ‘Suicide is now most abundant ...in the very regions in which schooling is most expanded’ (Suicide 1880, 727). The *Daily Chronicle* cited Frankenstein’s monster to communicate this idea: ‘The present dreadful epidemic of suicide among the more intellectual seems to point to some most lame and impotent conclusions in our logic ...A scientific age has ...proved that “he who increases in knowledge increases in sorrow.”’²¹ Allegedly, no animals or amorphous beings suffered the weight of ‘conflict’ that ‘civilised’ persons endured. The Beast realised that human life was restrictive: ‘I had been in full sympathy with nature ...And what had I gained? Conscious knowledge of man, intellect perhaps to strive with him, power perchance to strengthen man’s hold on the material’ (Constable 1895, pt. two, ch. two). His ‘unity’ with nature, to use Maudsley’s term, was ‘severed’ by Power, and disillusion began. Initially, the Beast is ostracised by society because of his differences, which fuels his rage. His anger was fostered by the higher faculties he had gained, enabling an

²⁰ It is worth noting that the degenerate ‘savage’ of chapters one and two are not by any means ‘untutored’. The atavistic ‘savage’ degenerates as per the works of Lombroso and his peers live within society and are accountable to society’s restraints and moral codes. They represent a reversal of their humanity and the specific effects of such. The ‘content’ savages described above do not suffer the same conflict and war because they are allowed the freedom to satiate their needs; by not caging their instincts – temptation does not undo them mentally and morally.

²¹ George O’Byrne. 1893. *Daily Chronicle* 18 August. Quoted by Stokes 1989, 120.

outsider's realisation of the hypocrisies of society. Constable explored the idea that an individual's environment is a key factor of his development rather than the inheritance discussed in previous chapters of this thesis. He expressed this idea when writing a response to Francis Galton, arguing that man's environment repressed inherent skills and instincts thus man could never live the life he was born to follow: 'environment being always restrictive on the full action — achievement — of natural ability' (Constable 1905, 19). The Beast's angry and embittered persona is fostered by his surroundings and his peers and the life he must now lead is governed by the restrictive nature of his society.

The Beast laments that 'intellect is a cursed gift –a gift flowing from evil, destroying natural instinctive happiness, and introducing unnatural misery and unnatural immorality' (Constable 1895, pt. two, ch. five). To Constable, it was the higher faculties of human evolution which led to despair and anger. The Beast emphasises this view:

[Man's] measure of happiness decreases with the development of his reason²²...Each century of advance in intellect is marked by the imposition of new restrictive laws ...What has man gained by reason? ...Blindness of heart, pride, vainglory, and hypocrisy, envy, hatred, malice, and all uncharitableness (Constable 1895, pt. two, ch. five).

Constable suggested that reason allowed for pathologically damaging emotions. Like Strahan, Maudsley conceded that sometimes suicide required will and reason: '[Suicide] must be acknowledged the most momentous act of free will on human record' (Maudsley 1884, 330).²³ Similarly, the American writer

²² i.e. reason makes up part of the moral sense which, to Maudsley, was what set one aside as human; however, being 'human' is conversely what causes people to commit suicide (in the way that animals and 'savage' tribe members do not).

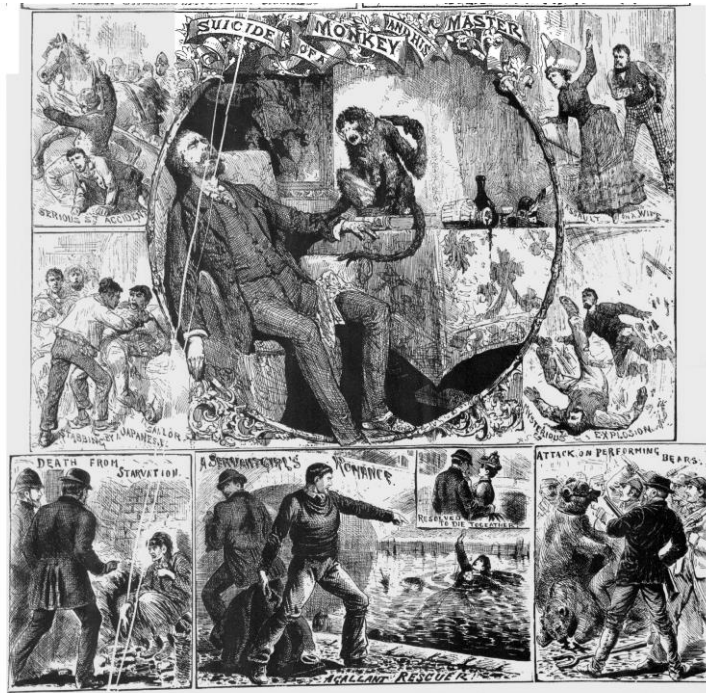
²³ This contradicts Maudsley's usual theory of hard-line determinism; however, an acknowledgement such as this shows that all suicides are different and can therefore be attributed to different causes, just as

Albert Rhodes stated: ‘it is the head which drives the man to [suicide]; he reasons, and from his reasoning comes death’ (Rhodes 1876, 188).²⁴ Reason allegedly meant individuals could choose death and override the instinct for self-preservation.

As seen, Maudsley felt that disillusionment and dissatisfaction in society would deplete an individual’s energy and disillusion and dissatisfaction would occur (Maudsley 1884, 326-7). Morselli believed that dissatisfaction could lead to suicide: ‘unsatisfied desire ...leads to voluntary death’ (Morselli 1881, 362). Likewise, it is the Beast’s human intellect and reason which drive him to commit suicide through disillusionment., as Clout realises: ‘How ...painful for the poor Beast, with power of reflection suddenly born in him, full ...of belief in man's godlike greatness, to be confronted suddenly with the human beast as he is!’ (Constable 1895, pt. three, ch. two). Constable, as a socialist, is thus able to explore the perceived negativity of the rate of human evolution and the consequential inevitable loss of energy, hope and happiness. The Beast is driven to suicide by his ‘human’ emotions and a realisation about the hypocrisies of Western society. Like Jekyll, he is destabilised by an inner war between instinct and expected social morality. Reason and intellect offer him only a way out. The story bears similarities to an 1889 newspaper article featured in *The Illustrated Police News* (1889, 1317), a newspaper which sensationalised suicides and macabre tales, entitled ‘Suicide of a Monkey and Its Master.’ A Doctor finds a man’s body beside the body of a ‘learned’ monkey called Bertram who has ‘a revolver clasped between its fingers.’

Esquirol and Strahan, for example, suggested two different forms of rational and irrational suicide. This means this thesis can be written thematically in six separate chapters – because suicide theory did vary in the era depending on the victim and the context.

²⁴ *The Galaxy* was an American entertainment magazine. Rhodes was a frequent contributor to American, French, and British periodicals, writing mostly about Europeans and their lives.



Hypocrisy and Disillusion

Just as Henry warns Dorian that all ways end in ‘disillusion’ (Wilde 1891b, 162), the Beast becomes disillusioned with humanity. Constable ridicules the ‘idle’ class by mocking the publication of handbooks instructing humans on ‘how to use a knife, how to enter a room, how to sit down on a chair’ (Constable 1904, 8). He derides the middle classes for accepting such instruction: ‘this information of how to behave when in society is literally devoured by our great middle class’ (Constable 1904, 8). Constable questions the ability to determine ‘the best’ in society, calling the middle classes ‘selfish’ and parasitic (Constable 1904, 10). These are concerns predicated in the Beast’s narrative, in relation to both the upper and middle classes, which refers to the hypocrisy between public and private spheres:

The moment man came under the government of reason, each human being ...reasoned that it was for his individual benefit he should lie, cheat, murder, and thief for self-advancement. But, lest opportunity for gain by such means should be lost, he appreciated, too, the fact that he should act as

covertly as possible. Hence it followed that each man consented to promulgate for others a moral code of truth, fair dealing, and honesty, as thereby he made opportunity for remunerative selfish conduct and disguised his own mainsprings of action (Constable 1895, pt. two, ch. five).

Like *Jekyll and Hyde*, the *Curse* refers to moral and social laws which publically restrict individual desires and instincts, while encouraging the hypocritical indulgence of vices in private. The Beast's disillusion following this realisation culminates in inertia: 'my interest in life was gone. And Power was in a like state. We wearily dreamt and ate the time away' (Constable 1895, pt. two, ch. four). As seen above, brain function was often measured in terms of energy. Maudsley claimed that a lack of cerebral energy found in those exhausted by life could lead to suicide: 'depressed by causes which hinder function ...[the brain's] structural elements suffer, and reveal their suffering consciously by despondent sadness and apathy, by despair and life-weariness' (Maudsley 1892, 45). The Beast suffers a similar fear-filled apathy: 'the new, horrible dread, the dread of the future, grew on me' (Constable 1895, pt. two, ch. four). 'Civilised' humans, said Maudsley, suffer 'maladies of self-consciousness ...notably absent in the animal and uncivilised man, where generative energy is in full vigour and has not become self-conscious' (Maudsley 1884, 327). Maudsley claims this is 'evidence' that intellect 'sever[s] the unity of man and nature and brings doubt and disillusion' (Maudsley 1884, 327). According to Maudsley, the survival instinct gradually eroded in those for whom disillusionment and apathy became a part of everyday existence: 'Suicide...is a sort of convulsive climax of pessimism...there is no more powerful cause of individual suicide than the premature loss of evolutionary energy, mental and bodily' (Maudsley 1884, 330-1). Knowledge, therefore, could lead to disillusionment, eroding evolutionary energy which ultimately ended in suicide.

Constable questioned a middle and upper-class life of inertia, in which the struggle for life which theorists such as Morselli deemed so necessary was eradicated: 'why do thousands exist in absolute idleness...why do they pursue lives of selfish pleasure with the least possible intellectual exertion?' (Constable

1904, 10). Stevenson explored the possible outcome of this lifestyle in his set of three novels, 'The Suicide Club', published in 1878.²⁵ The members of this club are upper-class men 'who have grown heartily sick' of their daily lives (Stevenson 1878, 20).²⁶ Lloyd Osbourne, Stevenson's step-son, wrote that his step-father railed against materialism and the hypocrisy of, in this case, the middle class: 'No Socialist ever used the word "bourgeoisie" with more contempt than he ...He thought...that the mass of the middle class was almost hopelessly antagonistic to human advancement...its hypocritical morality ...[was] to him ...[an] inexcusable offence' (Osbourne 1924, 15). In a letter to the English poet Edmund Gosse, Stevenson elaborates on his feelings towards the human race: 'I do not like mankind ...As for respecting the race ...that way lies disgrace and dishonour.'²⁷ Stevenson, as *Jekyll and Hyde* hints, attacks the duplicity of the middle class. The hypocrisy and repression in society seemingly leads to the self-destructive consequences witnessed in *The Suicide Club*.

There are no fully-developed female characters in *Jekyll and Hyde*. Instead, the gentlemen dine with one another. The narrative states 'it is the mark of a modern man to accept his friendly circle' (Stevenson 1886, 48). This was usual for the era: 'all-male associations are integral to any notion of patriarchy beyond the household. They embody men's privileged access to the public sphere ...[and] sustained the powerful myth that masculinity is about the exclusive company of men' (Tosh 1994, 186-7). Stevenson, too, appreciated the company of his male peers. Henry James famously said that 'Mr. Stevenson' possessed 'an absence of care for all things female.'²⁸ In *The Suicide Club*, Stevenson satirises this upper-class gentleman's circle, despite his own enjoyment of it, by exploring the negative consequences of a 'gentleman's' life. In 'Cream Tarts', Prince Florizel and Colonel Geraldine meet an upper-class

²⁵ *The Suicide Club* was first published as a series of three novels in 1878 in the *London Magazine*. The collection was published as part of *New Arabian Nights* in 1882.

²⁶ The first in the collection is 'Story of the Young Man with the Cream Tarts.'

²⁷ Colvin 1900, 12-13.Vol. 2, 2 January 1886.

²⁸ Quoted by Luckhurst 2002, xxvi.

man who has gambled away his money and is now too ashamed to marry his betrothed. The Prince concludes that pleasure-seeking caused his ruin (Stevenson 1878, 13). The social reformer Jane Hume Clapperton would agree: ‘a life devoted to pure pleasure-seeking seldom, if ever, satisfies’ (Clapperton 1885, 107).²⁹ The Prince discloses that he and Geraldine also face ruin, to which their companion asks: ‘are you, after a life of indulgence ...going to give the slip to the sheriff’s offices of conscience by the one open door?’ (Stevenson 1878, 15). Suicide is portrayed as a means of escaping conscience. Stevenson treats this idea with more light-hearted irony than in *Jekyll and Hyde*, parodying the absurdities of his society in the ‘silliness’ of his three characters; the Prince asks: ‘if, as I suppose, your story is a silly one, you need have no delicacy with us, who are two of the silliest men in England ...We pass our lives entirely in the search for extravagant adventures’ (Stevenson 1878, 11-12).

Playing on Stevenson’s title, Nordau wrote that if egoism, indulgence and related apathy continued then indeed ‘every city’ would ‘possess its club of suicides’ (Nordau 1895, 537). The President of the Suicide Club asks the Prince ‘what is your reason for being tired of life?’ The Prince replies ‘unadulterated laziness’ (Stevenson 1878, 27), suggesting the consequences of a life of idleness as the gentility becomes weighed down with the ennui and dissatisfaction consequential to a life of leisure and inactivity. Some journal articles in the era commented on the energy levels of individuals within society.³⁰ These include journals to which Stevenson contributed. Stevenson explored this idea that ennui and listlessness would contribute to a lack of cerebral energy in some of his other work. In *The Day After Tomorrow*, he wrote: ‘Our race has not been

²⁹ See chapter one of this thesis; Clapperton was in the rare position of being a feminist but also a social commentator and eugenicist. To Clapperton, individualistic pleasure-seeking did not fulfil one’s needs and did not bring happiness.

³⁰ In 1869, George Miller Beard attributed the condition ‘neurasthenia’ to depleted energy supplies to the nervous system. In 1874, Maudsley first took up his idea of energy supplies, which he maintained throughout his work; ‘energy of a human body [is] a definite and not inexhaustible quantity’ (Maudsley 1874b, 467. The *Fortnightly Review*, in which this article was published, was contributed to by both Stevenson and Wilde). Following 1869, the publication of articles on the prevalence of neurasthenia were common, in journals such as the *Nineteenth Century*, [see 17(100)]; the *Saturday Review*, [see 48(1,243)]; the *Cornhill Magazine*, [see 28(167)] and the *Speaker*, [see 8].

strained for all these ages through that sieve of dangers that we call Natural selection, to sit down with patience in the tedium of safety ...Already in our society ...the bourgeoisie is too much cottoned about for any zest in living' (Stevenson 1887, 318). Stevenson portrays a society which needs struggle and competition. Without it, the bourgeoisie may become a society of disillusioned, dissatisfied and enfeebled individuals.³¹ Weakened mind and nerves along with depleted energy could allegedly end in suicide. The causes behind the weak nervous system and enfeebled mind were largely attributed to modernity and its accompanying vices, explored below.

Egoism and vices

Clapperton argued that social vices were rife within the late-nineteenth-century middle and upper classes, and that these vices were engendered by what allowed for gain – or indeed survival – in an increasingly immoral society:

Vices, not virtues, help one on ...the lies and tricks
of trade, gambling and downright knaveries
[...]society must enter on some different path, ere
we can say that all is going well to bring about in
human nature moral, intellectual and physical
“survival of the fittest” (Clapperton 1885, 28-31).

She argued that progression would only occur if the moral nature of mankind improved and vices were eradicated; therefore, socially engendered passions and vices needed to be controlled and balance enforced. Scientists addressed the same issue. For example, the physician William Benjamin Carpenter asserted that the will controlled activity in the mind and body, stating that will-power meant an individual ‘can use his will to *direct* his thoughts and control his feelings ...and keep his appetites and passions under subordination.’³² He said

³¹ An idea used by H G Wells in his 1895 novel *The Time Machine*.

³² Carpenter 1874, 106. Carpenter was a revered physician and registrar of the University of London who, according to E. Ray Lankester, ‘exerted a powerful influence for good on the scientific education of the

the will was essential in governing ‘self-control’ which was the key to retaining a ‘well-balanced’ mind (Carpenter 1874, 657). Maudsley stated that some altruistic restraint on ‘primary passions’ was essential for society to function and progress. Decadence, luxury and obsession with power, for example, were viewed as symptoms of excessive egoism (Maudsley 1884, 287). The unleashing of egoistic tendencies could cause ‘explosive disposition’, because natural impulses were constrained in social development and so became progressively worse (Maudsley 1884, 287). This idea is also seen in earlier Gothic convention. For example, in *The Monk*, Ambrosio’s lack of self-control means that his desires are unleashed in explosive fashion because ‘his long fast had only given a keener edge to his appetite’ and thus his egoistic ‘cravings of brutal appetite’ are set free and grow in intensity (Lewis 1796, 224, 236). Similarly, Maudsley believed that, when released, the developed negative impulses within ‘gain force rapidly’ (Maudsley 1884, 288) just as Jekyll’s internal instincts ‘came out roaring’ (Stevenson 1886, 103). Moral nature would become disturbed and society ‘breeds in itself the morbid elements which feed on it, flourish in it, and in the end kill it’ (Maudsley 1884, 286). This assertion of societal suicide was, in Maudsley’s view, largely due to excessive egoism and a lack of unity amongst its members. His use of terms like ‘luxury’ indicates that he linked the egoistical and the upper class and the materialistic middle class.

Through the exaggerated characterisations in his novel, Wilde emphasised the platitudes relating to egoism and materialism, underlining the image of the aristocratic life of idleness and laziness. The *St James’s Gazette* described *Dorian Gray* as a novel filled with ‘effeminate’ characters that ‘fill up the intervals of talk by plucking daisies and playing with them, and sometimes by drinking “something with strawberry in it” (Mason 1912, 199-200). Wilde’s satirical caricatures depict a useless upper class (to which Wilde himself belonged), the consequences of which appearing to lend themselves to views

English speaking world’ – Lankester 1885, 344. See the introduction to this thesis for further information on ‘the will.’

such as those of Maudsley, who wrote: ‘all privileged or so-called aristocratic classes have in their privileges the conducive elements of corruption and decay, and degeneracy of one sort or another is likely, sooner or later, to appear and spread among them’ (Maudsley 1867b, 170). Likewise, Dorian is accused by Hallward of leading his friends ‘down into the depths’ (Wilde 1891b, 120). Corruption spreads as Dorian and his aristocratic peers suffer the consequences of a life of excess; their behaviour is their own ruin.

Aristocratic men were expected to command the public sphere, projecting an image of restraint (Micale 1992). However, as T. H. Escott wrote in 1885, with reference to upper class men, despite their public image of respectability, privately these classes ‘love[d] to parade their own vices’ (Escott 1885, 58-9). Clapperton noted that in the life of the upper-class male, ‘tyranny of custom and fashion so press upon him at every point’ (Clapperton 1885, 216). At times, inner desires allegedly resulted in the polarisation between private life and public actions, as Stevenson demonstrates in *Jekyll and Hyde*; the degenerate ‘other’ acts out the hidden instincts of the gentlemanly but ‘secret sinner’ Jekyll (Stevenson 1886, 105). Throughout the century, physicians saw the potential consequences of excessive vice as causing mental and nervous disorders or suicide; a life of indulgence, facilitating a moral decline, would seemingly result in an unsatisfied life.³³ In a case study of the suicidal Gothic writer Edgar Allen Poe, Maudsley demonstrated the consequences of indulgence: ‘having yielded to temptation [alcohol] he has weakened himself’ (Maudsley 1860, 335). The Coroner William Westcott stated that ‘[suicide] is the effect of satiety following the pursuit of pleasure’ because exhausting sources of pleasure ultimately altered the state of mind (Westcott 1885, 141). Wilde understood the common views of his era, conceding that the moral of *Dorian Gray* is: ‘All excess, as well as all renunciation, brings its own

³³ See chapter three for more detail.

punishment.³⁴ Conversely, however, he claimed just days before that art could not contain morals, stating: 'the sphere of art and the sphere of ethics are absolutely distinct and separate.'³⁵ Wilde clearly understood and parodied perceptions of his own society and yet retained a distance. He did, after all, enjoy his own excesses. Marie Corelli, too, was upper class, and, like Wilde, satirises this class in her fiction and non-fiction, critiquing the hypocrisy and corruption of her own class.

Marie Corelli

Marie Corelli's two Gothic novels *Wormwood* (1890) and *The Sorrows of Satan* (1896) explore the hypocrisies of late-nineteenth century society in Paris and London respectively. Her non-fiction also critiques or satirises the immorality of society.³⁶ In her essay 'The Modern Marriage Market' she says of her era:

It is doubtful whether there has ever been [an age] which has so richly merited the pre-eminent and prominent label of "Sham" writ across it as this, our own blessed and enlightened time (Corelli 1898, 9-10).

Corelli felt that the upper classes 'masquerade[d]' as civil to maintain respectability in public (Corelli 1898, 10). We see this in *Sorrows of Satan*. Satan, in the guise of Rimanez, makes impoverished Geoffrey Tempest rich again and guides him on becoming a 'gentleman' which leads to Tempest's ruin. Rimanez says that London is 'full of abhorrent creatures not worth the torturing in hell to which it is said liars and hypocrites are condemned' (Corelli 1896, 61). Vices are carried out beneath a respectable façade: 'if there is one human being more than another that I utterly abhor, it is ...the man who huddles his own loathly

³⁴ Davis 1962, 258-9. Letter to the Editor of the *St James' Gazette*.

³⁵ Davis 1962, 257.

³⁶ Says Hartnell 2006, 284-303.

vices under a cloak of assumed broad-mindedness and virtue’ states Rimanez (Corelli 1896, 61). Similarly, in *Wormwood*, absinthe-addict Gaston claims ‘the barriers between vice and virtue are being fast broken down in all great “civilized” countries’ (Corelli 1890, 219-20).

