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# **Coping with Victorian Imperialism**

Degeneration in Detective Stories and Supernatural Fiction

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## Coping with Victorian Imperialism: A study on degeneration.

### **Introduction**

In his one of his major works, *The Uncanny*, Sigmund Freud explores the connection between familiarity and fear of the unknown, as an important tool in his study: this thesis wants to explore the dichotomy familiar fear to bring to light the connection between Imperialism and the aesthetics of the Victorian era, which often served a role as a coping mechanism for England's colonial past. What is familiar, often thought to evoke a positive feeling, is also what could evoke the strongest kind of fear known to man.

Freud defines the uncanny as a "class of the terrifying which leads back to something long known to us, once very familiar" (Freud 1919, 2). This familiarity could identify a relationship with the past, something that was left behind and exploited. Moreover, this relationship with the past, when taken into the context of Victorian novels, serves as foil for imperialism itself: art and aesthetic are put at service of the empire, to cope with the English sense of guilt derived from their history as colonizers. That was done by characterizing the "other" – those who were colonized - as something degenerate and dangerous. The familiar, ancient savageness that comes from a faraway place, extraneous yet so like the well-endowed man of the fin-de-siècle, threatens to come back haunting the civilization of Victorian England, destroying the order that has been built by society. This

process of “degeneration” enacted by English society of the Victorian Age was made so that the foreigner became a monstrous being, associated with negative qualities when juxtaposed with the Victorian man, who instead was seeking virtue and order.

This work aims to explore this process of characterizing the other as dangerous, while simultaneously establishing an order through logic and reasoning, an attitude typical of most detective stories. That will be achieved with a case study of two novels of the time: *The Sign of the Four* by Arthur Conan Doyle and *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* by Robert Louis Stevenson. These stories are a good representation of this phenomenon, because of how rooted the concept became in society during the Victorian period. On the other hand, this coping process is not always successful, as it is portrayed in a short story by the same Arthur Conan Doyle, *Lot No. 249*. By comparing the outcome of the events in these works, this thesis aims to illustrate how the confrontation with the imperial past is not always successful for the colonizers, but instead it may lead to disastrous consequences.

That will be done by first analyzing the problem at hand in the first chapter, focusing on what were the causes for anxiety in Victorian England, what degeneration is and how something foreign is often relegated to monstrousness and chaos, despite it being linked to the ones applying these etiquettes. Max Simon Nordau’s *Degeneration* (1895) and Sigmund Freud’s *The Uncanny* (1919) will be the main sources for explaining this relation between foreign and horrific, while also taking some key concepts from *The Ashgate Research Companion to Monsters and the Monstrous* (2017) By Asa Simon Mitterman. Imperialism brought anxiety and a sense of guilt among British society, which created the need of a way to examine the

disturbing points of the relationship between colonies and Empire, to find a way to cope with the past. Therefore, many authors of the time depicted the colonized as brutes, labeling as something lurking in the shadow, while being of the same species of those who felt threatened by their mere presence. Moreover, the concept of survival of the fittest, introduced by Charles Darwin in his *Origin of the Species*, will play a significant role in explaining the feeling of dread and anxiousness which permeated the search for order, while categorizing the other as monstrous. This process could only be brought to fruition by the heroes in the stories, such as Sherlock Holmes, or even the lawyer in Stevenson's novel, while also keeping in mind the role monstrousness had in the Victorian landscape. Indeed, the underlying chaos brought forth by the presence of the Otherness in the stories could only be solved by characters imbued with Englishness: Sherlock Holmes, despite having characteristics that bring him closer to the degenerate characters described by Nordau in his study, is actually the embodiment of every good characteristic that the Englishmen are supposed to possess and preserve. Likewise, despite being a flawed man, Utterson faces every challenge with reason and logic, being truly a man of his time: he is worrying about reputation and social standings, which were pivotal at the time.