Rimanez tells Tempest that he must become a gambler ‘to make [himself] agreeable to the English aristocracy’ (Corelli 1896, 67). When Rimanez challenges a fellow-gambler, Viscount Lynton, to a last game he offers to wager Lynton his soul, which Lynton accepts under pressure from his peers. After winning, Rimanez jokes to the crowd that souls do not exist: ‘how thankful we ought to be that we live in advanced days like the present, when such silly superstitions are being swept aside by the march of progress and pure reason’ (Corelli 1896, 108). Rimanez’s sardonic words warn of a class which sells its soul to the Devil for the sake of a pursuit of pleasure. Maudsley noted the social constructs dictating indulgences like gambling and the shame which could result:

A man of honour, so-called, would be more disgraced among his fellows by his refusal to pay a gambling debt than he would be by perpetrating a heartless seduction ...Men are found everywhere ...to avoid that which brings them shame and dishonour among their kind, although that which is esteemed may be profoundly immoral.³⁷

Maudsley criticises the middle and upper class for considering public appearance to be more ‘powerful’ than morality. To remain a ‘man of honour’ (borrowing Maudsley’s term) Lynton must pay his gambling debt. He is unable

³⁷ Maudsley 1867b, 161. We have no concrete evidence that Corelli read Maudsley’s work. However, there are connections. Corelli was interested in Darwinism and evolutionary theory (see chapter two of this thesis) and Maudsley wrote much about the topic. Corelli was also a contributor to the popular *Belgravia Magazine* in the 1880s. In Sept. 1881 [45(179)], Andrew Wilson published ‘The Mind’s Mirror’ which discussed theories of evolution, inheritance and Maudsley.

to and, dishonoured, he shoots himself. Lynton's 'friends' are disinterested in his woes, and Tempest realises that 'every gambler there [is] selfish to the core.' He realises the aristocrats infect each other with their selfishness: 'I know that I was becoming more and more of a brutal egoist with every hour I lived' (Corelli 1896, 108). Maudsley refers to the aristocratic youth as suffering 'foolish indulgence, through which it never has infixed in its nature the important lessons of renunciation and self-control, is not less pernicious ...[These] minds, when they are young, have never been trained to bear any unwelcome burden' (Maudsley 1867b, 162). To Maudsley, a life of luxury meant aristocratic men did not have the necessary self-control to withstand temptation. Lynton's lack of self-control in the gambling house leads to his 'mental sickness and confusion of a wilfully degraded existence' (Corelli 1896, 114). Accordingly, commented Thomas Coates, 'such is the history ...of many a young aristocrat's suicide' (Coates 1903, 155). Coates concluded that 'gambling fever' raged throughout society, and 'often may be seen men of distinction ...destroying their peace, their prosperity, the happiness of themselves and their families for the luck of the cards' (Coates 1903, 160). Men of 'reputation' were perceived to be the perpetrators of their own ruin.

In 1891, Douglas Mackenzie commented on the problems of gambling. He asserted that will and reason were overthrown while the gambler played continually to 'the pursuit of his own end', displaying the egoism to which *Sorrows* alludes (MacKenzie 1891, 227-239). Mackenzie's reference to a loss of will suggests that gambling was one of the driving forces behind the perceived social degeneration of the era. Mackenzie's view is similar to Maudsley's connection between egoism, loss of will and decrease in evolutionary energy. Like Maudsley, and as with Lynton, Mackenzie concluded that the consequence of such an existence was inevitably suicide: 'we should find that gambling was of all vicious habits, not even excluding hard drinking, the one which most predisposed its victims to suicide' (Mackenzie 1891, 232). Mackenzie felt that gamblers, like Lynton, could not live with the shame and ruin of gambling debts and losses and so would commit suicide. In *Sorrows*, Corelli depicts a London which encourages the duality of upper-class life. To be 'fashionable', Tempest indulges in vices despite simultaneously acknowledging 'what beasts we all

were' (Corelli 1896, 174). Rimanez reiterates this, telling Tempest that men, in particular the egoist, are monstrous:

The chief crime of the age [is] Sensual Egotism, the blackest sin ...This present time of the world breathes Egotism ...when the world is totally corrupt, when Self is dominant, when cunning supersedes honesty, when gold is man's chief ambition, when purity is condemned, when poets teach lewdness, and scientists blasphemy, when love is mocked, and God forgotten, the End is near (Corelli 1896, 464-6).

The contempt shown towards egoists in *Sorrows* is similar to the views of alienists like Maudsley; Corelli shows that continued selfishness can lead to the ruin of the self and others. Her depiction of society in *Sorrows* builds upon a narrative constructed to critique late-nineteenth-century Paris in *Wormwood*. Gessonex commits suicide following a cynical speech about society's hypocrisy and materialism. He is poor, but in contrast with the representations of poverty-stricken suicides in the mid-nineteenth-century, he had once been upper-class. Disillusion and absinthe, however, had caused his fall. Gessonex is allegedly a brilliant artist; nonetheless, his work is largely ignored as he is repressed as an artist by society's expectations. He chooses poverty rather than conform to society's 'fashion': 'Let me keep my artistic conscience! A grateful posterity may recognize what this frivolous age condemns!' (Corelli 1890, 130). When he finally concedes to the era's trends, he kills himself, filled with self-loathing. Immediately preceding his death, he attempts to buy a 'vulgar' cartoon, stating: 'it is a reflex of the age we live in. Its sale to-day will bring in much more money than I ask for one of my pictures' (Corelli 1890, 381). The artist, he laments, will be respected because of his money, despite the vulgarity of his work, which is the hypocrisy of the age. Gessonex refuses to live by the expected moral code of society and in words similar to those later used by Constable's Beast he states:

Civilization is a curse, — Morality an enormous hindrance to freedom. Man was born a savage, and he is still happiest in a state of savagery...Civilized, we are shackled and bound in a thousand ways when we wish to give the rein to our natural impulses (Corelli 1890, 267).

However, by choosing to live in ‘freedom’ from society’s expectations, Gessonex descends into poverty and alcoholism: he becomes the ‘mad painter’ (Corelli 1890, 135). Constable’s Beast finds that civilisation and instincts are diametrically opposed. Similarly, Gessonex is unable to find this balance such is the excess of his vice: a life without restraint leaves him alienated, but giving into society’s expectations causes his suicide. He scoffs at altruism, telling Gaston: ‘the Me who died was a painfully conscious creature, always striving to do good ...that Me was an utter fool!’ (Corelli 1890, 267-8).³⁸ Disillusioned, Gessonex turned to absinthe, rejecting morality. Such disillusion causes his suicide; he comments ‘we all die of disappointed something or other’ (Corelli 1890, 269). Gessonex is portrayed as a victim of ‘civilisation’ and social expectation, but also a perpetrator of the same egoism and immorality which surrounds him. Corelli is quick to condemn the values of society which caused vice-addictions. Gessonex and Gaston are driven to absinthe through disappointment in life and love respectively as Corelli shows that alcoholism was a vice which could potentially affect any class. This connection between destructive ruin and an addiction to alcohol or narcotics within the upper-class has also been made with *Jekyll and Hyde* and Jekyll’s ‘alcoholism’ caused by repressed frustrations (Reid 2006), and can also be seen in Dorian’s addiction to opium which drives him along the path to self-destruction. Neither character has the will to abstain from his addiction.

³⁸ Gessonex claims to have attended his own funeral – a metaphorical burial of the self he had been before his absinthe addiction took over.

An anonymous 'Habitual Drunkard' wrote about his experience of alcoholism and resulting lack of self-control:

There is a weakening of the controlling power of the higher-brain centres ...there are structural alterations of the whole nervous system, until at length the nervous batteries became so feeble that not only is there no spontaneous over-flow of nervous power but no discharge whatever, and the will is paralysed.³⁹

The alcoholic is described as weak-willed and unable to abstain. Likewise, Gessonex is a slave to absinthe, telling Gaston: 'Life without absinthe! — I cannot imagine it!' (Corelli 1890, 137). George Savage viewed alcohol as one of the biggest contributing factors to mental and physical degeneration, writing that the substance 'le[a]d[s] easily enough to a more chronic perversion of mind.'⁴⁰ He explained that alcohol 'impair[s] the nourishment of the nervous tissues' leading to impulsive action (Savage 1884, 45). Gessonex's suicide is impulsive. His mental state has deteriorated which pushes him from middle class to homeless drunkard. Through him, Corelli conveys the ruin that the middle and upper classes inflicted upon themselves. Similarly, Arthur Machen drew his own feelings about London into his 1894 Gothic tale, *The Great God Pan*.

The Great God Pan

Machen believed that the Gothic should not 'dwell calmly ...on the level plains of this earthly life' (Machen 1922, 56). He believed that 'everything visible [i]s the veil of an invisible secret' (Machen 1922, 24-5) and in *The Great God Pan* he reflects the 'interminable, cruel labyrinths' of the capital which hid base realities, where begins his critique (Machen 1922, 109, 143).

³⁹ Habitual Drunkenness, 1888, 606.

⁴⁰ Sir George H. Savage 1884, 45. Savage was a well-publicised doctor, president of the Medico-Psychological Association, and editor of the *Journal of Mental Science*.

Machen's tale features the multiple suicides of aristocratic men following liaisons with Helen Vaughan. There was concern in late-nineteenth-century society about an 'epidemic' of suicidal mania. The era's newspapers sensationalised stories about suicide, sustaining public desire for the horrific. Linda Dryden shows how the media sensationalised monstrous events, '[feeding] a public thirst for the macabre' (Dryden 2003, 16). Suicide was treated with equal fascination and Machen incorporates the every-day reporting of the suicides in Britain into the horror of his tale as the headlines scream: 'The West End Horrors; Another Awful Suicide' (Machen 1894, 77). No motive can be ascertained for these suicides, and the consequential fear and fascination in Machen's narrative mirrors media reports of the age:

Each of these men who had resolved to die a tortured shameful death was rich, prosperous...and not the acutest research could ferret out any shadow of a lurking motive in either case[...]every window [became] a frame for a face, curious or excited (Machen 1894, 74, 77).

In 1893 *The Daily Chronicle* referenced the alleged suicide mania: 'A craze of suicide is palpably on the verge of breaking out among us.'⁴¹ The following day, in the same newspaper, Walker Treacher blamed selfishness for the 'modern' epidemic:

A great increase in suicides is taking place amongst the better educated ...amongst those who are disappointed with the slow rate that progress towards a better state is taking place – a progress hindered by the ignorance and selfish pleasures of the many.⁴²

⁴¹ Holden Sampson. 1893. *The Daily Chronicle* 17 August, qtd. by Stokes 1989, 120.

⁴² Walker E. Treacher. 1893. *The Daily Chronicle* 18 August, qtd. by Stokes 1989, 120.

Newspapers were often criticised for their reporting of suicide, seen to encourage the phenomenon through the publicising of suicide.⁴³ For example, the *Speaker* stated: ‘what a pity it is that any class of journalists amongst us should be ready to minister to the morbid instinct of those miserable beings, and in doing so lures them on the road to destruction.’⁴⁴ Machen details the haste at which the newspapers in his novel report each suicide. For example, Lord Argentine, who was from an ‘illustrious family’, commits suicide. The narrative states that his death ‘caused a wide and deep sensation. People could scarcely believe it, even though the newspaper was before their eyes, and the cry of “Mysterious Death of a Nobleman” came ringing up from the street’ (Machen 1894, 72). The newspaper reports make individuals nervous: ‘the morning paper was unfolded in many a house with a feeling of awe; no man knew when or where the next blow would light’ (Machen 1894, 74). Machen engaged with the late-nineteenth-century anxieties of a suicide epidemic, mirroring and feeding the public ‘thirst’.

Machen’s protagonist, Villiers, describes the appearance of a suicidal male, Cranshaw, whom Villiers meets leaving the home of Vaughan:

An infernal medley of passions ...glared out of
...human eyes; I almost fainted as I looked. I knew I
had looked into the eyes of a lost soul ...Furious lust
...and the loss of all hope and horror ...seemed to
shriek aloud to the night (Machen 1894, 80).

The polarisation between public and private sphere meant that for men sex, including using prostitutes or taking a mistress, was acceptable provided it was discreet. Men were considered by some theorists to have more sexual energy

⁴³ As discussed previously, Goethe’s *Werther* (1774) was very publically and famously criticised for seemingly encouraging the suicides of other young men thanks to its overt and sensational portrayal of the act.

⁴⁴ 26 August 1893, qtd. by Stokes 1989, 120. Newspapers such as the *Police Illustrated News* drew graphic pictures of suicides and would write their stories in a melodramatic manner.

than women, which needed releasing.⁴⁵ However, as Ellice Hopkins, who campaigned tirelessly for social purity, argued, male sexual behaviour reduced the ‘Englishman’ to the ‘level of the dirty savage’ (Hopkins 1883, 5).⁴⁶ She asked men to ‘rise above the savage – the lower nature in you’ (Hopkins 1883, 12). To campaigners like Hopkins, the sexual desires of bourgeois males rendered them as degenerate as the slum-dwelling ‘savage’ – resonating with the traditional Gothic ‘savage’ and ‘lustful’ Manfred and Ambrosio (Walpole 1764, 94, and Lewis 1796, 67), who are driven by sexual desire. Machen’s male characters are confronted with the reality of the truth of their nature. Machen argues that a socially-constructed veil conceals the truth of life and indicates that the exposition of realities can have pathological effects as individuals may not like what they discover. Realising the truth of their own nature by giving in to sexual desire leads the men in *The Great God Pan* to commit suicide. The conflict between their inner lusts and the ‘veil’ masking these instincts is portrayed as a destabilising force. Ernest Clarke sent a suicide note to *The Daily Chronicle* prior to his death in 1893 and notes his disappointment following the realisation of this inner-self: ‘the good socialists look forward to society with brains and love, but there will always be the animal, in and out of us, to fight with.’⁴⁷ Clarke realises that there can never be a unification of society because individuals, as novels like *Jekyll and Hyde* and *Wormwood* show, have an inner ‘animal’ striving against public restraint. Tired of this ‘fight’, Clarke ends his life. He is beaten by the ‘perennial war’ which had become Jekyll’s daily fight (Stevenson 1886, 95).

Machen was disillusioned by the materialism of London (Machen 1922, 108-9). He incorporates this disillusionment into his central motif; the suicidal men are upper class living ‘amusing’ lives. Herbert, husband to Vaughan, tells

⁴⁵ See, for example, Mason 1995. See also Escott 1885, 208-9. The following chapter of this thesis engages with this idea fully.

⁴⁶ ‘Savage’ is used as the common means of describing bestial and degenerate nature, describing the capacity for instinctual behaviour if no balance between instinct and reason is reached.

⁴⁷ Ernest Clarke. 1893. *The Daily Chronicle* 16 August, qtd. by Stokes 1989, 116.

Villiers that young men are not taught how to withstand the temptations of life – seen also in *Sorrows* and *Dorian Gray*: ‘you know what young men are ...I came up to town and went a good deal into society. Of course I had excellent introductions and ...enjoy[ed] myself very much’ (Machen 1894, 41). Maudsley said that the minds of the male aristocrats ‘have never been trained to bear any unwelcome burden’ (Maudsley 1867b, 162). Likewise, Herbert lived an indulgent life; as a result, he cannot bear any ‘burden’. On their wedding night, Helen showed him ‘such horrors that ...I myself ...ask whether it is possible for a man to behold such things and live ...I was a ruined man, in body and soul’ (Machen 1894, 42). Machen alludes to the sexual indulgences of their ‘wedding night’ and, unable to cope with the reality of his instinctive lusts and passions, a degraded and ruined Herbert gradually degenerates mentally before committing suicide. Villiers realises: ‘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’ (Machen 1894, 90). Helen shows these men that beneath their gentlemanly exterior lies a passionate, bestial nature that, once indulged, renders them ‘lost soul[s]’ and driven to suicide.⁴⁸

The German psychiatrist Richard von Krafft-Ebing examined a correlation between mental states and sexual habits, referring to different varieties of sexual desires as consequences of cerebral disturbance (Krafft-Ebing 1886). One of his definitions was ‘hyperesthesia’, meaning excessive sexual desire. He likens men who suffer this to the gothicised image of the ‘beast’ because both desire ‘gratification of the sexual instinct’ and, as a result, sexuality ‘may easily degenerate into the lowest passion and basest vice’ (Krafft-Ebing 1886, 1). Men such as those in *The Great God Pan*, who attempt to satiate this excess sexuality, surrender to their animal instincts and degenerate. Krafft-Ebing wrote: ‘life is a never-ceasing dual between the animal

⁴⁸ The significance of this over female passion and sexuality is discussed further in the next chapter.

instinct and morality. Only will-power and a strong character can emancipate man from the meanness of his corrupt nature' (Krafft-Ebing 1886, 3). To surrender his will allegedly rendered an individual vulnerable to effects on his nervous system and mental disturbance. The men in Machen's novel, when exposed to their own instinctive sexuality, are left in 'the utter blackness of despair' (Machen 1894, 80). In the morally degenerate, sexual excesses 'are perpetrated which would disgrace humanity at large' (Krafft-Ebing 1886, 71). Dryden (2003) shows that real-life scandals in nineteenth-century Britain evidenced 'the chivalric English middle-class gentleman was no more or less moral than his working-class counterpart.' In fact, she continues, ideals about proper behaviour towards women were 'undermined' by the 'activities of men in the real world' and the fact that it was often the middle and upper-class Victorians who used prostitutes (Dryden 2003, 64). In *The Great God Pan*, unable to cope with the horror of their sexual indulgence and debauchery, the men responsible for such sexual transgressions commit suicide. Their reputations were tarnished. Sexual deviance, like all the modern vices and excesses of 'civilisation', is portrayed as a killer.

Conclusion

In Darkest England and the Way Out, General W. Booth compared the slums of England with the 'savage' lands of Africa:

There are men so ...so eaten up by vice that virtue is abhorrent to them [...]he has become lunatic, morally demented, incapable of self-government ...[they] infect their fellows [and] prey upon society (Booth 1890, 281-336).

Booth describes the common view pertaining to the degenerate nature of the country's lower classes. This chapter has shown, however, that the same conditions and vice-addictions were also applied to the middle and upper classes. These classes indulged not to escape poverty but to escape boredom or disillusion. Privately, vices were tolerated. But publically, and in excess, these vices constituted a lack of morals and a deficiency in will which is essential for maintaining the strength of the cerebral centre. Clapperton argued that the

outward condition of middle class lives forced a ‘check’ on some more natural desires. Being unable to outwardly satiate these desires forced duplicate lives, threatening moral and intellectual strength (Clapperton 1885, 110). Ultimately, Victorian ‘civilisation’, regardless of class, could fall prey to a loss of evolutionary energy which contributed to the ‘hymn of pessimism’ described by the era’s alienists.⁴⁹ Morality and mental stability were seen to deteriorate as disillusion and vice-driven egoism, and consequential suicides, increased.

In the following chapter, I show how nineteenth-century theories largely perceived women to be protected from suicide because of their domestic ties, but in reality, statistics disproved this perception. Commentators explained this using various theories which underlined the emotionality of female suicide. Chapter five extracts the female or effeminate suicides within the Gothic novels and examines how the authors engaged with these commentaries in these portrayals. Generally, female suicide was represented as the inevitable consequence of weakness. Brown (2001), Gates (1988) and Nicoletti (2007) all discuss the atypical ‘fallen’ woman and her necessary suicide of redemption. However, scholarly research neglects to entertain the concept of the suicide of the ‘New Woman’ as a direct consequence of her refusal to conform or even the autonomy which suicide affords the otherwise subservient female.

⁴⁹ Refers to Henry Maudsley (1884), quoted. by Turner 1988, 155.

Chapter 5: Suicide and Gender

Nineteenth-century theories largely perceived women to be protected from suicide because of their domestic ties, but in reality, statistics disproved this perception. Commentators explained this using various theories which underlined the individuality and emotionality of female suicide. I consider the female or effeminate suicides within the era's Gothic novels and examine how the authors engaged with prevalent commentaries and ideas about female suicide. This chapter focuses on the late-nineteenth-century largely upper-class ideology regarding the perceived consequences of transcending the 'correct' codes of manliness and femininity. Unless otherwise stated, the gender terms used in this chapter refer to upper or middle-class Victorians. Lower-class women often had to work so their roles were perceived differently.

Generally, female suicide was represented as the inevitable consequence of weakness. Brown (2001), Gates (1988) and Nicoletti (2007) all discuss the atypical 'fallen' woman and her necessary suicide of redemption. However, scholarly research neglects to entertain the concept of the suicide of the 'New Woman' as a direct consequence for her refusal to conform or even the autonomy which suicide affords the otherwise subservient female. The latter two points I explore further using the Gothic texts of Corelli (1890 and 1896), Machen (1894) and Wilde (1891b). I examine the female suicides in these novels against emerging biological perceptions of the female mind, as well as archetypal clichés of the drowned woman. I discuss the feminisation of Dorian Gray and Jekyll in the run-up to their suicides, and analyse the figure of the New Woman and her perceived threat to nineteenth-century society. I find inherent contradictions in nineteenth-century perceptions of the desired female role and in her suicide itself. Largely, I discover that female suicides in the above novels serve as a warning to the era's women as each suicide shows a potential consequence to a wronged or 'fallen' behaviour. This is evidently also true in other novels written in the late nineteenth century. Grant Allen, for example,

published the notorious *The Woman who Did* in 1895 in which his well-educated female protagonist eschews the ‘vile slavery’ of marriage and consequently is left to raise her daughter alone while economically bereft after the death of her lover (Allen 1895, 43). Herminia stoically bears her lot until her daughter rejects her feminist ideology. This loving mother then commits suicide to spare her daughter further shame. As I explained on page 8 of my introduction to this thesis, I chose to refrain from delving into novels beyond the realm of the Gothic except as a means of indicating prevalent ideas of the era. It is the Gothic response to external perceptions to which I chose to dedicate my research. However, as a consequential New Woman suicide, Herminia’s tale supports my findings in this chapter and is therefore an interesting reference.

Predominantly, suicide statistics seemed to suggest that suicide was a male action. However, many late-Victorians felt that suicide statistics should show that women were more likely to commit suicide because they were allegedly weaker-willed and more emotional (See Gates 1988 and Showalter 1985). To explain this paradox, theorists like J W Horsley claimed that statistics did not consider attempted suicides, and in reality ‘suicide...is a specifically female crime, though some allowance must be made for the fact that a man often has more force, both physical and mental, and therefore his attempt is more frequently successful’ (Horsley 1881, 506). Certainly, the act was represented as feminine throughout the century (Brown 2004).

In chapter seven of *Victorian Suicides*, Barbara Gates examines statistical evidence of female suicide versus expectation and considers the concept of ‘lovelorn women’ (1988). She explores the extent to which some Victorians viewed female suicide as the outcome for ‘monstrously passionate’ women who had become dangerous to themselves and others. Finally, Gates considers how some female suicide victims were alleged ‘fallen’ woman who had little other options available. Like Gates, I explore the cliché of the ‘fallen woman’ and her unavoidable suicide. However, there are aspects pertaining to the suicide of female characters in the late nineteenth century which Gates does not address. I explore the evolutionary biology of the ‘New Woman’ and consider that her suicide was seen as consequential should she attempt to transcend ‘traditional’ expectations. And, in contrast to Gates’ idea that lack of

will may contribute to female suicide, I argue that perhaps the suicides of late-nineteenth-century women can, in certain cases, be viewed as an assertion of autonomy.

Gender spheres

‘Women, I considered, should be kept in their places...as wives, mothers, nurses, cooks, menders of socks and shirts, and housekeepers generally’ parodies Marie Corelli through Geoffrey Tempest in *The Sorrows of Satan* (Corelli 1896, 171). Women themselves sometimes contributed to these typical representations of their gender. In 1883, the writer E. Lynn Linton stated in the *Saturday Review*: ‘Time was when the phrase “a fair young English girl” meant the ideal of womanhood.’¹ Linton asserted that Victorian women should be proud of their ‘innate purity and dignity of...nature... [She] would be...a tender mother.’² Women were traditionally assigned this domestic maternal role, while men were appointed as economic providers. John Ruskin stated:

Man’s power is active, progressive, defensive...His intellect is for speculation, and invention; his energy for adventure, for war, and for conquest ...[The woman] must be enduringly, incorruptibly good ...wise, not that she may set herself above her husband, but that she may never fall from his side (Ruskin 1884, 70).

In the latter half of the century, following changes to middle-class female education and reforms to women’s rights, scientists and psychiatrists argued that nature offered proof that women should be restricted to the roles of wife and mother.³ Charles Darwin described female faculties as ‘characteristic ...of a past

¹ i.e. to the middle-class.

² E. Lynn Linton. 1883. *The Girl of the Period and Other Social Essays* vol. 1. qtd. Gardiner 1993, 55-60.

³ Middle-class female education became more accessible to women; the first women’s college was established by Emily Davies in 1869 at Hitchin; in 1879 Oxford University opened women’s colleges; in

and lower state of degeneration', driven by instinct over reason (Darwin 1871, 326-7). He defined the female purpose as '[caring for] children ...[being an] object to be beloved and played with ...and someone to take care of house (Barlow 1958, 232-233). Science and evolutionary postulations of biological determinism had 'coloured' the theory of the female condition and thus the separation of men and women was underlined biologically, with women naturally bound to be frivolous and prone to mental derangement (Alaya 1991, 232). George Romanes drew on Darwin's *The Descent*, claiming that women are mentally inferior to men because their weaker minds cannot withstand certain conditions (Romanes 1887, 657).⁴ In contrast, he wrote, men should be competitive and assertive. Romanes believed that that gender spheres were essential in safeguarding against the 'degeneration of the race' because 'men always admire in women what they regard as distinctively feminine qualities of mind, while women admire in men the distinctively masculine. Sexual selection ...is constantly engaged in moulding the minds of each upon a different pattern' and ensuring propagation (Romanes 1887, 662). The writer and evolutionist Grant Allen (1848-1899) published a similar idea: 'we are of two sexes: and in healthy diversity of sex ...lies the greatest strength of us all. Make your men virile: make your women womanly' (Allen 1889, 448, 458).⁵ Both genders allegedly play a biological role in the advancement of society. They have different 'functions' which explains a need for distinct spheres (Mosse 1996). In 1869, the anthropologist James McGrigor Allan asked: 'What is woman's mission? Nature prompts a reply in one word – Maternity! It is woman's great function ...that she can bear and rear children ... Is it not a glorious mission to be

1881 women were given permission to sit exams at Cambridge. Reform to women's rights included the Married Women's Property Rights in 1870 and 1882.

⁴ Romanes' article reduces traditional views on femininity to science, dividing the mind into three sections: intellect, will and emotion. Women were allegedly lacking in will, so would be overpowered by emotion.

⁵ Again, Allen is quick to stress he refers only to the 'cultivated classes.'

a wife and mother? (McGrigor 1869, 200, 212).⁶ She is ‘educator’ of her offspring, and thus only valued socially if she adheres to rigid moral standards of propriety (Holmes and Nelson 1997, 13). The section below considers how the authors of the Gothic in my study engage with concerns about the perceived reversal of gender roles and how these anxieties inform the representations of suicide in Gothic fiction.

Effeminate men

Goethe’s *The Sorrows of Young Werther* (1774) was criticised for its presentation of a suicidal and feeble man unable to exercise restraint on his emotionality.⁷ Henry Maudsley noted with reference to *Werther*: ‘suicide or madness is the natural end of a morbidly sensitive nature, with a feeble will’ (Maudsley 1874a, 268-9). R. L. Stevenson wrote to Fanny Sitwell that ‘Werther himself has every feebleness and vice that could tend to make suicide a most virtuous and commendable action ... He was only the weakest.’⁸ Maudsley and Stevenson both associated weakness with ‘feeble’ men possessing ‘feeble will’ who then commit suicide.

In ‘The Decay of Lying’, Wilde’s narrative suggests an alternative perception of the death of Werther:

All that I desire to point out is the general principle
that Life imitates Art far more than Art imitates Life
...Scientifically speaking ...the energy of life, as
Aristotle would call it — is simply the desire for
expression, and Art is always presenting various
forms through which this expression can be attained.
Life seizes on them and uses them, even if they be to

⁶ By ‘Nature’, McGrigor believed that menstruation and reproduction took all of a woman’s energy and concentration, leaving her none left to engage in ‘masculine’ activities, such as work, or matters of intellect or reason.

⁷ For detailed information on Werther and suicide, see Feuerlicht, 1978: 476-492.

⁸ Letter to be found in Colvin 1900, 51. The letter was written on 6 September 1873.

her own hurt. Young men have committed suicide
because Rolla did so, have died by their own hand
because by his own hand Werther died (Wilde
1891a, 39).

The alleged epidemic of suicides following the publication of Werther was, to one of Wilde's characters, Vivian, simply the beauty of life imitating art, an 'expression' of one's true self. *Dorian Gray* reads along these aesthetic lines while simultaneously parodying traditional views on effeminacy, explored below. However, such aesthetic ideals frustrated critics such as Max Nordau and Maudsley. Nordau asserted that men displaying emotions were feminine and, as such, would challenge the strength of the nation. 'Emotionalism' should allegedly be seen as a symptom of degeneration: '[He] weeps copiously without adequate occasion ...he feels his inner self confounded, the depths of his being broken up' (Nordau 1895, 19). Nordau argued that excessive emotion would lead to mental weakness. To Maudsley, suicides like those of Werther were an example of a weakness of will, contrasting Wilde's later comments on 'expression'. Wilde postulates that the 'energy' of life comes from this 'desire for expression', but for Maudsley and Nordau the opposite was true. They saw the aesthete's 'emasculated sensualities in art masquerading as art for art's sake' (Maudsley 1884, 327) as a forewarning about the evolutionary decline of the race. Maudsley argued that suicide would result from a depletion of energy which renders an individual emasculated and beleaguered by nervous disorder (Maudsley 1884, 302-4).⁹ Nervous disorders seemingly rendered men incapable of contributing to society. Janet Oppenheim emphasises this view: 'sensitive nerves ...implied ...a virtual assurance that the man so cursed would be unable to play his allotted part on the public stage' (Oppenheim 1991, 149). Nerve disorder in males was characterised as 'neurasthenia' which was allegedly

⁹ See previous chapter in thesis for more information.

evidenced by symptoms like fatigue, anxiety, and trembling (Beard 1880).¹⁰ It was the result of exhaustion of the brain's energy reserves, attributed by Beard to the stresses caused by urbanisation and an increasingly competitive business environment. To Beard, the sufferer of neurasthenia would invariably be pale and frequently cry and tremble. Clearly, symptoms such as these were 'incompatible with conventional ideals of the self-sufficient and courageous male' (Forth 2001, 337). Conveying a particularly prevalent psychiatric view on effeminacy and nervous disorder, Maudsley refers to a particular patient: 'In some respects, I think, his mind seemed to be of a feminine type; capable of a momentary lively sympathy, which might even express itself in tears' rather than confront difficulties 'with deliberate foresight' (Maudsley 1866a, 161).¹¹ Likewise, in a parody of similar ideas, Dorian's nervous disorder is exaggerated as he falls to the floor in a 'death-like swoon' after fearing persecution from James Vane. To excuse the behaviour, Dorian states 'my nerves are dreadfully out of order' (Wilde 1891b, 157, 162). He is prone to tears and bouts of 'trembling' and 'shivering', leading Henry to notice 'how absurdly nervous' Dorian is (Wilde 1891b, 161, 145, 161).¹²

Largely, Victorian ideology asserted that the 'reasoning power' in man meant that they could exercise restraint, whereas women were impulsive.¹³ We know that Wilde read Romanes' 1887 article in which Romanes developed the same idea:

We find that in woman, as contrasted with man, these [emotions] are almost always less under control of the will - more apt to break away ...from the restraint of reason, and to overwhelm the mental

¹⁰ Beard referenced American civilisations, but interest was piqued in Europe too. Nervous disorders became a widely reported condition and not just in specialist journals; there were reviews in the popular press too – for example *The Saturday Review* reported on the condition in 1879 (48(1),243), as did *The Chambers's Journal* (issue 850) in 1880.

¹¹ Maudsley writing of his late father-in-law, John Connolly.

¹² See chapter four of this thesis for further description of his nervous disorder.

¹³ For information on the alleged weak-will and impulsivity of women, see Murphy, 2007.

chariot in disaster ...in whatever form this supremacy of emotion displays itself, we recognise it as more of a feminine than a masculine characteristic (Romanes 1887, 657).¹⁴

Wilde read that men were more restrained than women, and any ‘break-away’ from these conditions was to be rendered ‘feminine.’ Three years later, he published *Dorian Gray* which parodies these consequences of subverting ‘traditional’ gender roles. Dorian appears effeminate – he has ‘finely-curved scarlet lips’, ‘delicate hands’ and is prone to expressing excessive emotion (Wilde 1891b, 146). In his portrayal of Dorian, Wilde satirises the views of theorists like Maudsley that pleasure-seeking aesthetes were effeminate. Wilde himself was described by Anna Bremont as ‘[a] feminine soul, a suffering prisoner in the wrong brain house (Burns 1996, 94).¹⁵ Wilde was a man who edited a woman’s journal.¹⁶ He was an effeminate aesthete but married. Wilde was a walking contradiction who blurred boundaries between masculine and feminine and between reality and art. He would complain ‘we have certainly the saddest literature of all the ages, for we have made Truth and not Beauty the aim of art’. When words reflect only ‘the facts of life’ they lack ‘that pleasure-giving power in virtue of which the arts exist.’¹⁷ He argued that realism could not bestow pleasure. In *Degeneration*, Nordau links Wilde and the emasculated aesthete by representing Wilde as the leading culprit for aesthetic degeneracy: ‘[t]he ego-mania of decadentism, its love of the artificial, its aversion to nature, and to all forms of activity and movement, its megalomaniacal contempt for men and its exaggeration of the importance of art, have found their English representative among the “Aesthetes”, the chief of whom is Oscar Wilde’

¹⁴ See chapter two of this thesis. In ‘Literary and Other Notes III’, written for *The Woman’s World* in 1888, Wilde wrote that he had read Romanes ‘Mental Differences’ in *Nineteenth Century* and learnt about ‘leading characters that differentiate men and woman mentally.’

¹⁵ Anna Bremont was an American singer, novelist, poet and journalist.

¹⁶ In November 1887, Oscar Wilde became editor of *The Woman’s World*, a journal directed at middle-class women.

¹⁷ Written in ‘Literary Notes IV’ of *The Woman’s World* (Clayworth 2004, 126).

(Nordau 1895, 317). Although predating Nordau, Dorian parodies the manner in which Wilde was himself generally viewed and the late-nineteenth-century middle-class view that weak-willed men would be unable to cope with life and be driven to suicide.

The French neurologist Jean-Martin Charcot (1825-1893) asserted that neurasthenia and hysteria in men was largely the result of ‘vices of excess.’¹⁸ Of this, Micale states that it was widely accepted that men should master self-control: ‘Victorian codes of masculinity, with their emphasis on emotional self-control and sexual sublimation, fuelled Britain’s ...ascendancy over the third world throughout this period’ (Micale 1990, 57-8).¹⁹ Similarly, Forth says that ‘critics began to wonder what had happened to the ‘real’ man of the past and bemoaned the loss of autonomy and willpower that afflicted so many in the modern world’ (Forth 1991, 337-8). We see this in the Professor of Surgery F. C. Skey’s lecture of 1866, delivered at St. Bartholomew’s Hospital in London, in which Skey stated that hysteria was obviously due to a weakness of will because it does not affect ‘[those] who are characterised by vigour of mind, of strong will, of strength, and firmness of character’ (Skey 1867, 41-2). By the late-nineteenth century, willpower was perceived as an essential requirement for battling nervous disease and hysteria (Mosse 1996, 92).

In *Jekyll and Hyde*, Jekyll is represented as feeble. He ‘sought with tears and prayers’ (Stevenson 1886, 104) to deny Hyde his appearance but is unable to master his will. Jekyll is overpowered by his counterpart despite maintaining an internal ‘perennial war’ (Stevenson 1886, 95) to repress his ‘savage’ other. Consequently, his lack of willpower leads to his portrayal as a slave to feminine emotion. For example, Poole tells Utterson that on one occasion he heard Jekyll ‘weeping like a woman’ and Jekyll himself admits to ‘shuddering and weeping

¹⁸ Charcot’s ‘Leçons du Mardi’. vol.2, leçon 12 (29 Jan 1889). Quoted by Micale 1990, 392.

¹⁹ Micale 1990, 57-8; although much of Micale’s text is well-written, I object to the use of ‘third world’ in the above passage. Although our modern age uses the ‘term third’ frequently to denote the less economically developed countries, it was not coined until 1952, and so to use it in relation to the late-nineteenth century is somewhat inappropriate. See also Tosh 1994, 183.

in my chair' and 'half-fainting' and 'pale' with the stress of his transformations (Stevenson 1886, 109, 93, 61). Jekyll had felt pressured 'to carry my head high, and wear a more than commonly grave countenance before the public' which conflicted at all times with a 'certain impatient gaiety of disposition' (Stevenson 1886, 95). The subsequent guilt about indulging his desires leaves Jekyll's mind 'haunted by ...fears' and his body 'not strong enough to contain the raging energies of life' (Stevenson 1886, 108). As we saw in the previous chapter, lack of 'energy' was seen to result in mental disorder and suicide in many cases. And without physical and mental strength, a man's masculine identity would allegedly be eroded, leaving the sufferer unable to endure his situation and effeminised, threatening national efficiency. Maudsley wrote that 'a certain rude and blunt vigour is a necessary endowment of the man who is framed in mind and body to succeed' in a world of 'brute force' (Maudsley 1884, 326). Hyde the 'brute' overrides the introspective and emotional Jekyll and as such succeeds in the 'perennial' struggle as the enfeebled Jekyll succumbs.

Jekyll and Dorian are portrayed as feminine and their suicide is in part a consequence of this. Even the situation of their suicides indicates their femininity – they both commit suicide within the domestic sphere, their own home. Home was considered a haven for women (as we will see below), but not for men, who should instead have been out contributing to the economy. For women, there are a number of psychiatric and evolutionary theories pertaining to their suicides.

The New Woman

Angelique Richardson gives an authoritative overview of the middle-class Victorian nuances about the New Woman and the subject's associated literature (Richardson and Ellis, 2001). The New Woman was essentially a middle or upper-class Victorian female who transcended the Victorian 'ideal' on womanhood (mother and wife, discussed below) by seeking independence and an education. Richardson demonstrates the complexity of the term, with anti-feminists seeing the New Woman as disruptive; eugenicists believing she might prevent the regeneration of the human race; and the media satirising her. Evolutionary and medical discourse in the era attempted to manipulate public

opinion on the disruptive impact of the New Woman, as critics hoped to legitimise the view that women should not be entitled to higher education or professional careers because this meant ignoring their 'biological' destiny for reproduction and motherhood (Erskine, 1997).

The psychiatrist, and suicide theorist, Forbes Winslow blamed women's reproductive organs for their overall degeneration. In a psychiatric case study of Shakespeare's female suicide, Ophelia, Winslow wrote that passion caused a 'morbidly exalted state of the reproductive instincts', overcoming the woman's mental state and causing 'painful moral and mental degeneration' (Winslow 1860, 153-5).²⁰ Herbert Spencer asserted that reproductive function meant women lacked the energy required for full mental development (Spencer 1887, 713-33). As seen in the previous chapter, emphasis was placed on the importance of energy in maintaining strong brain function, which controlled the 'higher' faculties of reason and will. Maudsley (1874b) argued that the mind is made up of faculties such as thought and feeling and that the mind, brain and nervous system are all linked. He believed that women did not have the mental capacity to withstand the same tasks as men because the female nerve centres are sacrificed in the construction of the reproductive organs and so are 'more easily and more seriously deranged' (Maudsley 1874b, 473). Secondly, he argued, too much energy spent in gaining knowledge would mean not enough energy left to maintain effective reproductive organs, leading to 'a puny, enfeebled and sickly race' (Maudsley 1874b, 471). To guard against this outcome, said Maudsley, women need to accept their 'foreordained work as mothers and nurses of children' (Maudsley 1874b, 471). Maudsley's view is similar to Victorian stereotypes such as those published in Coventry Patmore's long poem entitled 'The Angel in the House' (1854-56) which 'popularised' and 'exemplified' the nineteenth-century feminine ideal – domestic mother and wife, angelic, pure and delicate (Blair 2007, 37). Late-nineteenth-century ideology, and

²⁰ The previous chapter showed how medical men frequently used literary characters to support their claims.

art, often rendered women either predatory femme fatales (such as Helen Vaughan or Sibyl Elton) or ‘fallen’²¹ for those who defied these stereotypes.

Psychiatrists warned of the dangers for women of railing against the feminine ‘ideal’ illustrated above, in some cases warning that a deviance from traditionally-assigned domestic roles will leave the woman susceptible to suicide, without the domestic sphere which would prove an ‘obstacle to suicide’ (Ferrero 1894, 639). The Irish writer and journalist, Michael George Mulhall (1836-1900) argued that ‘domestic ties’ were a safeguard against suicide (Mulhall 1883, 908), while the British commentator R. Skelton wrote that women could be protected from suicide if she possessed ‘affection for home and children’ (Skelton 1900, 471). Within the domestic sphere, women were presumed to be safe from hardships because the home was ‘a shelter, not only from all injury but from all terror, doubt and division.’²² In reality and in fiction, women who did not live by traditional gender spheres were often portrayed not just as dangerous to others but to themselves.

The Gothic has, throughout its history, been viewed as a genre which had the capacity to influence its reader. Jane Austen, for example, famously parodied the Gothic drama in her 1817 novel *Northanger Abbey*, in which the psychological disintegration of the Gothic heroine, such as Emily in *Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794), is satirised by Catherine’s rational breakdown caused by her belief in her own Gothic surroundings, having read *Mysteries*, and other Gothic texts. Fiction has, over the years, been perceived to have the ability to fabricate a reality in accordance with Wilde’s doctrine that life does indeed imitate art, potentially eroding the self-preservation instinct of its reader. In 1845, the psychiatrist Etienne Esquirol postulated that insidious fictional works could result in suicide: ‘books, placed by their cheapness within the reach of all, contain only declarations in opposition to...the duties which all owe to society;

²¹ See Lynn Pykett 1992, 62-72. She refers to the ‘social evil’ of the ‘fallen woman’. Discussed in further detail below.

²² J B Brown 1871. *Young Men and Maidens: A Pastoral for the Times*. Quoted in Soloway 1995, 110.

they inspire contempt for life, and suicides multiply' (Esquirol, 1845: 280). In the Romantic era, *The Sorrows of Young Werther* was seen to cause multiple imitation suicides (Feuerlicht 1978). The alleged potential for literature to have this adverse effect is also evidenced by some late-Victorian fiction. In *The Portrait of Mr WH* (Wilde 1889), Cyril Graham – whose only enjoyment in life is poetry – becomes obsessed with trying to uncover the truth of the existence of 'WH' of Shakespeare's sonnets. He forges his 'evidence' in a similar fashion to Wilde's revered Chatterton.²³ When the truth is discovered Graham shoots himself. The literature he loved ultimately precipitates his suicide. Two years later, Wilde published *Dorian Gray*, in which Dorian's mind is poisoned by the corrupting effect of the decadent 'yellow book' given to him by Henry. Dorian degenerates further under the effect of this book.²⁴ To Nordau, the potentially pernicious effect of art on the mind was evident: 'artists, incapable of rooting their work in sober reality, made an infantile appeal to a jaded and neurasthenic hunger for the new and bizarre in their public' (Nordau 1895, 279). Fiction was seen as capable of poisoning the mind of its reader, having a pathological effect on the weaker-minded audience and having the power to 'unhinge its barriers of self-protection, so that it yields readily to the temptation to crime or suicide' (Ordranax 1864, 395). The prison chaplain-turned-writer, J W Horsley, agreed that fiction could provoke an increase in suicide: 'the sentimental glamour thrown over [suicide] by some poets and novelists has had an evil result' (Horsley 1881, 509). 'New Woman' fiction was perceived to exert a harmful influence in the late nineteenth century. It was categorised as lurid and feminist and generated concern for the mental wellbeing of women who read it.²⁵ I explore the perceived negative effect of New Woman fiction as well as female

²³ See chapter four of this thesis for detail.

²⁴ As chapter two established, the 'seed' for degeneration exists within Dorian but he degenerates by outside influences. The 'yellow book' itself is believed to be based upon J.K. Huysmans' *À Rebours* book about Parisian decadence.

²⁵ There is an abundance of primary material on this subject. A good article, for example, is Stutfield 1895, 833-45; secondary criticism includes Pykett 1992. In chapter six she elaborates on the claim that 'the New Woman fiction debate was also part of a wider panic about degeneration' (36).

sexuality using Corelli's *The Sorrows of Satan* (1896) and Arthur Machen's *The Great God Pan* (1894).

Not all Victorian feminists wanted to reject their role as wives and mothers; they merely wanted to secure equality and believed that *both* genders should repress their urges to ensure the unification of society.²⁶ However it was often accepted in late-Victorian society that men may privately satiate their sexual desires using prostitutes or mistresses whereas if a woman indulged in excessive sexual practice with someone other than her husband she was considered 'fallen.'²⁷ Working-class women were viewed as already 'fallen' and equipped with a knowledge of impurity which middle and upper-class women did not possess: 'perhaps in some ways [working-class woman's] completer knowledge acts as a shield ...she is not pure-minded ...While she may be deprived of the freshness and delicacy of an ignorant woman, she does not run the same danger of falling' (Jeune 1885, 672-3). Middle and upper-class women should, in contrast, remain 'pure'. Thus, men could indulge in sexual relations out of wedlock, but for (middle and upper-class) women it was deemed ruinous.

The New Woman was often portrayed as a threatening fusion of pathological tendencies towards vice and gratification, denying femininity by emulating traditional male behaviour which allegedly extended to enlarged sexual appetites (Richardson and Willis, 2001; Ledger, 1997). The New Woman was, as a result, often portrayed as androgynous. Corelli wrote on the subject of female emancipation: 'Let [the New Woman] eschew his fashions in dress, his talk and his manners. A woman who wears "mannish" clothes, smokes cigars, rattles out slang, gambles at cards, and drinks brandy and soda on the slightest provocation, is lost altogether, both as woman and man, and becomes sexless' (Corelli 1905, 182-3). Corelli previously explored the concept of the androgynous woman in *Sorrows*. Rimanez refers to New Women as 'unnatural

²⁶ Langland (1995) and Richardson (2003) both address the idea that women were also responsible for the construction of the view that women had a duty as morally superior sex to propagate.

²⁷ See Bland 1995.

hybrids of no-sex' (Corelli 1896, 216). Corelli uses the word 'unnatural' frequently in conjunction with New Women, for example: 'there are a number of females clamouring like unnatural hens about their "rights" and "wrongs"' (Corelli 1896, 374). Corelli asserted that femininity could instead be used to ensure that women retained mastery over men, as a woman's real power was in her natural ability to evoke male worship:

The clever woman sits at home, — and like a meadow spider spreads a pretty web...Flies — or men — tumble in by scores, — and she holds them all prisoners ...Nature gave her at her birth the "right" to do this, and if she does it well, she will always have her web full ...She must learn to take a wider outlook and use her limitless powers for the benefit and betterment of the world (Corelli 1907, 31).

This passage suggests that women could be responsible for the 'betterment' of society but the 'mannish' New Woman could not attain this. *The Sorrows of Satan* looks at the detrimental effects of both New Women and New Woman fiction, and the consequences of being both New Woman and a victim of the trend.

Sibyl Elton is sexually aware, having read much 'destitute' but 'fashionable' New Woman fiction (Corelli 1896, 298). Rimanez, the Devil, stirs passions within Sibyl and she attempts to seduce him, linking female passion with Hellish imagery. When he rejects her, Sibyl commits suicide, blaming fiction and society, although seemingly her inherited nature is also responsible. Maudsley believed that degenerate symptoms were hereditary: 'a person inherits not only the general characters of the family, but peculiarities of manner and of disposition' (Maudsely 1867b, 90). Sibyl's mother is paralysed, which Rimanez describes as: 'the worst of all the physical punishments that can befall a "rapid" lady' (Corelli 1896, 162). He says that Sibyl's mother had been 'wild...with scores of lovers' and that her paralysis is 'Nature's revenge on the outraged body' (Corelli 1896, 162). Having lived a licentious life, Sibyl's mother

epitomises the late-nineteenth-century idea described in previous chapters that the degenerate was a threat to future generations, as Rimanez tells Sibyl:

Your mother was, like yourself, a voluptuary ...In
the written but miscomprehended laws of Nature, a
diseased body is the natural expression of a diseased
mind...the evil that was in her is also in you, - it
festers in your blood slowly but surely ...it will have
its way (Corelli 1896, 364-5).

As with Dorian, the seed for Sibyl's degeneracy (sexual deviance) allegedly existed from birth. Her mother had not fulfilled her maternal duty. Late-Victorian eugenisists felt that it was the female duty to rationally, without the interference of love, choose the correct partner and secure the future of the race (Richardson 2003, 57). However, the concurrent fear that degeneracy was hereditary and irreversible created a paradox, as the eugenists also believed that degenerate figures should refrain from propagation for fear of contagion. Seemingly, only 'pure' women should be encouraged to propagate. Maudsley asserted: 'there is a destiny made for [everyone] by [their] inheritance' (Maudsley 1867b, 88). Similarly, Rimanez tells Sibyl that she was born a 'foul thing' from the start: 'you corrupt the world, - you turn good to evil, - you deepen folly into crime, - with the seduction of your nude limbs and lying eyes, you make fools, cowards and beasts of men' (Corelli 1896, 363). Sibyl is allegedly injurious to men and Rimanez underlines the danger of such women procreating: 'they are the mothers of the human race, and the faults of the race are chiefly due to them' (Corelli 1896, 81-3). 'Pure' women could save the race – but degenerate women could facilitate its decline. By killing her 'rapid' characters (Sibyl and her mother) Corelli mimics the Victorian fear of sexuality that led many to believe that 'a woman's fall ends in her death' (Auerbach 1990, 30-1).

The philosopher John Stuart Mill (1806-1873) claimed that the aforementioned Victorian ideology about the behaviour of women was culturally constructed: 'all women are brought up from the very earliest years in the belief that their ideal of character is the very opposite to that of men ...yielding to the

control of others' (Mill 1869, 232). In *Sorrows*, Corelli satirises the idea that society constructed women to act in a certain way. In her suicide note, Sibyl writes that the purpose of her education had been to prime her for marriage and learn the 'correct' feminine behaviour and 'to hide all savage passions' (Corelli 1896, 378). New Woman fiction was seen to portray these passions from which women had been restricted. Sibyl claims that after having read her first New Woman novel 'the insidious abomination of it filtered into my mind and stayed there' (Corelli 1896, 405) suggesting their influence could not be reversed. Sibyl asks Tempest, 'do you think a girl can read the books that are now freely published...and yet remain unspoilt and innocent?' (Corelli 1896, 201-2). While Sibyl's education had been manufactured to teach her how to be a lady, her favoured literature now threatens that construction by showing her that she *could* succumb to her passions.

Growing up, Sibyl watched others acting upon their passions in private and realised that her society was inherently vice-ridden and decency an illusion. Maudsley believed that beneath the faculties of the moral sense, humans had 'egoistic passions' which he classified as instincts towards human behaviour that was immoral, such as sexual desire (Maudsley 1884, 251). A parent with 'egoistic passion' could allegedly transmit this, rendering their offspring predisposed to degeneracy in its various forms.²⁸ Sibyl inherited her alleged sexual deviance from her mother before reading New Woman literature. Her 'rapid' nature is therefore hereditarily gained, but the fiction then added to her 'state of vice' and reinforced her perception of an immoral society (Corelli 1896, 408). She starts to question whether men and women were 'lower and more depraved in their passions and appetites than the very beasts?' (Corelli 1896, 405). Sibyl acknowledges the inherited nature of her character and the external influence of her society and fiction:

²⁸ Maudsley's views on degeneration were widely referenced, and so it is likely that Corelli, with her interest in evolution, would have been aware of his ideas. An article was published commenting on his ideas in the journal *Belgravia* in 1881 entitled 'The Mind's Mirror.' Corelli herself published in the same journal demonstrating shared readership.

I am as I was made ...my vices have been encouraged and fostered in me by most of the literary teachers of my time. I married, as most women of my set marry, for money, - I loved ...for mere bodily attraction (Corelli 1896, 418).

Mothers were seen as the moral educators of their offspring and maternal 'purity' was essential (Holmes and Nelson 1997, 2). The nature of Sibyl's mother consequently means Sibyl is unable to understand the 'rules' of femininity. With no maternal educator, Sibyl can only learn from her reading, and confuses love with lust. Sibyl had developed notions of an imaginary life through her reading which contrasted the reality of her loveless situation. Women were expected to be content with a class-based marriage, but this existence fosters coldness in Sibyl, who becomes increasingly disheartened by her situation and destabilised by hypocritical class values. Janet Casey notes: '[Corelli] reflects the confusion of an entire generation of women, a generation confronted at once with the suffragette movement, and the decline of the feminine ideal as perceived in the Victorian age' (Casey 1992, 164). As such, these women lost a sense of who they should or could be. Corelli portrays Sibyl's confusion which undermines her stability; on the one hand, she is the sexually aware New Woman and on the other a vulnerable victim. As the offspring of a 'loose' woman who is raised in a hypocritical society, sold into a loveless marriage to an unsympathetic husband and condemned to alleged inherited moral misdemeanour, Sibyl is seemingly left with only one escape – suicide.

Sibyl's nature is a combination of external sources and inheritance. However, her suicide itself is seemingly an act of her own free will. Her suicide note begins: 'I have made up my mind to die. Not out of passion, or petulance, - but from deliberate choice.' She refers to this choice as 'free will' (Corelli 1896, 399). Her suicide is the one opportunity she has in a patriarchal society to seemingly reclaim her autonomy and identity, and reject her established role. Sibyl's social restraints are such that she can live in disgrace, having 'abased [herself] in the humiliation of a guilty passion' (Corelli 1896, 383), or she can choose death. An alternative existence was seemingly not possible in a society

which placed much emphasis on the correct way for a woman to behave. Sally Ledger claims: 'Many New Woman novels of the period close with the death, suicide or mental illness of the heroine' (Ledger 2001, 92). Gail Cunningham makes the same connection in "'He-Notes" Restructuring Masculinity', and writes that New Woman authors almost invariably killed off their female protagonist as the result of a form of breakdown, warning of the self-destructive aspect of transgression (Cunningham 2001, 94). Corelli follows the pattern of the fiction which her narrative claims to abhor as the heroine's options limit her ability to define herself. Her suicide is the only decision the woman can finally make for herself and as such is a bid for independence in a climate where her true identity has repeatedly been denied. She dies gazing into a mirror to witness the truth of her own identity as death releases her from her roles of daughter and wife. However, she is prevented from gaining autonomy through death as the Devil arrives to claim her: 'I know WHO claims my worship now' she states as she is dragged into the burning flames (Corelli 1896, 410). She belongs to Rimanez now and so, even after death, she can find no independence.²⁹ Her end thus warns of the hellish consequences for women who succumb to passion and even death can provide no escape from her controlled and patriarchal existence.

Arthur Machen's *The Great God Pan* also portrays the alleged threat of the sexually promiscuous woman. Dr Raymond's experiment, which he hopes will allow his subject, Mary, to meet the God Pan, is successful, but she dies after bearing a daughter, Helen Vaughan. Helen embodies the feared dangers of female transgression. Machen therefore constructs a novel in which Raymond's experiment effectively lifts the 'veil' on the ideology of Victorian femininity, as he intended to lift the 'veil' on civilisation (Machen 1894, 14), and Machen explores the consequences of the monstrous side of female sexuality.

Helen's alias is Mrs Herbert, who exposes her husband to 'horrors' (Machen 1894, 42). She is portrayed as a 'femme fatale', compounding the late-

²⁹ Why this is the case is explored in the sub-section of this chapter entitled 'The Fallen Woman.'

nineteenth-century fear that ‘once [the femme fatale] gets the upper hand and flaunts it, she’s the devil ...you’re the one to be pitied’ (Lago 1981, 11). Helen is injurious to men by causing their death and destruction, and ‘at once the most beautiful woman and the most repulsive’ (Machen 1894, 47). Helen is aesthetically beautiful, but her degenerate nature renders her ‘repulsive’, and, as Grant Allen says of the ‘ugly’, likely to cause ‘race extinction’ (Allen 1880, 448-9). Helen entertains male visitors, insinuating her position as an upper-class prostitute. To Dr Elizabeth Blackwell, sexual deviant ‘prostitutes’, regardless of class, possessed an inherently bestial character and were ‘human tigers who delight in destruction and torture’ (Blackwell 1887, 36).³⁰ The prostitute was seen as inherently evil and aiding the spread of contagious disease (Liggins 2003, 39). Helen embodies these perceived threats and in eugenicist ideology, as a degenerate danger to society’s men, Helen must be removed permanently.

The prevention of the procreation of the degenerate female was paradoxically opposite to the idea that women *must* procreate. Grant Allen asserted that ‘it was women’s racial duty to ...follow natural dictates’ (Allen 1884, 179). Female eugenicists saw women as morally superior to men and therefore responsible for society’s improvement. The eugenicist Sarah Grand said that individuals who did not procreate ‘are not agreeable either to know or to think about.’³¹ She said that women should choose their partners rationally, exclusive of love or passion. Richardson says that the late-nineteenth-century fear was that ‘passion ...would lead ...ultimately, to the degeneration of the British race’ (Richardson 2000, 231). In *Sorrows*, Sibyl initially enters into a loveless marriage, and only when she gives way to passion does she end up committing suicide. Similarly, Helen’s wanton passion causes her own end by forced suicide. By not remaining ‘pure’ these characters do not possess the innate morals allegedly necessary for race progression. Female eugenicists like

³⁰ Dr Blackwell (1821-1910) was born in Britain but retained dual citizenship between Britain and America, and was the first female to achieve a medical degree. She did advocate women’s rights, but also advocated social and moral reform and, as such, she was against prostitution as a social evil.

³¹ Richardson 2000, 232. Quotes Sarah Grand’s *The Marriage Question*.

Grand were firm exponents of biological determinism: Grand writes in her book *The Heavenly Twins* that vices ‘become hereditary, and continue from generation to generation’ (Grand 1893, 80). Corelli was aware of Grant’s *Heavenly Twins*; Sibyl reads it in *Sorrows*. Sibyl and Helen are daughters of alleged degenerates. Consequently, they demonstrate the feared effect which inheritance had in contributing to the degenerate pool. As women were the ‘mothers’ of the British race then, to eugenicists, they must be prevented from propagating if not fit to do so. The death of both Sibyl and Helen certainly does end this suggested line of contagion.

The New Woman would allegedly risk a new generation of sexless beings, and both texts explore this idea. Rimanez proclaims that women who transcend gender spheres are androgynous: ‘I do not consider them women at all, - they are merely the unnatural and strutting embryos of a new sex which will be neither male nor female’ (Corelli 1896, 82). Consequently, he tells Sibyl: ‘when you die, your bodies generate foulness, - things of the mould and slime are formed out of the flesh that was once fair for man’s delight’ (Corelli 1896, 81). This description is mirrored in Helen’s death scene: ‘I watched, and at last I saw nothing but a substance as jelly ...a horrid and unspeakable shape, neither man nor beast’ (Machen 1894, 99). Both characters are portrayed as a Gothic ‘abhumans’ (Hurley 1996) and, as such, they are the definitive symbol of the degenerate woman: ‘the firm structure of the body that I had thought to be unchangeable, and permanent as adamant, began to melt and dissolve ...I saw the form waver from sex to sex, dividing itself from itself ...I saw the body descend to the beasts whence it ascended’ (Machen 1894, 98). The monstrous and androgynous Helen is indicative of Maudsley’s warning that women who ignored their biological destiny would be ‘a monstrosity – something which having ceased to be a woman is not yet a man’ (Maudsley 1874b, 477). Similarly, McGrigor wrote that the New Woman was a ‘creature who “shunts” the conjugal and maternal duties; who rebels against the very instincts of Nature ...in aping man, [she] becomes a nondescript - a monster more horrible than that created by Frankenstein’¹ (McGrigor 1869, 212). The New Woman is thus Gothicised, worse than the unnatural and destructive monster created by Frankenstein. Hurley asserts that the reduction of Helen to a ‘thing’ is telling of

the era's anxieties, representing the transformation a being who symbolises corruption and disgust into symbol of evil, 'literal[ising]' the 'beastliness' of human nature (Hurley 1996, 29). Helen's devolution concludes her degenerate nature, culminating in suicide which, remembering previous chapters, was theorised as one of the definitive symptoms of degeneration. Helen is thus handed a rope; what other option could there be for a late-nineteenth-century monstrous, promiscuous and harmful woman?

As discussed, the 'house' (Patmore 1854-6) was seen to offer women a safe haven, a shelter from real life and protection against the temptations to which she would allegedly be prone. Features of morality such as chastity and modesty were perceived to be essential qualities in women as the 'mothers' of the race (Bland 1995, 84). If they were to 'fall' from this pedestal, there were perceived to be obvious potential consequences to late-Victorian society. The next section explores the position of the 'fallen woman' and her consequential suicide.

The Fallen Woman

Ron Brown claims that visual culture of suicide in the nineteenth century tended towards a female representation because the fallen woman was stigmatised throughout the era as one who could only be redeemed through suicide (Brown 2001, 148-63). Suicide became a cliché, ubiquitously represented as the inevitable outcome for the disgraced woman. Lisa Nicoletti notes that by the second half of the century publications such as *The Illustrated Police Journal* commonly featured images of women committing suicide, usually through drowning (Nicoletti 2007). She refers to these representations as warnings or 'narratives of sexual danger', noting that Victorians believed that women who attempted to enter the public sphere would be exposed to temptation and they would 'fall' to suicide (Nicoletti 2007, 9). George Savage presented a lecture entitled 'Constant Watching of Suicide Cases' to Bethlem Asylum in 1884 and referred to female suicide as an act of shame and remorse: 'the woman who destroys herself as she is awakening to reason...[is] horrified by the thought of her faintly-remembered past' (Savage 1884, 18). Drowning was considered an established mode of suicide by the late nineteenth century as

was the idea that the female suicide warned of the potential outcome for the century's most epitomised 'fallen woman', the prostitute.³² Earlier in the century, Thomas Hood's infamous 1844 poem 'The Bridge of Sighs' asks the public to view the [fallen] woman who commits suicide sympathetically and suggests that after death, and thus redemption, the prostitute becomes feminine again, and should be treated accordingly:

Touch her not scornfully;
Think of her not mournfully;
Gently and humanly;
Not of the stains of her,
All that remains of her
Now is pure womanly.³³

Her re-feminisation intimates the redemptive effect of suicide by drowning. In Stanza 5, Hood continues: 'Death has left on her / Only the beautiful' after her sin has been cleansed and concludes his poem with:

Owning her weakness,
Her evil behaviour,
And leaving, with meekness,
Her sins to her Saviour!

Although her actions had been 'weak' and 'evil', her suicide rids her of her sins and she will meet the 'Saviour' a reformed woman. Elizabeth Bronfen writes that 'the powerful, self-assertive woman [acts] as the signifier for the threatening Otherness of the body, of nature, of sexuality', whereas death represents 'the innocent, passive, fading woman' – i.e. the feminine. Through death, the 'threatening Other' is removed, returning the woman to 'innocent' status (Bronfen 1992, 223). Although Hood's popular poem was published in 1844, this idea only increased in popularity as the century progressed. Olive Anderson writes that suicide was the only option for seduced women: 'any young woman

³² Lambton Young, Secretary to The Royal Human Society, calculated that there had been 550 female suicides by drowning between the years 1830 and 1871.

³³ Quiller-Couch 1919. Stanza 4. The poem was published in the May 1844 edition of *Hood's Monthly Magazine*.

depicted as lingering near deep water was immediately understood to be deserted or “fallen” and contemplating suicide’ (Anderson 1987, 197) The image attempted to maintain social order by underlining the dangers for women should they transcend their safe domestic world. The section below examines Corelli’s Pauline de Charmilles in the context of the drowned woman. She is an upper-class woman who succumbs to temptation and subsequently commits suicide in *Wormwood* (1890).

***Wormwood*³⁴**

According to Janet Casey, Corelli infers that women ‘initiate their own victimisation’ (Casey 1992, 173). Casey specifically refers to Corelli’s article ‘Man’s War against Women’ in which she wrote: ‘from that first apple of Eden, she has constantly offered him too much fruit of the garden.’³⁵ Corelli implies that women should retain her natural femininity so that they may retain control of their own life. She wrote that in marriage a woman should maintain ‘a desire to please’ her husband (Corelli 1905, 159) and that ‘charm, grace of manner, easy eloquence and exquisite self-restraint’ were essential for a harmonious marriage (Corelli 1907, 23). Corelli alleged that if women remained pure and innocent, they may live a happy life:

The woman ...whose voice is equable and tender, who enhances whatever beauty she possesses by exquisite manner, unblemished reputation, and intellectual capacity combined, raises herself ...so far above [men] that she straightway becomes the Goddess and he the Worshipper. This is as it should be (Corelli 1905, 183-4).

³⁴ See chapter two for links between this title and the Gothic genre.

³⁵ Marie Corelli 1907. Man’s war against women. *Harper’s Bazaar* 41, 425-8; 550-53. Quoted in Casey 1992, 173

Once a woman's reputation is 'blemished', however, she is rejected. *Wormwood's* Pauline 'initiat[es] her own victimisation', to use Casey's words. She is engaged to Gaston, who idolises her. By marrying him, Pauline would have adhered to the above-mentioned late-nineteenth-century view that women should marry the rational choice of partner rather than be influenced by passion. However, Pauline offers Guidel 'too much fruit' and rejects rationality for passion, destroying her own life and the lives of those around her.

It is Pauline's physical beauty and femininity which lead Gaston to worship her:

The Swiss wild-roses had left their delicate hues on [Pauline's] cheeks; the Alpine blue gentians had lost their little hearts in her eyes. She was dressed ...in ...a simple garb of purest white silk ...her rich curls of dark brown hair were caught up in high masses and tied with a golden ribbon (Corelli 1890, 14-15).

Gaston places Pauline on a pedestal, deriving pleasure from her child-like frivolity: '[She] heaved a comical little sigh over the one serious inconvenience and unforgettable disadvantage of her past school-life, namely, the lack of delectable Éclairs and marrons glaces' (Corelli 1890, 14-15). As seen above, Corelli wrote that women should be 'charm[ing]' and Pauline is described as such: 'a charming smile parted her lovely lips, and she returned my profound bow with the prettiest sweeping curtsy imaginable' (Corelli 1890, 15). Initially, Pauline is the rosy-cheeked feminine 'ideal' who becomes 'worshipped' by Gaston:

How was it that she, a girl fresh from school ...fond of bon-bons and foolish trifles, should suddenly ravish my soul by surprise and enslave and dominate it utterly? ...She was beautiful ...and I suppose her beauty allured me. Men never fall in love at first with a woman's mind; only with her body (Corelli 1890, 20).

To ensure a happy domestic situation, says Gaston, 'a stupid beauty is the most comfortable sort of housekeeper going ...she will ...make herself look as ornamental as she can' (Corelli 1890, 20). These words correspond with Corelli's critique of female behaviour above. Corelli also suggests that Pauline is subordinate to the men in her life because of her child-like nature. She is described throughout the novel as a 'child'. Women were commonly described as naturally less evolved than men. For example, McGrigor wrote that 'woman preserves the infantile type ...physically, mentally and morally; woman is a kind of adult child' (McGrigor 1869, 210). Similarly, Romanes believed that 'childishness' was an evolutionary consequence for women.³⁶ Paralleling the late-Victorian belief in the innate weakness of the female mind, Gaston frequently refers to Pauline's emotional frailty, for example: 'She is very sensitive ...She is a little angel-harp that responds sympathetically to everything' (Corelli 1890, 69). Her cousin, Heloise, shares Gaston's view and worries that Pauline 'is a little morbid perhaps and unstrung. She often sheds tears for nothing', and Gaston replies 'girls will often weep for nothing' (Corelli 1890, 71). Emotional and child-like, Pauline's faculties of reason and will are lacking and she starts to give in to temptation, succumbing to her passion for Silvion Guidel. Pauline acknowledges that she does not possess the will to resist: 'It seems that I have fallen into some great resistless river that carries me along with it against my will' (Corelli 1890, 117). Jane Wood says that 'the physiological consequence of [a woman's] reluctance to comply with prescribed social and sexual roles' was allegedly an affected nervous system and mental instability. Late-Victorian ideology often warned that passionate and illicit liaisons would result in the balance of her mind becoming deranged (Wood 2001, 163). Pauline's affair with Guidel gradually diminishes her already frail mental state and she sinks into despair. As she admits the truth of her affair to Gaston, her fragile state of mind is evidenced by descriptions like 'shivering

³⁶ Romanes 1887, 657. Lombroso wrote the same, in 1895: 'in figure, in size of brain, in strength, in intelligence, woman comes nearer to the animal and the child'. Lombroso 1895, 48.

sigh', 'feverish', 'tear-spoilt eyes' and 'quivering lips' (Corelli 1890,107-9). Previously, 'with a helpless swaying movement she fell in a sudden swoon at [Gaston's] feet!' (Corelli 1890, 97-8). Pauline's mental and nervous disposition is weakened beyond repair.

Following her admission, Gaston denounces Pauline as debased and ruined:

The world will slowly close upon you like a dark
prison wherein to expiate in tears and pain your sin
...the kindly faces you have known from childhood
will turn from you in grief and scorn ...friends will
shrink from and avoid you ...how desolate your days
will be (Corelli 1890, 118-9).

As Gaston prophetically concludes, destruction is the end result of her transgression: he becomes addicted to absinthe; Pauline's father and Guidel die; and Pauline commits suicide. Juliet Gardiner describes how nineteenth-century women were categorised for marriage or for sex, quoting Eliza Lynn Linton: 'she [the sexually impure] has lost also that far more precious purity and delicacy of perception ...men ...may amuse themselves with her...but they do not readily take her for life.'³⁷ Pauline is abandoned by both Guidel and Gaston; as a fallen woman, she is no longer fit for either suitor. Humiliated, remorseful and desperate to spare her family further shame, she runs away. Pauline is portrayed as unfit to partner anyone, having yielded to temptation and relinquished the opportunity to be adored. Pauline acknowledges that she must become socially isolated: 'disgraced, I will bear the solitude of disgrace, — ruined, I will abide by my ruin' (Corelli 1890, 147).

³⁷ Gardiner 1993, 57. Quotes Eliza Lynn Linton. 1868. The Girl of the Period. *The Saturday Review*, 339-40.

Corelli argued that to be 'worshipped' by man would put women in a favourable position:

If she has the natural heritage of her sex ...she has no need to come down from her throne and mingle in any of his political frays ...the object of woman's existence is not to war with man ...but simply to ...hold him in subservience without so much as a threat or a blow. Clever women always do this; clever women have always done it (Corelli 1907, 14-27).

Pauline was worshipped by Gaston. However, by falling from her pedestal she is unable to gain 'command' over the man who once loved her. Instead he drives her to suicide. In a role-reversal, he now commands her, taking delight in detailing Guidel's murder: '[Murder] has a ludicrously appalling effect on human nerves! On the silly Pauline it fell like a thunderbolt... She tottered and sank down on the pavement, shuddering in every limb, and crouching there, moaned to herself like a sick and suffering child' (Corelli 1890, 362-4). Corelli retains the 'silly' and 'child-like' imagery used to describe Pauline throughout the novel but while these traits had once endeared her to Gaston, he is now 'indifferen[t]' (Corelli 1890, 367). His perception has altered, now viewing Pauline as no more than a prostitute. When he finds her singing for money, he sneers: 'one would have thought there were more comfortable ways of earning a living...you, with your fair face and knowledge of evil could surely have done better than this' (Corelli 1890, 355). Gaston's father is more sympathetic to her plight, proclaiming her a 'victim' ruined by a 'vile seducer' (Corelli 1890, 207). This fallen woman can thus paradoxically be viewed as both victim and perpetrator – like the representation in Hood's earlier poem.

Pauline defines herself according to her relationship to Guidel: 'I have had ...one thread to bind me to existence, — Silvion!' (Corelli 1890, 358). When she finds that he has died, she breaks down, having no one else to live for: 'suddenly flinging up her hands above her head, she broke into a loud peal of discordant delirious laughter and rushed violently past me out of the court'

(Corelli 1890, 368-9). She drowns herself, her suicide immediate and impulsive. Gaston waits by the morgue for her body to be brought in and when it is Pauline is presented as a figure of beauty once more. Hood asked that the drowned woman be treated tenderly and with sympathy. Similarly, Pauline's angelic appearance and her innocence, virtue and femininity are restored by her seemingly redemptive death. Gaston describes:

I ...saw the fair, soft, white body ...laid out ...like a beautiful figure of frozen snow ...The river had fondled her! — had stroked her cheeks and left them pale and pure, — had kissed her lips and closed them in a childlike happy smile, — had swept all her dark hair back from the smooth white brow just to show how prettily the blue veins were pencilled under the soft transparent skin, — had closed the gentle eyes and deftly pointed the long dark lashes in a downward sleepy fringe — and had made of one little dead girl so wondrous and piteous a picture (Corelli 1890, 381).

In death, she is restored to her pedestal and Gaston gazes at her beauty. Brown states that in death the female suicide is objectified as a sexual figure once more as men are no longer repulsed by her original sin (Brown 2001, 54). Gaston uses sexualised language to portray his lingering desire for Pauline – the river 'fondled', 'caressed' and 'kissed' her, denoting Gaston's wish to do the same. For a time, she is no longer the fallen prostitute he had believed her to be, but is redeemed. However, the necrophilic description of her dead female body paradoxically reminds us of the sexuality which caused her fall. When Gaston realises a photograph of Guidel remains in her locket he furiously tells the mortician that she is 'a fille de joie, no doubt!' (Corelli 1890, 387). Heloise arrives and takes Pauline's body home, and Gaston realises that Pauline has 'escaped' him (Corelli 1890, 387). By committing suicide Pauline escapes her loveless union, her sin and the stigma of the fallen woman. As a result she is returned to the domestic sphere, to be buried with her father. Ultimately suicide was the only way of allowing her 'to receive the last solemn honours due to

Innocence and— Frailty’ (Corelli 1890, 388). With her suicide, Pauline achieves redemption.

Throughout *Wormwood*, Pauline lacks the will and self-restraint to withstand her impulses. She is swept along by a tide of emotions, her impulses driving her first into her affair, then to run away, and finally to die. She is impelled into the river to be free from the persecution of her misdemeanour and is restored to the safety of her family after death. It is interesting to note the different endings for Pauline and Sibyl. While Pauline is expunged of her sins through drowning, Corelli does not follow the ‘traditional’ female suicide of drowning for Sibyl, who poisons herself. As a result, she is not redeemed, but instead is condemned to Hell: ‘the scarlet wings beat me downward ...to a further darkness...amid wind and fire!’ (Corelli 1896, 410). There is no salvation for Sibyl. Both of Corelli’s characters are abased and rejected, having given in to lust, but one is redeemed through drowning and the other is sent to Hell. Pauline had, after all, expressed remorse for the shame wrought upon her family, whereas Sibyl’s suicide note only blames society and those around her. Adhering to the Victorian cliché, Corelli suggests that sins can be expunged and femininity restored if the individual is repentant and cleanses herself through drowning.

Dorian Gray

Like Corelli, Oscar Wilde satirises the late-nineteenth-century views about women, culminating in the stereotypical and clichéd death of *Dorian Gray*’s Sibyl Vane, who kills herself following Dorian’s rejection.³⁸

³⁸ It is interesting that there are two characters named Sibyl in my study; it was a name which gained in popularity in the nineteenth-century following the publication of Benjamin Disraeli’s novel *Sybil: or The Two Nations* in 1845. The novel tackles the appalling conditions for the working class in England and the divide between the rich and the poor. Wilde could therefore have chosen this name deliberately to signify the class-gulf between Sibyl Vane and her lover, Dorian, while indeed in *Sorrows* the name could be seen to represent the materialism of the upper-class, emphasised by the poverty Tempest had suffered before striking his deal with the Devil and becoming rich again. His union with Sibyl Elton is certainly one that would not have taken place had he remained poor.

As editor of *The Women's World* between 1887 and 1889, Wilde sometimes promoted the New Woman. Stephanie Green says that Wilde did not agree with the false principle of femininity: 'In practical terms, the magazine examines things and identities... and reports on new roles for women in public life. The contents frequently reflect on the artifice of femininity, drawing on historical examples of successful women to promote the idea of the New Woman' (Green 1997, 103). Wilde himself is quoted as saying that he wanted to 'deal... with what [women] think' (Davis 1962, 194). However, Green does not mention that Wilde sometimes wrote paradoxically of the feminine ideal: 'women seem to me to possess just what our literature wants, a light touch, a delicate hand, a graceful mode of treatment' (Wilde 1889a, 164) and his literature does indeed contain some characters who parody this femininity. In *Dorian Gray*, Lord Henry comments 'women are a decorative sex. They never have anything to say, but they say it charmingly' (Wilde 1891b, 40). Gender spheres, like those described by Romanes (above), in the novel are treated with playful irony and satirise the idea of the fallen woman. The female suicide was often clichéd as a weak-willed character unable to exist without her love, or a fallen woman seeking redemption. Sibyl Vane becomes this cliché; archetypal tragic romantic performer, fallen woman *and* rejected in love – she is a myriad of female representations to be explored.³⁹

Like Pauline, Sibyl Vane is feminine, described as a delicate 'rose', with 'childlike' appearance, 'winsome fanciful ways' and a 'shy trembling gaze' (Wilde 1891b, 53, 85). Dorian initially places her 'on a pedestal of gold' (Wilde 1891b, 63). In return, she wants to subserviently be 'his': Sibyl's brother warns her that Dorian merely wants to 'enslave' her, to which she replies 'I shudder at the thought of being free' (Wilde 1891b, 56). Her mother approves of the union, telling her son that 'if this gentleman is wealthy, there is no reason why she should not contract an alliance with him' (Wilde 1891b, 53). Previously, Sibyl

³⁹ Helen Small references the cliché of the suicide as 'an immediate and lucid response to a devastating betrayal' (Small 1996, 4).

had effectively been sold to the theatre's owner and Dorian speaks of buying her from him. She is a commodity, and their marriage offers the only other available option to her aside from acting. Sibyl desperately hopes that Dorian will 'take [her] away' (Wilde 1891b, 70) and consequently, with no other means of escape, is driven to suicide by his abandonment. Unlike Sibyl Elton and Pauline, Sibyl Vane remains true to her love for Dorian and yet is portrayed as a fallen woman nonetheless, as discussed below. After his rejection, 'she flung herself at his feet, and lay there like a trampled flower' (Wilde 1891b, 71). The image of Sibyl begging for forgiveness at Dorian's feet evokes the clichéd image of the fallen woman. Augustus Egg's well-publicised 1858 trilogy 'Past and Present' (below) shows the established iconic tradition of the fallen woman, who initially begs for forgiveness after transgression, prostrate at her husband's feet, before being cast out alone. The final image, aptly entitled 'Despair', adheres once more to the idea that suicide offers the only option to the fallen woman, as the abased wife sits beside the river, clutching a baby – the result of her affair – seemingly contemplating suicide (Brown 2001, 156).



In July 1885, the *Pall Mall Gazette* published the words of a matron at the Lock Hospital, who had told the *Pall Mall*'s editor, William Thomas Stead, that 'the innocent girl once outraged' suffered 'a lasting blight' (Bland 1995, 57). A fall from virtue was often recognised as irredeemable for middle-class women, hence the iconography of the suicidal fallen woman. Lucy Bland discusses the Victorian ideology which ascribed the inhibitory power of modesty to women in the absence of an evolved will-power. Without modesty, therefore, a woman had no means of inhibition and would become irreversibly degenerate (Bland 1995, 57-8). Sibyl was working-class, and so would not be expected to carry herself with piety – the middle and upper-classes viewed the lower-classes

as inherently sexually immoral.⁴⁰ However, Dorian's adoration of Sibyl elevates her and, with their union, she would become aristocratic. Her fall, however, corresponds with the eugenicist concept that innate nature cannot be reversed and so the biological nature of the lower-classes cannot be improved through marriage. Parodying this idea that lower-class women were already fallen, Wilde subverts the images of Sibyl's delicate nature by constructing an image of a sexually impure woman whose union with Dorian must be ended. He frequently associates the term 'passion' with Sibyl (Wilde 1891b, 50, 70, 71) and casts her as an actress. Actresses were often looked upon unfavourably; not only did acting remove the woman from the domestic sphere but actresses usually worked late hours, were attractive, and played lead, sometimes sexual, roles. Tracy D. Davis states that 'Victorians were deeply suspicious of women whose livelihood depended on skills of deception and dissenting' (Davis 1991, 3). Supporting the cliché of his 'fallen woman', Wilde hints at the eroticism of their backstage meeting. Dorian tells Henry and Basil that during this meeting, a 'changed look' had come over her and she had kissed him passionately, while trembling and shaking (Wilde 1891b, 62). His description hints at sexual passion and her transition to seduced woman. Like Corelli's *Sorrows*, the narrative explores the idea that the fallen woman is left with little option other than redemption through suicide, as Dorian comments that Sibyl 'had atoned for everything, by the sacrifice she had made of her life' (Wilde 1891b, 85). The outcome of the fallen woman was, as seen, often portrayed as death, a cliché to which Wilde adheres.

Sibyl is portrayed as emotional and despairing, as Dorian's rejection left her with 'a piteous expression of pain' (Wilde 1891b, 70). Late-nineteenth-century alienists believed that excessive emotion was almost exclusively feminine and would lead to their suicide. The philosopher Thomas Marsaryk

⁴⁰ Liggins 2003, 48. She writes that the middle-classes saw working-class women as 'being very close to the shameless prostitute, even if they do not sell their bodies on the street. This reflects the wider "anxiety over the sexual precocity of working-class girls" which feminists sought to control.'

argued that women were motivated to suicide because women are ‘more passionate and unrequited love and jealousy disturb[s] her more than man’ (Masaryk 1881, 26). The American author Albert Rhodes (1840-1894) believed that ‘women appear to be more subject to...disappointed love, betrayal, desertion, jealousy, domestic trouble, and sentimental exaltation of every description’ (Rhodes 1876, 192-4). Richard Krafft-Ebing blamed the ‘sad tragedies of passionate love that are in conflict with the principles of morality or social standing, and often terminate in murder, self-destruction and...suicide’ (Krafft-Ebing 1866, 11-12). Krafft-Ebing alleged that when women embarked on their first relationship they were unable to resist their desires because they lack the will to govern their passions. First loves are so passionate, he claimed, that they contravene moral law and women ‘love so deeply’ that they will be broken by the end of this relationship (Krafft-Ebing 1866, 11-12). Likewise, Romanes considered women as slaves to emotion, concluding that: ‘[The will] exercises less control over the emotions in women than in men’ (Romanes 1887, 659). Wilde read this article and, similarly, Sibyl is so ‘enslaved’ by her emotion that she is impelled to suicide. In his two-chapter depiction of Sibyl and her death, Wilde manages to incorporate the image of ‘ideal’ Victorian woman, the fallen woman, the seduced and rejected woman, and the heartbroken woman who cannot live without her beloved. Sibyl is an ensemble of ‘types’ which paints her as a caricature of late-nineteenth-century perception and serves as a parody of the varied but clichéd representations of the suicidal woman in fiction.⁴¹ Her suicide is not a concession to expectation, as Wilde frequently criticised ‘the cultivation of separate sorts of virtues and separate ideals of duty in men and women’ (Green 1997, 111). By creating and exaggerating these spheres for his characters, he satirises their distinctions. As someone seen to blur boundaries between genders, an effeminate homosexual married man, it is fitting

⁴¹ For example, Anna’s and Emma’s suicides in Gustave Flaubert’s *Madame Bovary* (1880), Hermione’s suicide in *The Woman Who Did* by Grant Allen (1895) or indeed Pauline’s suicide in *Wormwood*.

that he so clearly parodies the era's stereotypical portrayal of those such as himself who are seen to transgress.

The 'Art' of Suicide

Wilde's main concern was aesthetic determinism, or 'art for art's sake' – the belief that life imitates art, and therefore art can influence individuals and the formation of society. This section looks at the perceived consequences when Sibyl attempts to reject the 'life imitat[ing] art' of her tragic heroines on stage and reverse that dictum into art imitating life – inconceivable for the aesthete Dorian.

The iconography of suicide across history is examined in Brown's *The Art of Suicide* (2001). Particularly common was the romanticised image of the drowned woman. Likewise, Wilde references the romanticism of Ophelia's death in *Dorian Gray*: Henry Wotton suggests to Dorian that Hetty, the woman he loved, might be 'floating at the present moment in some starlit mill-pond, with lovely water-lilies round her, like Ophelia' (Wilde 1891b, 167). Similarly, upon the death of Sibyl, Henry romanticises the concept of dying for love:

Someone has killed herself for love of you ...There is something to me quite beautiful about [Sibyl's] death. I am glad I am living in a century when such wonders happen. They make one believe in ...romance, passion, and love' (Wilde 1891b, 82-3).

Dorian views Sibyl as beautiful art. They only meet at the theatre, in the sphere of her artistic performances. Outside the theatre, Dorian fails to notice her (Wilde 1891b, 56). She is not 'real' to him nor is he to her. He is her 'Prince Charming', and she represents tragic Shakespearean heroines. Dorian tells Henry that Sibyl 'regarded me merely as a person in a play' (Wilde 1891b, 45). This is reciprocated by Dorian; when Henry asks him 'when is she Sibyl Vane?' Dorian replies 'never.' When the reality of Sibyl as a person – and not art – becomes clear to Dorian after her final performance in the theatre, he rejects her. As 'art', Sibyl exists for her beauty alone and need play no other role. Eventually, however, she tells Dorian 'I became conscious that the Romeo was hideous and old ...that the words I had to speak were unreal' (Wilde 1891b, 70).

Sibyl wants reality and rejects the aesthetic dictum of life imitating art. Wilde's preface states that 'all art is useless' because it has no purpose outside its own beauty. Similarly, Henry tells Dorian: 'the moment [Sibyl] touched actual life, she marred it, and it marred her, and so she passed away' (Wilde 1891b, 84). If Sibyl ceases to be 'art' then she has no purpose to Dorian; it is only through her clichéd suicide that she becomes art once more. Wilde uses the clichés of the dramatic world's tragedies to romanticise Sibyl's demise. Dorian confesses that her suicide seemed 'to be simply like the wonderful ending to a wonderful play. It has all the terrible beauty of a Greek tragedy.' Henry replies: '[Sometimes] a tragedy that possesses artistic elements of beauty crosses our lives' and thus we become 'spectators' (Wilde 1891b, 81-2). By 'performing' the final Act of the tragic suicide, Sibyl is revered in Dorian's eyes: 'What a romance it had all been! ...When he thought of her, it would be as a wonderful tragic figure sent on to the world's stage to show the supreme reality of love' (Wilde 1891b, 85). Suicide becomes a beautiful work of art and so, in keeping with Wilde's views on art, cannot be construed as morally wrong. Wilde wrote in his Preface: 'Those who find ugly meanings in beautiful things are corrupt without being charming. This is a fault. Those who find beautiful meanings in beautiful things are the cultivated.' Sibyl's suicide is revered for its artistic beauty. Paradoxically, in accordance with Wilde's preface, this would render the seemingly corrupt Henry and Dorian 'cultivated'.

Conclusion

I have tried to ascertain how the ideas relating to the suicide of women in the late nineteenth century were addressed in these Gothic novels, while at the same time acknowledging the satirical manner in which the authors subvert or exaggerate the era's ideals. There are paradoxes in the concept of female sexuality. Women were seen as slaves to their passions and without will, but were simultaneously expected to be pure and morally superior. The images contradict each other. Similarly confusing is the idea that a woman was at fault if she chose not to have children but a woman should *not* have children if she was degenerate. The fallen woman could redeem herself through suicide, but suicide was still seen as a sin. The contradictions are of many proportions and the novels and their authors reflect this, because on the surface each seems to

explore a specific contemporary idea: Pauline is the suicide-through-redemption fallen woman; Sibyl Vane the seduced/lovelorn/abandoned/work of art; Sibyl Elton the immoral fallen woman who is also victim of her inheritance, society and pernicious fiction; finally, Helen Vaughan the femme fatale whose sexuality deems her injurious to men. In Gothic fiction of the eighteenth century, women were persecuted victims. Now, the myriad representations show an attempt to engage with but at the same time satirise the common late-Victorian views of women – no longer just a victim – that were peppered with problems. In an age of decadence, aestheticism, degeneration, the struggle for female emancipation and gender blurring, there was no ‘one size fits all’ portrayal. Suicide is a narrative device suitably shocking for the Gothic, a permeable genre which has evolved alongside changing attitudes. Suicide with regards to women was an increasing concern. The cliché of the suicidal woman would thus be used to scare her counterparts and maintain social governance. These concerns and paradoxes work their way into the era’s fiction. New Woman texts were seen as narratives of danger. So, too, the texts discussed above demonstrate the potential consequences of women’s actions and suicide becomes a warning mechanism while simultaneously exaggerated in typical Gothic fashion.

The following chapter explores the psychology of emotion in the two short stories ‘Oke of Okehurst’ (1886) and ‘Sir Edmund Orme’ (1891). Although there is some weight to the argument that all suicides are potentially caused by strong emotion, there have been alternative aspects to each previous suicide I have discussed. In the forthcoming chapter, however, I wish to ascertain the psychology behind emotion itself according to the theories of William James (1842-1910) and why the authors have chosen to use the traditional Gothic motif of the supernatural to deliver their tales of woe, rather than the typical nineteenth-century degenerate. These ghostly figures warn of the pathological consequences of succumbing to strong emotion and failing to exercise strength of mind. Ghosts were frequently used in early Gothic to underline psychological disintegration and the power of emotion and imagination over reason (Botting 1996, 3) and thus the use of the supernatural in the late-nineteenth-century stories discussed in the next chapter show how

science, psychology and Gothic tradition all interact with one another, as art and science join hands once again.

Chapter 6: The Psychology of Emotions, Ghosts and Suicide in Henry James's 'Edmund Orme' and Vernon Lee's 'Oke of Okehurst'.

Some late-nineteenth-century physicians were preoccupied with the nature of impulsive behaviour and the social importance of the individual's ability to exert self-control. These physicians (discussed below) realised that powerful emotions could exercise strong physiological effects independent of the will and reason. The study of the psychology of strong emotions and their impact on both the inner consciousness and the external behaviour of an individual began in the middle of the nineteenth century when psychiatrists and psychologists recognised a link between stimulus, behavioural change and reaction. This chapter examines how Henry James and Vernon Lee used nineteenth-century theories about the emotions and suicide in their short stories, 'Sir Edmund Orme' (James, 1891) and 'Oke of Okehurst' (Lee, 1886).¹ It also explores how these stories hark back to 'the old story of love and pain and death' (H. James 1891, 78), which is also part of Gothic traditions. The concept of the power of the passions was, after all, an idea used in literary history, shown below, before scientists in the nineteenth century began to medicalise human behaviour.²

Suicide as an outcome of strong emotion is a device that has been used since at least the seventeenth century. Shakespeare, for example, created some

¹ 'Edmund Orme' was first published in the Christmas edition of the magazine *Black and White* in November 1891, before making it to book format in 1892 in a collection called *The Lesson of the Master* (H. James, 1892). 'Oke of Okehurst' was originally published by Blackwood with the title 'A Phantom Lover' in 1886.

² For a good discussion about the medicalisation of behaviour in the nineteenth-century novel, see Small 1996.

of the most memorable emotional and passionate suicides in literature.³ The critic George Henry Lewes (1817-1878) noted that: ‘in literature it is always passion, and passion of vehement sudden afflux, which determines suicide: the agonies of despair or jealousy, the arrow pangs of remorse, or the dread of apprehension or shame’ (Lewes 1857, 57). A character’s suicide emphasises the strength of the emotion and the tragedy of the tale.

In the latter half of the nineteenth century, specialist and non-specialist journals alike applied these literary traditions to real life, as investigations into lesions of the will and the psychology of emotions occurred alongside the emergence of suicide statistics in the middle of the century. In 1884, an article in *Chambers’s Journal* claimed that ‘the passions and emotions are generally at the root of self-murder’ (On suicide 1884, 293). With access to allegedly factual information, theorists could begin to assess the motives behind suicide, and strong emotions emerged as one of the leading causes of the phenomenon.⁴ Literary authors could now combine the literary tradition of suicide as well as earlier Gothic conventions with some of the medico-socio concerns of the era, blending fantasy and reality to create ambiguous worlds reminiscent of the traditional Gothic’s suggestive hauntings caused by excessive imagination and emotion (Botting 1996, 3).

The Passions and the Emotions

As chapter three showed, Etienne Esquirol is widely viewed as the founder of nineteenth-century medical views on suicide (Berrios 1996, 445). Esquirol (1838) argued that suicide was either rational or irrational, believing that irrational suicides were committed impulsively as the result of an overwhelming emotion and not insanity. He wrote that suicide was down to

³ For example, in *Othello*, Othello kills himself after murdering his wife as his rage and jealousy escalate; *Romeo and Juliet*’s title characters take their own lives because the strength of their love means that they are unable to live apart from each other and Lady Macbeth seemingly commits suicide following her mental breakdown through the weight of her guilt. Much like Oke, she becomes delusional before her demise.

⁴ Evidence can be seen in most nineteenth-century theories on suicide. See, for example, the table quoted by Albert Rhodes (1876, 192) and Henry Morselli’s (1881) tabled results.

emotional upheaval or social factors and in many cases he felt that suicide existed independently of long-term mental derangement. Esquirol agreed that a suicidal person would always have a transformed mental state due to the effect of strong emotions, but this in itself did not constitute insanity. This idea came to be known as the 'standard view' on suicide (Berrios 1996, 447). Esquirol blamed this transformed mental state on the passions which, he said, 'enfeeble the organs' and arrest the reason and the will (Esquirol 1838, 254). He concluded:

When the soul is strongly moved, by a violent and unexpected affection ...the reason is disturbed, the individual loses his self-consciousness ...and commits acts the most thoughtless; those most opposed to his instincts, his affections and interests (Esquirol 1838, 256).

When subject to a strong emotion, an individual's will and reason could allegedly be overthrown, rendering the individual vulnerable to the impulsive action which the emotion dictates. In many cases, the individual commits an act so far removed from reason that it goes against arguably man's most innate instinct – the instinct to survive. Esquirol focused on the power of emotion to cause suicide, and thus the link between Gothic convention, emotion and nineteenth-century suicide theory is evident: in Gothic fiction, reason is frequently suspended in its weak-willed characters giving reign to passion and emotion, causing a character to act in ways hitherto unusual to them. For example, Ambrosio the Monk committed incestuous and erotic acts before murdering his sister and mother, fuelled by his emotions (rage, terror, remorse and shame) and passions (Lewis 1796). In *Otranto*, Manfred's 'passions' frequently obscured his 'reason' (Walpole 1764, 33), leading to his murderous rages. In light of the medicalisation of suicide theories in the nineteenth century, the link between suicide, arrested will and unreasonable behaviour engendered by strong emotion was brought firmly into Gothic fiction of the era. Literary traditions and new medical theories were thus combined and taken in new directions by scientists, physicians and psychiatrists such as Esquirol.

In 1872, Charles Darwin published *The Expression of Emotion in Man and Animals*, a book relating to the manifestation of emotions in which he noted that animals and humans respond to certain situations in similar ways. Drawing on Henry Maudsley's *The Pathology of Mind* and his own evolutionary theories, Darwin attempted to show that the emotions had evolved to allow an individual to survive. Esquirol, on the other hand, had earlier argued that not all of the emotions had adaptive value. Instead, some had the strength to cause pathological behaviours – including overriding the survival instinct and impelling an individual to suicide. Darwin did not discuss the control which the passions could exert, but it is certainly something which Maudsley and the psychologist William James explored.

William James, brother to the novelist Henry, was a psychologist at Harvard. He had suffered depressive tendencies himself and had a suicidal sister. He set out to answer the question 'What Is an Emotion?' (1884). James argued that all emotions manifest easily recognisable bodily expressions, much as Darwin had postulated in 1872. However, James also realised the limitations of Darwin's work: 'not even Darwin has exhaustively enumerated *all* the bodily affections characteristic of any one of the standard emotions' (W. James 1884, 191). James asserted that the range of physical responses to an external stimulus is immense and that every change in consciousness, however slight, 'reverberates' around the circulatory system, affecting all the organs in some respect (W. James 1884, 191-2). James hypothesised that the emotions were the end result of the physical reaction described above. Without the physical reaction, emotions were nothing but 'a cold and neutral state of intellectual perception' (W. James 1884, 193). The physical response would in fact be so sudden and impulsive that there could be no time to perceive which emotion the individual is feeling. As a result, the name of the emotion can only be ascribed after the event:

The bodily changes follow directly the perception of the exciting fact ...Common sense says, we lose our fortune, are sorry and weep ...The hypothesis here to be defended says that this order of sequence is incorrect ...the more rational statement is that we feel

sorry because we cry ...Without the bodily states following on the perception, the latter would be purely cognitive in form, pale, colourless (W. James 1884, 189).

James suggested that passions and emotions are made up of physical manifestations and that giving way to them increases their intensity. Individuals should exert self-control and 'refuse to express a passion' (W. James 1884, 197). He argued that the brain contains centres for the perception of the bodily manifestation called the 'aesthetic' sphere, where pleasure and pain is experienced. When an external stimulus generates automatic physiological responses, reflexes pass through the body and are transformed into 'object-emotionally-felt' (W. James 1884, 203). The 'expressions of emotions' postulated by Darwin were, to James, expressions which *became* emotion as boundaries between the physical and the mental blurred.

The inability to control the emotions was considered problematic because the emotions can override the will – the importance of which has been established throughout this thesis. As James said, the physical responses to stimulus are sudden and unrelenting. In an article published in the *American Journal of Insanity*, the Philadelphian psychiatrist John P. Gray (1825-1886) concluded that: 'the passions are mainly at the bottom of suicide ...under the dominion of depressing passions, disappointments and chagrin, the physical man is in a state of disturbed equilibrium.' The individual could become 'swept up' by their emotions (Gray 1878, 47, 53). John Ordronaux claimed in the same journal: 'the immediate psychological causes to which the suicidal tendency can most justly be ascribed are to be found in exaggerations either of the expansive or depressive passions' (Ordronaux 1864, 385). Ordronaux asserted that the suicidal impulse comes from an overwhelming need to escape a part of one's self which allowed these passions to become all-consuming. In effect, this was an escape from one's 'own personality' (Ordronaux 1864, 391). James argued that such atrophy of will would only be caused if the individual cannot gain control of their emotions: 'giving way to the symptoms of grief or anger increases those sorrows themselves...sit in all day in a moping posture, sigh, and reply to everything in a dismal voice, and your melancholy lingers'

(W. James 1884, 197-8). If the emotions are what our brain *perceives* them to be, then by not acting out the ‘role’ of the particular emotion, said James, it stood to reason that the emotion would cease to exist. This concept is seen, for example, in the story ‘Bitterly Rued’, serialised anonymously in the weekly *London Reader* in August 1884. The story features two brothers, Clinton and Horace, who love the same woman, Leila. Horace realises that Leila loves his brother. Instead of exerting any restraint over his grief, Horace dwells on the pain and, as such, it intensifies:

She did not love him ...his white lips repeated the words over and over again ...life was over for him ...Love such as his, wild, unreasoning, knowing no control, yielding to no restraint, is, indeed, a curse to its possessor (‘Bitterly Rued’ 1884, 399).

Overwhelmed by his emotions, Horace shoots himself. Rather than change the direction of his responses, Horace perpetuates his emotions through repetition before telling himself that only ‘misery’ stretches before him. His love is Gothicised – ‘wild’ and ‘unrestrained’ – and after giving in to his emotions, he commits suicide. The theory remained popular in Western society throughout the rest of the nineteenth century, becoming known as the James-Lange theory of emotion.⁵

As previous chapters have shown, Maudsley believed that pathological emotions caused mental disturbance, but in order for a mind to be so affected there would need to be some want of reason from the offset. In *Pathology of Mind* he wrote:

Sorrow ...envies, hatreds and jealousies,
disappointed ambition ...anxieties and
apprehensions, and similar heartaches ... [which]

⁵ Carl Lange, a German psychologist, had arrived at a similar view to James.

gain undue activity from the want of a proper development of the rational part of the nature, would not then produce that instability of equilibrium which goes before the overthrow of the mental balance (Maudsley 1867b, 159).

Maudsley argued that the depressive passions could only ‘overthrow’ those individuals who lacked the sufficient evolutionary development to prevent them. He justified this belief by arguing that not everybody who undergoes the same emotional upheaval would take their own life. Individuals respond differently. For this, Maudsley blamed inheritance: ‘causation ...[may] have its root far back in foregoing generations’ (Maudsley 1867b, 84). Maudsley’s view on the development of human nature was, in most cases, that an individual’s life was hereditarily pre-determined, as chapters one and two showed.

The following section will investigate to what extent Lee and Henry James explored the ‘science’ of emotion, the late-Victorian debate on hereditary transmission and the notion that the emotions can cause deterioration in mental arrangement. I examine the use of the traditional Gothic trope of the supernatural to emphasise the psychology of the characters that are either suicidal as a result of emotional upheaval; delusional as a result of mental derangement; or lacking the willpower to override the effects of strong emotions.

The Supernatural

The Society for Psychical Research (SPR) was founded in 1882 by Henry Sedgwick, Frederic W. H. Myers and Edmund Gurney. The members attempted to research the history of alleged apparitions using science to ascertain whether or not the images of the other-worldly originated from within the unconscious mind (Grattan-Guinness 1982, 19). They noted that sceptics about the existence of ghosts reduced the testimonies of contemporaries and stories throughout history to ‘morbid hallucination’, and cited Maudsley as a prime example (Gurney and Myers 1884, 795). The SPR conceded that there would be occasions where some reported ghostly experiences would be

hallucinations but also asserted that they could provide scientific evidence for the genuineness of apparitions. Some authors of ghost stories denounced this need to acquire concrete evidence one way or another. Arthur Machen, for example, wrote in a letter to his publisher in 1894: 'In these days the supernatural per se is entirely incredible; to believe, we must link our wonders to some scientific or pseudo-scientific fact, or basis, or methods' (Brangham, Dobson and Gilbert 1988, 238). Machen rejected the modern requirement that everything be given a scientific explanation. Similarly, an article in the *Saturday Review* stated: '[This is] an age when vice is expected to be decent, art to be moral and science to be popular. Ghost stories were popular before they were scientific' (Ghosts again 1884, 53). With an emphasis on feelings and fantasy over science, reason and rationality, the British ghost story maintained popularity in the Victorian era, and remained a regular trope of the Gothic.

The fascination with the supernatural is evidenced by the volume of journal and newspaper articles debating or discussing the issue.⁶ A late-nineteenth-century newspaper article described the ghost as a sinner, wandering purgatory, and therefore representing 'the corrupt part of man' (*London Daily News* 1889, 5). Interestingly, Christine Ferguson quotes a *Pall Mall* article from 1882 which described the belief in ghosts as an 'atavistic' sign of degeneracy 'that might catalyse other forms of human evolutionary decline' (Ferguson 2007, 66).⁷ The late-Victorian Gothic ghost, therefore, is significant, suggesting the potential degenerate nature of the ghost's witness or that the ghost itself may represent a corrupt nature. Once again Gothic convention and late-nineteenth-century theories about degeneration are linked.

An article in *All The Year Round* claimed that some ghosts were examples 'of past follies, that will not be laid ...and, most of all ...ghosts of

⁶ Hilary Grimes (2011, 85) also notes the late-Victorian fascination with the spiritual and supernatural. See also Briggs 1977.

⁷ She is referring to the article *Psychical research*. *Pall Mall Gazette* (21 October 1882).

inherited passions and sins – which, conquered and laid to rest as regards ourselves, start into new life in our children’ (On ghosts 1886, 20). The literary ghost can therefore be seen as a Gothic motif representing moral transgression, vices or weaknesses while symbolising late-nineteenth-century scientific concerns about the persecutory haunting of the past (see chapters one and two for more detail). Grimes suggests that Victorian ghosts represent the late-Victorian fascination with the unconscious and that ghosts characterise the haunting of the unconscious self (Grimes 2011, 85). Indeed, Vernon Lee said ‘my ghosts are what you call spurious ghosts’ (Lee 1890, preface) who haunt minds instead of being realities, acting as projection of unconsciousness instead of a definite reality. She added: ‘the past ...that is the place to get our ghosts from ...we live ourselves ...on the borderland of the past’ (Lee 1890, preface). Ghosts represent a bridge between the past and the present and between barbarism and the modern, but they are also an outlet for human psychology and consciousness. The ‘haunting of the mind’ is therefore an alternative exploration of human emotion and its effect and consequences, which, as the tales discussed below show, includes murder and suicide, particularly to authors of the Gothic such as Lee and James.

Vernon Lee’s ‘Oke of Okehurst’

Vernon Lee was good friends with one of the chief proponents of the aesthetic movement, Walter Pater. In some of his essays, such as within *Studies in the History of Renaissance* (1873), Pater portrayed supernatural figures as having ‘learned the secrets of the past’ (Grimes 2011, 112).⁸ Jeffery Wallen notes that Pater’s dark and supernatural characters ‘radically confuse the boundaries between historical eras’ (Wallen 2012, 1043). The ghosts can represent a connection with the past which allows the author to explore Gothic tropes like inheritance and the blurring of the past with the present. Ghostly figures can also expose closely-guarded or shameful secrets of one’s ancestral

⁸ Pater’s *Renaissance*, in response to the Mona Lisa.

heritage. Ghosts, therefore, have an aesthetic appeal, creating strong feelings within each individual reader and allowing a personal response to the ghostly. Angela Leighton explains further: 'it is the readers [of the supernatural] who have designs on the ghost' demonstrating 'the aesthetic possibilities of ghosts' (Leighton 2000, 2). This appealed to the subjective aestheticism of Pater's philosophy. Grimes says that Lee drew her aestheticism from Pater, situating her ghostly figures within 'the tradition in Victorian aestheticism which linked the art and the Gothic', identifying connections between aestheticism and the supernatural (Grimes 2011, 112). The figure of the ghost became an important feature of subjective aestheticism. Lee expanded upon the aesthetic doctrine 'art for art's sake' and wrote instead of 'art, not for art's sake, but art for the sake of life' (Lee 1895, 259). She wanted the reader to internalise their own feelings to conceive their own individual enjoyment from art. The ghosts of her supernatural tales were a channel through which the reader's own psychology and relationship to the past could be explored. She refrained from dictating the path which the reader should follow by maintaining ambiguity: 'the supernatural...must necessarily...remain enwrapped in mystery' (Lee 1890, preface). Her ghosts, therefore, could be products of the mind: 'the genuine ghost...[is] this one born of ourselves' (Lee 1890, preface). Lee rejected the attempts of the SPR to provide tangible evidence of ghosts, claiming that her own stories 'tell of no hauntings such as could be contributed by the SPR' (Lee 1890, preface). The scientific 'evidence' applied to the supernatural would, in Lee's opinion, remove the romance, the beauty and the aesthetic appeal.

Lee's short story, 'Oke of Okehurst', was first published in booklet form as 'A Phantom Lover' by Blackwood in 1886, before being put together with three other supernatural tales for her 1890 collection *Hauntings*. It is the tale of a marriage haunted by a ghostly ancestor. Within the setting of the Gothic-inspired mansion, portraits trace the path of an aristocratic ancestry with secrets encroaching upon the living. However, it is also a tale of psychological torture and jealousy. The narrator of 'Oke of Okehurst' is an artist commissioned to paint Alice Oke. Alice persuades her husband that she is visited by the ghost of her ancestor's lover, Christopher Lock. Driven wild by jealousy, Oke attempts to shoot the ghost. In doing so, he kills Alice and then himself. Late-

nineteenth-century newspapers frequently reported tales about murder-suicides. Often, these stories would tell of jealous husbands who, in the grip of rage-filled delusions, killed their wives and then themselves.⁹ Oke prophesises a warning of a similar outcome inherent in Lee's tale: 'I don't think [ghosts] should be taken lightly. God would not permit them to be, except as a warning or a punishment' (Lee 1890, 71). Lock's murder had been caused by adultery and immense passion. His suggested ghost therefore warns of the repercussions should restraint not be exercised over passion and emotion. Like Lock, Oke makes no attempt to rationalise his emotion which leads to his suicide. Oke's suicide indicates the consequences of a lack of reason and willpower, a concept which was central to both the Gothic genre and suicide theories in the era, evidenced by its recurrence in each chapter of this thesis.

Mirroring late-nineteenth-century concerns about physiognomy, Oke displays a 'nervous frown between his eyebrows, a perfect double gash, - a thing which usually means something abnormal' (Lee 1890, 59).¹⁰ Darwin had written that in the midst of strong emotions, humans were prone to involuntary external signs, for example: 'the eyebrows not rarely are rendered oblique ... This produces peculiarly-formed wrinkles on the forehead' (Darwin 1872, 179). This was a physiological manifestation with which William James agreed: 'When worried by any slight trouble, one may find that the focus of one's bodily consciousness is the contraction ... of the eyes and brows' (W. James 1884, 193). Lee was familiar with Darwin's evolutionary theory (Towheed 2006) and her story draws on ideas about the physiognomy of the emotions to demonstrate the progressive decline of Oke's 'unconscious' emotions, leading to his eventual suicide:

⁹ Some examples are: (from the *Illustrated Police News*) 'The Charge of Attempted Murder and Suicide.' (Sat 19 Dec 1885); 'Attempted Murder and Suicide.' (Sat 14 April 1883); 'Suicide and Murder at Masked Ball.' (Sat 3 March 1888); 'Awful Double Murder and Suicide.' (Sat 2 July 1881); (from the *Morning Post*) 'Murder and Suicide.' (Tuesday 18 May 1886); 'Murder and Suicide.' (Mon 23 Jan 1888); 'Murder and Suicide.' [Lloyd's Weekly Newspaper](#). (Sun 02 Jul 1882); 'Murder and Suicide.' *Reynolds's Newspaper*. (Sunday 14 November 1886).

¹⁰ See also chapters one and two with reference to physiognomy and degeneration.

The poor fellow was constantly straining after an explanation of his wife's peculiarities; and although the effort was probably unconscious, it caused him a great deal of pain. The gash – the maniac-frown ...between his eyebrows, seemed to have grown a permanent feature of his face (Lee 1890, 59).

Lee combines contemporary discussion about the physiology of emotion with the traditional features of the ghost story. She stated that 'the ghostly' is 'a form of the supernatural in which, from logic and habit, we disbelieve, but which is vital' (Lee 1881, 93). Scientific naturalists and rationalists were sceptical of the existence of ghosts in a world increasingly dictated by science and reason. However, to explore the psychology and the cerebral consequences of pathological emotions, Lee needs the 'vital' Gothic convention and familiarity of the ghost story to draw her reader into the dark world of her tales. She maintains a level of ambiguity by ensuring that the narrator is unable to ascertain the truth behind the suggested haunting. She comments that Alice's drawing room possesses a 'vague presence ...of the murdered cavalier poet' (Lee 1890, 82) but the narrator never sees the ghost.

Lee wrote that 'to raise a real spectre of the antique is a craving of our own century' (Lee 1881, 93). The 1886 article 'On Ghosts' noted that a popular feature of ghost stories is to include 'the ghost ...of some far-off ancestor, whose portrait hangs in the great hall' (On ghosts 1886, 18). Certainly we see this in the earlier Gothic too – in *Otranto*, for example, Manfred is haunted by the portrait of his late Grandfather. Both quotes above suggest that one purpose for utilising the supernatural as a literary device is to convey the persecutory nature of an inescapable ancestry. As chapters one and two show, a central feature of theories about degeneration, as well as

traditional Gothic convention, was ideas about inheritance and the ‘sins’ of the ancestors affecting their descendants.¹¹

Lee responds to these anxieties by constructing a tale in which a seventeenth-century woman conspires with her husband to murder her lover. This woman is related to, and resembles, Alice, even sharing her name. It transpires that the present Mr and Mrs Oke are first cousins. Oke ‘feels disgraced by what our ancestors did two centuries and a half ago’ (Lee 1890, 70). Alice explains to the narrator that her ancestor, Nicholas Oke, had suffered such guilt following his part in the murder that he had declared upon his death bed: ‘when the head of his house and master of Okehurst should marry another Alice Oke descended from himself and his wife, there should be an end of the Okes of Okehurst’ (Lee 1890, 86). In his Gothic-inspired article ‘Edgar Allen Poe’, Maudsley wrote that man’s outcome in life is down to his nature, and ‘effect coming in the form of “error and evil behaviour” may have its cause somewhere back in the far past. For how much therefore are we to doom the man responsible?’ (Maudsley 1860, 342). Lee dabbles with this idea which was frequently debated within journals of the era, including those in which she herself was contributor.¹² Contemporary concerns regarding inheritance (see chapter two for further detail) are drawn into her short story as the narrative suggests that Oke’s behaviour, which culminates in murder and then his own suicide, may ‘have its cause’ in the degenerate and evil acts of his ancestors. The inherited nature of degeneracy and allegedly abnormal acts such as suicide is a consistent motif of this late-century gothic genre and thus the concept of

¹¹ Which is a theory Lee acknowledges in ‘Gospels of Anarchy’ (1908, 37). The article was first published in *Contemporary Review* in 1898). She writes: ‘later Darwinism [was] training us to perceive that in the process of evolution there is, alongside of the selection of the fittest, the rendering even unfitter of the initially unfit, degenerative tendencies as well as tendencies to adaptation.’ Lee also reviewed Max Nordau’s *Degeneration* in *Deterioration of the Soul* (1896, 928-943). Lee was therefore clearly aware and interested in theories of degeneration.

¹² For example: William R Greg, 1868. On the Failure of “Natural Selection” in the Case of Man. *Fraser's Magazine*, 353-362 – Lee was a frequent contributor to this journal. She also contributed to the *Cornhill Magazine* in the 1880s. Robert Louis Stevenson was a regular journalist for the same magazine, and Lee even published in the same edition as Stevenson’s ‘Talk and Talkers’, 1882, 46(272) which references degeneration as does ‘Hereditary Traits’, published in *Cornhill* in April 1878 which focusses on the continuing debate.

free-will is dubious: Oke is seemingly a slave to his biological nature and his overriding pathological emotion, jealousy. His suicide, like those of other Gothic degenerate protagonists such as Hyde, Dorian and Helen Vaughan (as detailed in chapter two), is once again a means of preventing this passion-inspired ancestral evil from continuing, as asserted by Nicholas Oke.

Jealousy

An article in the *Saturday Review* described jealousy as a ‘bad passion’ or a ‘vice ...founded on the desire to have that freely which it seeks to carry captive by violence, and it is thus ...[a passion] which in its essence rests upon a logical contradiction. Hence, perhaps, the torture to which it gives rise’ (Jealousy 1863, 298-300). Jealousy was seen as a destructive emotion because it created psychological torment. For example, in the short story published in the weekly *Bow Bells* magazine in 1884 entitled ‘Wilfred Halcombe’s Crime’, Wilfred becomes increasingly jealous of his beloved Elaine’s relationship with Karl Roeper and eventually murders his rival. Wilfred’s physical changes are described as: ‘something terrible ...[he] looks worn and ill. His eyes are sunken, his cheeks fallen in’ (E.C. 1884, 426). This negative emotion leaves him physically altered. Jealousy infects Wilfred’s home with ‘desolation and disease’ (E.C. 1884, 427). The jealous individual becomes blinded by his passion, his reason becomes disturbed, and eventually he commits suicide. The same happens in ‘Oke’; Oke’s emotions become progressively worse as the physical manifestations of his grief, anger and despair dictate his mental state.

Oke finds Alice’s claimed affair with the ghost of Lovelock increasingly difficult to bear as the ‘sins’ of their ancestors – murder, sex, passion – become apparent in Oke and his wife. The present Oke is portrayed as a weak man who allows his wife to torment him. This weakness can, for alienists like Maudsley, be traced ‘far back in foregoing generations’ rendering him susceptible to strong emotion such as ‘jealousies’ and their consequential mental imbalance (Maudsley 1867b, 84). Oke’s jealousy ‘seemed to filter into his whole nature and poison it’ (Lee 1890, 91). One night, he turns deathly white and asks: ‘who’s that fellow looking in at the window ...Alice? Damn his impudence!’ (Lee 1890, 93). Oke begins to suffer the symptoms of a persecutory hysteria:

It seemed to me that he was perpetually listening, watching, waiting for something to happen ...the mention of Lovelock brought a helpless look, half a convulsion ...into his face ...I soon began to perceive that my host was getting perfectly ill (Lee 1890, 95).

The narrator realises that ‘the thing that ailed William Oke was jealousy. He was simply madly in love with his wife, and madly jealous of her’ (Lee 1890, 97). Like Wilfred, Oke is described as ‘ill’. His physiology expresses his emotion, often with physical effects like ‘choking’ or flushing ‘as if he had bitten on a sore tooth’ (Lee 1890, 87). His unrestrained jealousy is ‘killing him inch by inch’ (Lee 1890, 97), but the underlying question remains ‘jealous – but of whom?’ – a ghost or a delusion? (Lee 1890, 97). The narrator attempts to explain the psychology: ‘I explained to Oke that he was suffering from delusions’ (Lee 1890, 102). Maudsley believed that when ‘passions’ were vehement and habitual, they would end in ‘delusions. The nature...of the delusion will be determined by nature of the passion in which the self-feeling is engaged, but the particular form which it assumes will depend on the individual’s education and on the circumstances in which he was placed’ (Maudsley 1863, 12). Maudsley asserted that particular forms of delusion would be the result of the precise emotion suffered.

In ‘Apparitions’, Gurney and Myers conceded that ‘no one doubts there are numerous hallucinations which do not correspond with any objective fact whatever outside the organism of the percipient ...a ...grief or anxiety on a mesmeriser’s part is reflected in the demeanour of his subject’ (Gurney and Myers 1884, 795, 802).¹³ Inner consciousness would allegedly sometimes be externalised by the senses as a ghostly figure, suggesting that mental disharmony is the end result of such strong negative emotions. Maudsley, who

¹³ William James had affiliations with the SPR and is even mentioned in this article.

is referenced in 'Apparitions', similarly wrote: 'the idea in the mind will very much affect the perception' from which apparitions are created (Maudsley 1878, 703). The supernatural was therefore often perceived to be a projection of unconscious emotion; conscious emotion, as William James himself believed, is merely a secondary outcome. In *Wormwood*, while in the grip of jealousy, Gaston is plagued by a demonic leopard. In 'Oke', it is the ghostly apparition of Lovelock which drives Oke to murder and suicide and serves as an indication of Oke's unconscious turmoil. Maudsley believed that ghosts were hallucinations caused by a temporary mental disorder whereby the image of the hallucination is a projection of 'the idea in the mind' which effects 'the perception' (Maudsley 1878, 703). By referring to her ghosts as 'spurious', Lee intimates that seeds planted in the mind can grow and haunt a person's consciousness. These seeds can enslave the reason and moral sense, before becoming a vivid mental image. Maudsley felt that a person could be so 'distressed by the persistence of the apparition which he has created' that he may even commit suicide (Maudsley 1878, 705), as we see in 'Oke'.

Maudsley asserted that the negative human emotions which constituted degenerate symptoms included anger and jealousy, stating that the degenerate 'exhibit[s] ...all the inferior kinds of emotion, fear, jealousy, envy, hatred, malice' (Maudsley 1862, 76). This suggests that individuals tormented by the prolonged existence of such negative emotions could become degenerate characters themselves. In keeping with the theories discussed in chapters one and two, this would suggest the necessity of these degenerate and therefore unfit characters being removed through suicide – the end result of a degenerate and broken persona. Jealousy is the emotion behind some infamous literary murder-suicides, for example Shakespeare's *Othello*. Jealousy is a 'monster' which feeds upon Othello, culminating in the murder of his wife and his own tormented suicide.¹⁴ His mind is 'perplex'd' by his perpetual

¹⁴ Shakespeare, approx. 1604: 3:3, ll. 169-70.

torment.¹⁵ Likewise, Oke is tormented by an external source, his wife, and becomes ‘puzzled’ (Lee 1890, 60), mirroring Othello’s perplexity. Jane Clapperton discussed the ‘cruel monster’ of jealousy, writing in her widely-publicised text *Scientific Meliorism and the Evolution of Happiness* that jealousy is ‘a powerful anti-social emotion causing ...a weight of suffering, sorrows and shame, that lies like a vast incubus on human happiness’ (Clapperton 1885, 134). Lee read and reviewed Clapperton’s text, referring to it as ‘important’, ‘valuable’ and ‘fearless’ (Lee 1886, 340). She will therefore have read Clapperton’s assertion that jealousy was a pathological character flaw which could end in tragedy, murder and suicide. Oke becomes more ‘livid’ as his jealousy ‘feeds’ on him (Lee 1890, 95). While watching his wife one day, Oke sees an entity unseen by the narrator and races into the drawing room to confront his ‘rival’ but kills Alice instead. As she dies, Oke shoots himself. The narrator tells his audience that the Coroner’s decision was ‘that Mr. Oke had killed his wife in a fit of momentary madness’ (Lee 1890, 106). But, as the narrator himself shows, it is not a ‘momentary madness’ but a prolonged suffering under the weight of the degenerate ‘bad passion[s]’ jealousy and despair, emotions which Oke could not restrain.

Maudsley concluded ‘Delusions’ by writing that ‘gradual degeneration of mind through morbid passion ...and delusions’ would lead to extinction, because ‘if the passion be nursed in the mind, it degenerates into envy, malice, and hatred’ (Maudsley 1863, 24). Similarly, William James believed that emotions gained control of the mind when one submitted to them. Oke dwells each day on the perceived relationship between his wife and the ghost of Lovelock, and his mental arrangement gradually deteriorates to the point where his unconscious shows him that which he is convinced he sees – the ghost himself. Darwin wrote that those suffering from anxiety or grief would find their ‘breathing becomes slow and feeble’ (Darwin 1872, 179). Lee underlines

¹⁵ *ibid.* 5.3, ii. 355.

this physical response as Oke ‘breathed as if someone were squeezing his windpipe’ (Lee 1890, 99). A feeling of hopeless dejection is accompanied by fury and jealousy. The physical effect of these emotions leaves him feeling overwhelmed:

I feel sometimes as if I were mad, and just fit to be
locked up. But don't think I don't struggle against it.
I do, I do continually, only sometimes it seems too
strong for me ...I know what a wretched creature I
am, and how unfit (Lee 1890, 102).

With the words ‘struggle’ and ‘unfit’ Lee hints at theories about degeneration, suggesting the inevitable ‘extinction’ of the eugenic debates discussed in chapters one and two. Lee also implies a weakness of mind which renders Oke unable – and so ‘unfit’ – to battle against his inherent feelings. Like Dr Jekyll of the same year, Oke submits to the negative feelings which cause his internal ‘struggle’. He does not possess the will to withstand his egoistic passions and so Oke becomes vulnerable to a temporary mental derangement which sees him kill himself and his wife.

Shame, Dishonour and Remorse

Seemingly to include all cuckolded men – or perhaps just as further indication of his mental deterioration – Oke refers to himself as a third party: ‘he isn’t merely jealous, you know. But he feels that she is on the brink of dishonouring herself ...dishonour is in our own hands, and depends only on our own acts’ (Lee 1890, 101). Oke’s death following the murder of his wife after a seemingly imaginary affair suggests it is ‘dishonour’ as well as jealousy which cause his suicide. The deteriorating effect of this blend of emotions progressively propels Oke into a world of nervous disorder, mental disharmony and melancholy. As chapter four demonstrated, public reputation was important to the late-nineteenth-century upper class. Novels such as *The Sorrows of Satan* (1896) and *The Suicide Club* (1878) show characters like the gambler, Lynton, choosing suicide over dishonour (again, see chapter four). Oke suffers yet more physical changes as he becomes increasingly shamed by his wife’s alleged misdemeanours and is even described as ‘blushing’ (Lee,

1890: 94), an effeminate term which indicates his reduced masculinity in the wake of his inability to withstand his emotions.

Physical and mental changes can also be seen in Alan Campbell of Oscar Wilde's *Dorian Gray* (1891). Campbell assists Dorian in disposing of Basil's body following the latter's murder. His suicide is referred to in the final chapter, through Dorian's attempt at self-justification: 'as for Alan Campbell, his suicide had been his own act' (Wilde 1891b, 175). Initially, these words suggest it was Campbell's free will to end his life. However, if we examine the small amount of information Wilde gives us about Campbell it becomes apparent that his suicide was the result of the effect of strong emotions including remorse and shame. Dorian and Alan had been friends before something happened that altered Alan: 'he had changed...was strangely melancholy at times' and isolated himself from his peers (Wilde 1891b, 132). Dorian blackmails Alan into helping to dispose of Basil's body after handing him a note: 'As [Alan] read it, his face became deadly pale and he fell back in his chair. A horrible sense of sickness came over him' (Wilde 1891b, 135). Wilde depicts a physical response to his overriding emotions of shock and shame: 'a shudder passed through him...he shivered all over...He felt as if an iron ring was being slowly tightened round his forehead, as if the disgrace with which he was threatened had already come upon him' (Wilde 1891b, 136). He assists Dorian in covering up his crime and then leaves, later committing suicide. This outcome intimates Alan's shame and his fear about the threat of disgrace which reduces him to 'tears' (Wilde 1891b, 136). Wilde describes in a few short paragraphs the mental disharmony of a shamed and melancholy man terrified of dishonouring himself.

The narrator suggests that Oke's problem is psychological: 'I poured out volumes of psychological explanations' (Lee 1890, 102). In her Preface, as seen above, Lee wrote that her ghosts told 'of no spectres that can be caught in definite places and made to dictate judicial evidence' (Lee 1890, preface). Lee argued that ghosts came from within so there can be no documented material evidence. She had previously written of the psychology of spectres, the 'inner ghost' or 'the haunter not of corridors and staircases, but of our fancies' (Lee 1881, 93). Her Preface concludes: 'The genuine ghost? And is not this he, or

she, this one born of ourselves, on the weird places we have seen, the strange stories we have heard?’ (Lee 1890, preface). Lee therefore suspends the reality of the ghost in her story, through the ambiguity of her framework and the conclusion to the tale: receiving Alice’s locket after her death, the narrator realises ‘it contained some very dark auburn hair ...I am quite sure it was Lovelock's’ (Lee 1890, 106). In the final sentence Lee subverts the seeming reality of Oke’s psychological deterioration postulated by the seemingly delusional responses to his emotions. The reader is left to question whether Oke was haunted by a murdered ghost or whether it was a delusion. A. A. Brown says: ‘a ghost [as a literary device] is a matter of both consciousness and unconsciousness; it is our conscious perception of that which defies consciousness’ (Brown 1998, 71). What the character feels internally affects what they perceive as reality, just as the reader’s inner consciousness affects how they read the truth of the supernatural in art. Lee suggested that by literalising the ghostly one way or another it removed that personal response and the mystery of the idea of the supernatural, a view shared by Lee’s good friend Henry James. In his Preface to *The Turn of the Screw*, Henry James wrote of the scientific recording of ghosts that they were ‘as little expressive, as little dramatic, above all as little continuous and conscious and responsive, as is consistent with taking their trouble ...to appear at all’ (H. James 1898, 39-40). Previously, Andrew Lang had suggested the problems inherent in reducing the ghostly to science in 1894: ‘Readers of the Proceedings of the Psychical Society will see that the modern ghost is a purposeless creature...he has no message to deliver, no secret crime to reveal’ (Luckhurst 2002, 186-7). As seen above, the messages that the use of a ghost can convey are essential to the plots in literary texts. To conclusively denounce its existence would eradicate parts of the dramatic lesson which the ghost represents. In ‘Edmund Orme’, James satirises the attempts of the SPR to literalise ghosts: upon seeing the ghost, the narrator says ‘I had heard all my days of apparitions’ and as such finds it ‘tremendously interesting to encounter a case’ (H. James 1891, 72). Ghosts had become commonplace to the narrator and thus fear, mystery and intrigue is removed from the ghostly presence. James attempts to override the banality through his framework and his adherence to Romantic traditions, giving the ghost-story back its intrigue, romance and mystery.

Henry James's 'Sir Edmund Orme'

James's story tells the tale of a widow, Mrs Marden, who is haunted by the ghost of Edmund – who also represents her conscience, her guilt and the secrets of her past. Mrs Marden tells the narrator that Edmund had killed himself after she jilted him for her true love, Captain Marden. The story is filled with negative emotions. As well as guilt, Mrs Marden is plagued with fear for her daughter, Charlotte, while Edmund's trapped and tragic ghost represents the extent of his own heart break. The use of suicide is significant; it allows James to explore the effect of multiple emotions, including guilt, despair, shame, remorse and fear. The ghost embodies the reverberations of emotion from all characters, not just Edmund's own initial grief. Although it is his own emotions which lead to his death, Edmund's presence serves to emphasise the story's other main characters' feelings, as his suicide haunts Mrs Marden's conscience.

Like Lee, James ensures his story's authenticity remains ambiguous through the use of two narrators, writing years apart, to tell the tale. The story is found locked in a drawer by the tale's initial narrator. We are told that 'the statement appears to have been written ...long after the death of his wife, whom I take to have been one of the persons referred to' (H. James 1891, 57). The reader is also distanced from the reality of the tale by the fact that 'it' happened long ago, and subversive words such as 'take' and 'appears' suggest a level of uncertainty on the part of the initial narrator. James therefore undermines his story's validity from the offset: 'I can't ...vouch for his having intended it as a report for real purpose ...it was written for himself, not for others' (H. James 1891, 57). After reading a copy of *Hauntings*, James commended the 'the ...speculative fancy' of Lee's tales, and appreciated the juxtaposition between the ghost and the familiar (Edel 1981, 276). Lee and James both challenge the legitimacy of their story through the ambiguity of their framework, distancing themselves from reality enough to explore the pseudo-scientific psychology of their tales.

Both of James's main characters, Mrs Marden and Edmund, suffer as a result of love and emotion, discussed further below. Both are only freed upon

the widow's death. The Gothic figure of the ghost in James's tale blurs the boundaries between past and present, between reality and fiction and between traditional nuances and contemporary debate. James wrote that the modern 'psychical cases' involving ghosts destroyed the 'dear old sacred terror' which he ultimately revered (H. James 1934, 169). At the same time, however, ghost stories (and Gothic fiction) 'provide Victorian authors with a ready, conceptual, linguistic and formal arsenal for the representation of psychic distress' (Matus 2009, 19). The ghost thus presents James with a means of portraying contemporary views on emotional distress within the realms of traditional Gothic fantasy and romance. He is a character against whom James can divulge the emotions of his other characters while recapitulating the archaic literary features that have survived the test of time, that 'old story' of love, romance, grief and betrayal.

Alan Rhodes claimed that, in all suicide cases, 'impulsive' suicide as a result of betrayed love or jealousy allegedly made up 17% (Rhodes 1876, 192). Earlier, in 1840, the British psychiatrist Forbes B. Winslow had conducted a survey into suicide as a mental and psychological consequence and addressed the issue of suicide as a result of strong emotion. Winslow explored the pathological effect of ungoverned emotion upon the mental harmony of an individual, in particular the 'temporary depression' of Esquirol's 'chronic' suicide (Esquirol 1845, 328). Referring to love, Winslow wrote: 'this sacred sentiment ...when unrequited and irregulated, produces the most baneful influence upon the system ...How many melancholy cases of suicide can clearly be traced to this cause!' (Winslow 1840, 56-8). He postulated why emotions could have such a tragic effect: 'everything that tends to throw the mind off its healthy balance will of course predispose to suicide' (Winslow 1840, 98). This term 'healthy balance' was adopted by Maudsley (1867b, 159) with regards to unrestrained emotion. From Esquirol and Winslow through to Maudsley and William James, these psychiatrists agreed that excessive emotion and a lack of restraint in managing this emotion would have pathological consequences upon the mind. These consequences could include suicide, as Gray wrote: 'in the emotions and passions we look for the motive

and controlling influences of suicide in those that are not insane. Love, pride, remorse' (Gray 1878, 52). Edmund is one of these cases, as I show below.

Arnold L. Goldsmith notes that 'the foundation of Henry James's philosophy' was 'everybody in this world suffers, but decent people bear it if they are to get anything from life' (Goldsmith 1958, 110). For James, Goldsmith suggests, one had to have the will to overcome pain and suffering and not succumb to it. Edmund's death bears similarities to the infamous lovelorn death of Werther in the Romantic era.¹⁶ Like Edmund, Werther takes his own life after being rejected by his beloved. As seen in chapter five, Werther was used as a case study by Maudsley to denote the feebleness of mind which led to his suicide (Maudsley 1874a, 268-9), while Robert Louis Stevenson considered Werther's suicide a 'commendable action' due to his weak and feeble nature.¹⁷ In employing a similar motive for Edmund's suicide, James portrays the weakness of his title character, and creates a familiar literary setting of the heartbroken and lovelorn suicide.

In using the ghostly figure of Edmund to demonstrate and embody multiple pathological emotions, James yields to the literary market which still enjoyed the popular ghost story.¹⁸ James allows the traditional to convey the modern message: giving in to excessive emotion, particularly in upper-class men, was destructive to all concerned. In Edmund, James had created a character 'in mourning' who, even as a spirit, carries with him 'an air of dejection' and 'weariness' (H. James 1891, 69, 74). He had taken his own life in a fit of despair without the strength of mind or will to endure his grief. This act of Werther-weakness is effectively punished in the guise of Edmund's wandering ghost. The wandering and restless ghost portrays the consequences of suicide in keeping with earlier superstitions, juxtaposing historical views with contemporary psychological debate about suicide, strength of mind and

¹⁶ *The Sorrows of Young Werther*, written in 1774 by [Johann Wolfgang von Goethe](#).

¹⁷ Letter to be found in Colvin 1900, 51. The letter was written on 6 September 1873.

¹⁸ For information on the popularity of the ghost story in this era, see Briggs 1977 or Luckhurst 2002.

willpower. The wandering ghost of the suicide was a superstition which stemmed from the sixteenth century when the Catholic Church condemned suicide as an irreligious act which would leave the perpetrator's spirit wandering the earth in purgatory. The corpse of the suicide victim would be buried at crossroads with a stake through it, allegedly pinning the restless ghost to its body. The last corpse to be buried at crossroads was Abel Griffiths in 1823 (Gates 1988, 27). However, the folk-lore of the roving spirit remained. In 1866, *Reynolds's Miscellany* published a short story set fifty years previous and tells of a suicide whose 'dishonoured corpse met with the fate awarded to suicides of that day' (Campbell 1866, 204). A poverty-stricken young man, Allan, meets Old Musgrave's Ghost who tells him that he is 'doomed to walk this earth for [my] sins' (Campbell 1866, 205). Similarly, in 1888, *Every Week* included a story entitled 'A Truthful Woman's Ghost Story' in which a woman, Annie, tells of a ghost she has seen whom she later finds out killed herself: 'Her face was pale and haggard, and there was an expression of wretchedness in it, a despairing misery more distressing than anything I could have imagined.' She is a spectral representative of the 'superstition that the soul of a suicide is condemned to haunt this world' (A Truthful Woman's Ghost Story 1888, 206-7). By creating a suicide's ghost who remains alone and despairing on Earth, James employs these historical beliefs, and yields to the 'old story'. It is only when Mrs Marden dies, after her daughter falls in love, that Edmund's ghost is set free: just as Musgrave's ghost is liberated once he has righted his wrongs, Edmund can only achieve peace when those whose lives he has blighted through his suicide have also found the peace previously denied to them.

Like Lee, emotions and feelings were central to James' narrative. In 1891, James wrote in his notebooks that he wanted his fiction to portray the reality (and consequences) of genuine emotions, of 'all passions, all combinations' (Mathiessen and Murdock 1961, xvii). Accordingly, 'Edmund Orme' places emphasis on feelings throughout. For example, Mrs Marden tells the narrator 'it isn't what you say that makes the difference, it's what you feel. *That's* what [Edmund] goes by' (H. James 1891, 67). Significantly, the ghost of Edmund appears only when negative emotions are felt by other characters –

those of guilt, fear, grief and heart-break – reiterating the narrative’s message about the penalties of submitting to these damaging feelings. Edmund’s ghost disappears once Charlotte has proclaimed her love for the narrator: this is the first positive emotion expressed between characters in the story. Mrs Marden, too, can die now she knows her daughter will be looked after. Therefore, the warnings symbolised by Edmund’s ghost about the damaging effects of pathological emotions are no longer required. However, after the death of his wife, the narrator resurrects the story of the ghost by writing down his tale. In doing so, the ghost is brought back into existence, in the consciousness of the narrator, and is subsequently shared with the reader. The negativity of grief and loss recall the ghost and his original message about the harmful effects of destructive emotion.

The narrator in ‘Edmund Orme’ decides the tale had the ‘beauty’ of ‘an old story of love and pain and death’ (H. James 1891, 67). Love, as this section has established, is recognised in the narrative as the positive emotion needed to rid Charlotte of the ghostly presence forever. As such, this leads me to argue against the reductive words of Ronald Paulson who writes of ‘Edmund Orme’ that: ‘the evil (or merely wrongdoing) is located in the living person (the woman who jilted Orme) and not in the ghost who pursues her’ (Paulson 2007, 179). It is true that the narrator is inclined to apportion some blame to Mrs Marden: ‘It was a case of retributive justice. The mother was to pay, in suffering, for the suffering she had inflicted’ (H. James 1891, 130). However, the narrator’s reliability has been questioned. By portraying Edmund as a weak and lovelorn suicidal aristocrat, James adds another dimension to his tale by also placing the blame for the tragic consequences with Edmund himself. Edmund, like Oke above, is incapable of withstanding his emotions or of exercising the self-control perceived as necessary in Victorian gentlemen (see chapters four and five) and so is too weak, or ‘unfit’ to live. Far from being the perpetrator of ‘evil’, as Paulson claims, Mrs Marden had not actively chosen to betray Edmund and had been so affected that she had not married her true love for a further five years (H. James 1891, 77). She fell in love with Captain Marden not for his money or position – as she points out, Edmund possessed those qualities (H. James 1891, 76) – but ‘simply’ for love. Such a statement

undermines the image of her as a sexual transgressor. However, the narrator believes Mrs Marden a 'coquette' (H. James 1891, 59) and clearly holds her responsible for the aristocrat's suicide. As chapter five showed, women of her class were, after all, expected to submit to a marriage of economic advantage over love. To assert the independence shown by Mrs Marden in jilting Edmund for the sake of love was unusual and, as seen, was often condemned. The ghost exists not just to punish Edmund himself but to remind the widow of her past mistakes. She is literally haunted by her past. Is Mrs Marden to blame for Edmund's death? Does she deserve to be haunted by her own conscience? Or is Edmund wholly responsible for allowing his emotions to suppress his reason? Ultimately, suicide is an interpretive death and thus its use in ambiguous tales merely adds to the speculative nature of the stories. The ambiguity of 'Edmund Orme', as evidenced by the unreliable framework of the narrative, allows for the reader's own interpretation of the suicide, the responsibility for it and even of the existence of the ghost itself.

Conclusion

Traditional Gothic supernatural figures and representations of older suicide superstition are portrayed in the above tales, alongside contemporary concerns about the psychology of emotions, biological determinism, degeneration, the will and murder-suicides so frequently reported in the late nineteenth century. The ghost stories discussed above reaffirm the role of suicide as a trope in late-nineteenth-century Gothic fiction. The suicides in 'Oke' and 'Edmund Orme' are an essential aspect of the tales through which the authors could deliver their message and explore the psychological damage of their title characters.

As chapter four of this these established, middle and upper class Victorians placed much emphasis on the importance of self-control and will power, particularly in public and particularly in men. The term 'degeneration' had, by the late nineteenth century, come to encompass anybody whose actions were not conducive to the futurity of the Western world. This included people who allowed their negative emotions to take control, as it was feared this would result in diminished reason and rationality, ultimately leading to a

complete breakdown of the mind (see Maudsley above). William James had argued that emotion need not dictate a person's response. Rather, it was the person's response that dictated the emotion, as with Oke.

As chapters one and two showed, suicide came to represent an appropriate means of removing the degenerate, especially amid fears of the biological determinism of degenerate characteristics. As an 'unfit' and weak man, whose ancestors became murderers flamed by emotions like jealousy, Oke represents the prime candidate for a murder-suicide outcome. His jealousy results in physical and behavioural changes that are accentuated by his conviction that a ghost has returned to have an affair with his wife. This ghost is seemingly a delusion of his own making, as he indulges his 'bad' emotions, which allegedly stem from his ancestor's own degeneracy. His mind broken and his strength shattered, Oke kills himself. The ghost serves as a warning about the consequences of giving into the negative feelings which threatened Oke peripherally. Lee allows the reader to decide on the reality of the ghost or not but, either way, Oke allowed himself to be driven mad with jealous, despair and shame. Had he fought his nature and withstood the effects of these emotions, the outcome could have been different.

Likewise, Edmund Orme's enfeebled mind causes his suicide. He embodies the superstitions of the suicide's wandering ghost, representing the ultimate consequence for the perceived weakness which led to his suicide. Just as Maudsley reproached the death of Werther, Edmund's suicide is also reproved. His ghost suggests the damaging effects of negative emotions and as such he is only set free when love is proclaimed and thus positivity restored to the tale.

The suggested but ambiguous figure of the ghost, and the act of suicide for Oke and Edmund, allowed their respective authors the freedom to explore myriad emotions which either lead to the 'spurious' conjuring of the spectral – emphasising the breakdown of a character's mental harmony – or to demonstrate the consequences of strong emotions should they be indulged. In both cases, the ghost represents a pathological state of mind, with either the emotions of the ghost-seer, or the ghost himself, persecuted by pain and

misery. Restraint on emotion, so central to the late-Victorian ideology for a progressive society, is central to both stories. The lack of will and restraint in both 'cases' ultimately leads to a characters destruction, mental anguish and their suicide. Clearly, the figure of the ghost is a means by which authors can portray the emotional and mental distress and decline of characters and therefore deliver an important message. The act of suicide does the same, once again establishing suicide firmly in the genre of the Gothic.

Conclusion

*Suicide is an event that is a part of human nature.
However much may have been said and done about
it in the past, every person must confront it for
himself anew, and every age must come to its own
terms with it.*
--Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749-1832)

Each historical period had to ‘confront’ existing ideas about suicide and attempt to understand what suicide said about ‘human nature’ and society itself. This thesis limits its research to the parameters of late-nineteenth-century Western society, predominantly Britain. I wanted to examine the interdisciplinary nature of the relationship between the Gothic genre and the fields of medicine, psychology and sociology within the era, in particular identifying how medical, sociological and psychological theories about suicide shaped Gothic fiction and its suicides. I also acknowledge the influence of literary themes, motifs and language on scientific and medical discourse within the era. I show that suicide is indeed a Gothic trope which surfaced in late-nineteenth-century Gothic fiction to reflect the new theories which were emerging about suicide in the era.

Ultimately, I felt that the changing attitudes towards suicide within the late nineteenth century would be evidenced in the Gothic tales. The Gothic genre is, after all, fluid and transitional, continuously adapting to reflect the corresponding era’s fears and anxieties (Botting 1996; Hurley 1996). Suicide levels in the late nineteenth century were perceived to be increasing and theories arose to ‘explain’ this alleged rise in rates. I have examined the work of theorists like Henry Morselli, Henry Maudsley and Samuel Strahan alongside the portrayals of suicide in Gothic fiction, demonstrating how their well-circulated ideas and hypotheses infiltrated the ‘second wave’ of the Gothic.

Suicide in late-nineteenth-century Gothic fiction remains largely uninvestigated by modern literary scholars. Lisa Nicoletti (2007) and Ron Brown (2001) focus fundamentally on the feminisation of suicide in late-Victorian newspaper reports and, in Brown's case, visual art. Nicoletti and Brown make useful observations about some of the era's common perceptions about female suicide, namely that suicide was allegedly a consequence for the 'fallen woman', usually suicide by drowning, for whom there were limited options available other than death. However, neither gives weight to alternative representations of and attitudes towards female suicide – for example, the monstrous degenerate fuelled by inappropriate passion, or suicide as a self-destructive consequence for the New Woman. Howard Kushner meanwhile writes that, in the nineteenth century, 'self-destructive behaviour became a *prima facie* example of the corrupting effects of urbanisation, the incidence of suicide developed into a barometer for social health' (Kushner 1993, 461). Kushner focuses on the effects of a rapidly changing environment upon the mental stability of all classes within late-Victorian society. He shows how suicide became indicative of changing ethical and moral values. Kushner does not use any fiction to underline his argument; rather, his is a sociological study of suicide in the era. Nicoletti, Brown and Kushner focus their respective research on one particular aspect of suicide theory. Barbara Gates looks at myriad fictional texts in the context of varying nineteenth-century suicide theories. However, hers is a broad overview of Victorian suicide theory from 1823 to 1900 and so, by her own admission, lacks a detailed study of specific works of fiction (Gates 1988, xiv). In contrast, by limiting my research to a specific era and genre, I am able to examine texts in more detail and include non-canonical and serialised fictions in an attempt to ascertain the importance of the Gothic suicide.

Suicide in the late nineteenth century was often associated with excess; the taboo; the sensational; passion; sin; and degeneration. Thus, suicide is in itself Gothicised and as such becomes an important aspect of the era's re-emerging Gothic genre. Late-nineteenth-century scientific and sociological concerns about degeneration; moral insanity; hypocritical lifestyles; gender; modernity; excessive emotion; and inheritance all enter into the imaginative

world of Gothic fiction, just as the language of the Gothic infiltrates scientific and sociological theory. Alienists like Maudsley – who was himself influenced by the Gothic – felt that the above concerns would or could culminate in suicide. There is, therefore, an evidential interdisciplinary connection between suicide in late-nineteenth-century Gothic fiction and suicide in medical, psychological and sociological theories of the same era. The Gothic genre, after all, reacts to its corresponding cultural and social transitions and the authors represent the reality of suicide through representations which are congruent with late-nineteenth-century portrayals by the media, physicians and sociologists. Thus the suicides of fantastical degenerate figures, for example, exist alongside physical appearances and behaviours which read like something ‘out of the Lancet’ (Wilde 1891a, 10).

I question why suicide is often used in Gothic fiction as a mode of death for the protagonist characters (and some secondary characters). I show that suicide is linked with strong emotion, regardless of its cause or motivation, and as such can emphasise a character’s passions, thoughts, emotions and pathological state in a way that other modes of death cannot. Using suicide, authors of the Gothic like Stevenson, Wilde, Corelli, Machen and Constable are able to convey the potential consequences of certain pathological conditions: for example; a degenerate nature; egoistic or self-indulgent gratification; and gender transgression. Through suicide, authors can demonstrate the intensity of feelings and the consequences of individual lifestyles while critiquing society as a whole. They can do all of this while drawing on and sensationalising a taboo and Gothicised subject which continued to evoke fascination and fear for their readers.

Therefore, fictional suicides become as integral to an historical investigation into suicide as nineteenth-century suicide statistics. Indeed, statistics are mistrusted by critics such as Olive Anderson (1987), who discusses the pitfalls in basing suicide theories around unreliable data, which is either potentially subverted by gender or class prejudice, or which dismisses the importance of suicide attempts in maintaining a factual record. Likewise, Gates writes that her research led her to realise that fiction reflects the ‘mentalities’ of the era’s views on suicide, thus meaning more than unreliable

statistics (Gates 1988, xiv). Similarly, I have shown how the authors of the Gothic fiction studied in this thesis were influenced and informed by current attitudes and publications about the subject, underlining the interdisciplinary nature of suicide, the Gothic and surrounding medico-socio ideals. Narrative devices like suicide therefore provide a level of historical realism, just as documents written by theorists like Maudsley provide a similar insight into literature and art.

All of the novels examined in this thesis have some connection with the theme of inheritance, which is consistent with nineteenth-century theories about the inherited nature of suicidal tendencies. Corresponding ideas about irreversibility, free-will and degeneration are thus drawn into each chapter; they themselves are concepts which were central to post-Darwinian thought. Similarly, concerns about the consequences of a lack of will and self-control were prevalent amongst late-nineteenth-century physicians and psychiatrists. There was a tension between the overall emphasis on the importance of the will in late-nineteenth-century medical and psychiatric opinion, and the consideration of determined pathological behaviours and moral responsibility. This tension is evident in the Gothic novels studied in this thesis. The recurrence of the inheritance motif in the novels alongside thoughts pertaining to the human will is a continuing contradiction which underlines this conflict in contemporary thought – how could someone have free-will and yet their nature be biologically determined? This recurrent contradiction underlined the multiple interpretations of suicide which existed during the century. Theorists such as Samuel Strahan (1892) felt that suicide could be labelled as two distinct types – the ‘rational’ or ‘irrational’. Maudsley, too, felt that in some cases suicide was an act of ‘free-will’ (Maudsley 1884, 330) while in other cases he saw suicide as the outcome of a pre-determined and degenerate nature. Theorists attempted to explain the contradictions in their texts by ascribing multiple causes to suicide; a multiplicity of readings which are indeed encompassed within the Gothic novels explored in my thesis.

Suicide was viewed as the alleged end result of a degenerate nature. Therefore, it is significant that degeneration theories are woven into each chapter of this thesis and into each Gothic novel discussed, be they theories of

atavism or merely pertaining to the weak-willed and delusional. To many cited theorists like Maudsley and Morselli, suicide became an inevitable consequence of degeneration and an appropriate end-result of a pre-determined degenerate nature, halting the ‘contagion’ of this devastating pathological condition in its various forms. Suicide and alleged degenerate aspects of character can be linked in each chapter within this thesis and as such then render the suicides of the novels’ degenerate characters seemingly necessary outcomes. There appears to be no way back for them: no chance of redemption, no rationality in the grip of emotion, and no forgiveness for transgression. Suicide therefore acts as a Gothic warning in these novels – a warning against excess; deviance; self-indulgence; transgression; or any action which might pathologically subvert the late-nineteenth-century desire for betterment in a fragile and transitional era of uncertainty and anxiety.

Future research

This thesis contains an extensive amount of new research about suicides in late-nineteenth-century Gothic fiction. There are, however, ideas which could be explored further. For example, Chapter four focuses on the inherent problems within middle and upper-class late-Victorian society and the corresponding perceived increase in suicide incidences. What I do not discuss in Chapter four is that happy, secure or conventional family lives are absent from all the fictional works: Jekyll only has male friends and no family; Dorian’s late mother and father are portrayed as deviants, and his grandfather a tyrant, while Sibyl’s mother is a mistress and her father absent; in *Sorrows*, Sibyl Elton’s mother is a sexual predator and then dies, and in *Wormwood* Gaston’s mother is dead and Gessonex lives alone on the street. In *Oke*, both modern Okes are descended from murderous sexual deviants and in *The Curse of Intellect* the monkey is plucked from his fellow beasts to live a lonely life amongst humans. Even Pauline of *Wormwood*, who does have a loving family, is alone and shamed and living on the streets when she commits suicide. The notable absence of a strong and healthy family unit connects with ideas about pathological inheritance; if all degenerate characters are affected by their ancestry, then it stands to reason that there would be no functional and ‘normal’ family behind them. The fact that none of these suicidal characters

has a conventional domestic environment or family history denotes the increasingly prevalent view that the domestic sphere offered security against suicidal feelings. This idea was studied in detail by Emile Durkheim in 1897, and circulated widely. He postulated that an individual's level of integration into the family, or other social institutions, would directly determine their likelihood of committing suicide. Durkheim blamed 'egoism' for incidences of suicide whereby the individual did not have a large family to divert their attention and integrate them into their values.¹ As a result, it would be interesting to assimilate Durkheim's views into a reading of later Gothic fiction (post-1897), particularly focussing on the idea that suicidal characters in Gothic texts did not have secure family units. I chose not to examine my texts in relation to Durkheim's views as most were written prior to the publication of his *Suicide*. His text brought about another change in thought about the topic of suicide, which lasted well into the twentieth century (Taylor 1982). It therefore seemed prudent to situate my research into the suicide theories of the late nineteenth century prior to the publication of Durkheim's radical sociological approach which once again altered opinions on suicide. Howard Kushner refers to the nineteenth-century portrayal of the 'safe' family life which would protect individuals from the threat of suicide:

From the very first, hypotheses about the causes of suicide were tied to sentimental visions of the family and to an ambivalence toward social change...Since the nineteenth century, experts have concluded that the best safeguards against suicide lay in the restoration of traditional values, especially the patriarchal family (Kushner 1997, 461).

¹ Durkheim 1897. See, for example, page 202 'The family is a powerful safeguard against suicide.'

This statement is justified by the representations within the novels I have studied. Further exploration into this using a larger number of examples would be an interesting study, but certainly my thesis lends itself to this idea.

In 452AD, the Christian Church denounced suicide as an act inspired by the Devil (Giddens 1971, ix). Marie Corelli incorporates a similar view into *The Sorrows of Satan*, evoking those earlier views which placed such emphasis on the un-religiosity of an act which would result in damnation of the soul.² Those committing suicide were deemed to ‘die in implacable malice, and are certainly damned by their own act and manner of concluding their life’, their souls damned for eternity.³ Similarly, Corelli says of Gessonex’s suicide: ‘Absinthe had done its work well this time! — and no divine intervention had stopped the suicide of the body any more than it had stopped the suicide of the soul!’ (Corelli 1890, 319). It is Corelli’s seemingly depraved characters who commit suicide *and* who are condemned, associated with Hellish imagery and the Devil. In Sibyl’s suicide note, Corelli writes with scorn of the scientists who rationalise life and proclaim there is no God, and Sibyl faces the consequences of such a belief as she is dragged into the burning flames, lamenting:

God whom I doubted, God whom I was taught to deny, this wronged, blasphemed, and outraged God EXISTS! And I could have found Him had I chosen,—this knowledge is forced upon me as I am torn from hence,—it is shouted at me by a thousand wailing voices! ...too late!—too late!—the scarlet wings beat me downward,—these strange half-

² And views evident in the earlier Gothic traditions. For example, in *The Monk*, Ambrosio stops Matilda from committing suicide by proclaiming that ‘suicide is the greatest of crimes...you destroy your soul’ (Lewis 1796, 65).

³ See John Sym 1637, 236-7. Suicide remained a deeply irreligious act in the minds of most individuals until the nineteenth century, when the increased merging of suicide and insanity, alongside the postulation of medico-sociological theories, meant that suicide became less a Church issue and more a question of family and social concern.

shapeless forms close round and drive me onward
...to a further darkness, ...amid wind and fire!
(Corelli 1896, 410).

A 'fallen' woman, Sibyl commits suicide and is carried to Hell. Corelli suggests that the soul will end up in Heaven or Hell depending on the individual's virtues and, seemingly, their death. Lynton, the gambler who commits suicide, also loses his soul to the Devil. Corelli's suicides are thus in some respect restoring the perception that suicide and vice result in eternal damnation: Gessonex's soul cannot be saved by 'divine intervention'; Sibyl is captured by the Devil upon her death; and Lynton the gambler literally wagers his soul to the Devil. All three then commit suicide. The narratives surrounding their deaths condemn and satirise the perceived atheism of late-nineteenth-century Western society. For example, with regards to Gessonex's funeral, the narrator states: 'and so it came about that the funeral of the starved, unhappy half mad painter of "Le Pretre" was the finest thing that had been seen in Paris... Once upon a time a suicide was not entitled to any religious rites of burial, but we, with our glorious Republic which keeps such a strong coercing hand on the priests and will hear as little of God as may be, we have changed all that!' (Corelli 1890, 327). The ironic tone of the narrative hints at a disapproval of the leniency now afforded to suicide victims.

Corelli doesn't just evoke religious views, however. This thesis shows that she had an interest in evolution and degeneration, creating a tension between science and religion. It is a tension that would be worth exploring in future research to show the conflict and contrasts between the emerging medico-socio theories of the era and the older religious views. This conflict, on a wider level, could be investigated as one of the causes of suicide in the increasingly secular society. Thomas Masaryk determined: 'we finally conclude that the modern tendency to suicide has its true cause in the irreligiosity of our time' (Masaryk 1881, 85). Likewise, in *Sorrows*, Sibyl writes in her suicide note that many of her class would die from being 'self-slain' while purporting the non-existence of God (Corelli 1896, 410). Was loss of faith the cause of many late-nineteenth-century suicides? This ties in with Durkheim's theories on suicide, mentioned above, that integration into social

institutions, including religious groups, was essential in safeguarding against suicide as it provided people with a sense of belonging in a rapidly changing and secular society. To investigate further, then, the religious views on suicide in the era and their reflection in fictional works would be interesting; research could be focussed purely upon the changing faces of religion in an increasingly lonely society, while investigating the archaic but long-standing opinions on the religious condemnation of suicide. I did not study the religious side of suicide in this thesis; as my introduction explains, I chose to focus on the changing views of the late nineteenth century, which were largely moving away from religion and emerging as medical, psychiatric and sociological. I wanted to limit my research to the new theories specific to the mid to late nineteenth century and how these new ideas informed literary texts and vice versa, in order to investigate the reasons behind the increased use of suicide in late-nineteenth-century Gothic fiction.

The limited amount of critical research conducted into representations of suicide in fiction renders literary suicides a research subject which can be continued and expanded upon. It would be interesting to investigate the two topics above, or to investigate suicide in relation to modern Gothic tales (or films) and see how today's representations, alongside our changed laws and (alleged) changed attitudes towards suicide, compare with portrayals in the late nineteenth century. I would see whether contemporary fictional suicides have different motivations now, after further psychiatric, medical and sociological research has been undertaken into the phenomenon, or whether the literary tradition has remained unchanged. Just as Shakespeare incorporated suicide of the broken hearted into his plays, and Goethe into *Werther*, and James into 'Edmund Orme', would today's representations reflect the same archaic tradition or would we notice substantial differences?

Problems and limitations

Suicide remains open to interpretation as it is so personal to each individual. The murderer and the murdered are one and the same and the only person involved is dead. Due to its interpretive nature, suicide cases can often be read in myriad ways, which this thesis shows. In one sense, the title of

chapter six – Suicide and Emotion – could be applied to the thesis as a whole, as in most cases suicide can be ascribed to strong emotion: the ruined gambler, Lynton, feels despair and shame; Sibyl Vane is devastated her ideas about love and marriage have been subverted; Hyde is terrified of the gallows; Dorian is wild with anguish when he realises his crimes cannot be erased from his soul; the Beast is depressed and lonely; Pauline is grief-stricken. I tried to show that emotion was not considered to be the sole reason behind suicide for late-nineteenth-century theorists, by looking deeper at social and gender expectation, as well as the causal reasons behind that strong emotion. However, I included ‘Oke’ and ‘Sir Edmund’ in the ‘Emotions’ chapter because ‘Oke’ explores the strong and pathological effects of jealousy, while ‘Sir Edmund’ explores the consequences of heart break, both of which have traditionally been used through literary history to emphasise tragedies. As both short stories make use of the supernatural to emphasise psychological distress, I felt the two could be linked effectively in the same chapter.

Throughout my thesis I made it clear why each text belonged in its respective chapter, as well as why some more canonical texts were included in multiple chapters, underlining the complexities of suicide as a very real and still very common phenomenon even today, often with potentially multiple reasons behind each individual act. As a result, late-nineteenth-century theories were contradictory at times, with suicide removing pathological natures and becoming an alleged aspect of natural selection, while remaining a baffling act that subverted the desire to live and pushed an individual into the unknown.⁴ It had for so long been theologically condemned, but some fields of thought now condoned suicide and even saw it as the ultimate redemptive act.⁵ Was it free

⁴ See chapters one and two of this thesis.

⁵ For example, Social Darwinists and Eugenicists (see chapters one and two of this thesis), and commentators of the New or Fallen Woman (see chapter five of this thesis).

will or lack of?⁶ I have tried to address these contradictions in my thesis, or at least acknowledge them.

Conclusion

The authors of the Gothic in my study engaged with the very real fears and fascinations about suicide that existed during the late nineteenth century. The novels attempt to explain human emotions and feelings and to explore a fascination with a phenomenon so directly opposed to the human survival instinct and that remained so mysterious, taboo and misunderstood. Suicide challenged the late-Victorian belief in the power of the moral sense and the will and questioned the truth behind moral responsibility. At the same time, the phenomenon appeared to reaffirm fears about degeneration and pathological inheritance. The Gothic genre gave the authors the scope to portray the reality of the perceived epidemic of suicides amidst the fantasy world of the supernatural, the Devil and personifications of evil. I have shown how the authors themselves would have come across the various prevalent theories on suicide and its adjacent themes, giving a sense of reality to the fantastical world which exists within the novels. Looking beyond ageing portraits, atavistic ‘Others’, murderous monkeys and elusive ghosts, we find very real worlds of tears, fears, disillusion, despair, hypocrisy, science and degeneration. Each individual suicide, therefore, really does become indicative of social, mental and medical problems which inhabited the late nineteenth century and, as such, suicide does become a literary index of the social disorders of its time. I set out to investigate common late-nineteenth-century (predominantly) middle-class views on suicide and in doing so uncovered the historical reasons behind prevalent attitudes; just as medical and sociological literature is influenced by literary texts, so works of fiction are so influenced by the attitudes and theories surrounding them. The perspectives on self-destruction afforded by the authors serve as a fictional and yet living history of the changing attitudes towards

⁶ See the contradictions of Henry Maudsley for example, who described it as both in *Body and Will* (introduction to this thesis).

suicide in an era which remained fearful and yet fascinated by the subject shown to be, as Goethe stated, '*a part of human nature.*'

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