Afterwards, the thesis will focus on the main source material, the novels: *The Sign of the Four* and *The Strange case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, while also taking into consideration other works of the two authors, such as "A study in Red", "The Hound of the Baskervilles" and "The Beach of Falesá". While the first – *the Sign of the Four* - is a full-fledged detective story, in which the protagonist is trying to settle reality into

an ordered system of things through logic and facts, it also serves as the perfect representation of all the issues with colonialism: exploitation is justified throughout the whole story, and the violent reaction of Tonga, the savage from the faraway land, is the incarnation of the fear of degeneration of society. The analysis will also shift towards other novels written by Doyle, such as *The Hound of the Baskervilles* and *A Study in Red*, because of their deep connection to the themes of degeneration and of the key figures of these novels. Indeed, starting with Watson himself, almost every antagonist in these murder mysteries is tied to colonies, having experienced the degenerative force that those faraway places exerted onto the mainland. The theme of degeneration is also poignant in the other novel that we will examine, *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, in which degeneration takes place in a physical form. The mite Mr. Hyde gives in to its desires, giving full space to his darkest part, the more savage and brutal one – which is exactly what the Victorian man feared, being overwhelmed by the stronger and fitter version of himself, the man who was colonized and deprived of everything. While this theme is extremely important in *Jekyll and Hyde*, the novel also serves the role of analyzing the class discourse of the Victorian Age, which was a turbulent time of revolution and social disparities.

Finally, after having finished the previous chapter on a note on decolonial thinking, the third and last chapter will deal with the afterlife of these stories, which have ended in a good ending – in a way validating the coping mechanism which was explained in the first chapter. Therefore, the short story *Lot No. 249* will be analyzed to flesh out the role of the mummy as both an artifact and an element of horror. These novels will be taken as an example of the failure of the mechanism just illustrated,

thus bringing the work to its conclusion, and proving its point: the novels taken into consideration play a major role in the effort of coming to terms with the fear of degeneration and be a coping mechanism for the British sense of guilt about colonization.

The essays and works taken into consideration analyze the issue at hand from different perspectives, which could be organized into three macro areas: the monstrosity and the connection between fear and extraneous, degeneration and the danger coming from the colonization and consequently the concept of survival of the fittest brought directly from Darwin and finally the theme of the double. By the end of this thesis, the relationship between Victorian literature and England history as a colonizing force will be exposed through the lens of a coping mechanism, both in its more successful forms and the least successful ones.



## **Chapter 1: An Overview of Victorian Anxieties**

The Victorian Age stands as a period characterized by many discoveries and experimentation that were spread across every field of expertise, ranging from science to art: therefore, it was a time of significant breakthroughs and advancements. However, despite these achievements, the era also brought plenty of stress and anxiety, which permeated every social class. This anxiety was not solely about the present situation of England and society but also apprehensions of the past, such as the guilt that was brought upon by their history as a colonial empire.

In this chapter, we will delve into the Victorian age in England and explore the causes behind the search for order originated from the various anxieties that were spread among its people. We begin by examining the technological advancements that characterized the era, which changed completely traditional ways of life and contributed to a sense of disorientation, because of the new means of transportation and factories. Next, we will explore the concept of "monstrous" and its connection to Darwin's theories of evolution. By discussing how monsters defy categorization and order, we can understand the anxieties and guilt experienced by the Victorians. Through this exploration, this thesis aims to understand the relationship between societal anxieties, the desire for order, and the process of labeling the unknown as a monster, through the lens of the Uncanny. In conclusion, we will take degeneration into account, to link all these concepts together to enlighten the fear that fueled this process of coping.

British society during the Victorian Era was thus characterized by innovations in every field of expertise, from societal improvements to actual technological progress. The main points we will take into consideration are three: industrial and technological revolutions, loss of faith and identity and social reforms. For starters, industrialization and urbanization brought significant changes to society: The rapid expansion of cities, overcrowding, and poor living conditions led to concerns about public health: cities that were once empty became soon overcrowded because of how they needed to work in the factories, which were born because of the technological advancements. Because of those advancements, information was able to travel more efficiently, and communication became faster through the development of the telegraph and later the telephone: moreover, railways and new means of transportation made the world much smaller and easier to travel. This facilitated the spread of ideas and information, making public opinion much more dynamic and giving birth to a more cosmopolite society. However, while the benefits of industrialization and technological progress are many, there were also negative consequences. The working class faced abysmal working conditions, long hours, low wages, and child labor, as many authors of the time such as Charles Dickens denounced and tried to bring to light. The rise of factories and the shift from rural to urban areas disrupted traditional ways of life and community structures, because of how families were almost forced to break up to follow the new way of living. This led to social and economic disparities, with a divide between the few rich people and the working class.

The Victorian Era also witnessed a significant loss of faith and identity: these changes cast no doubt upon traditional religious beliefs and social structures. Darwin's theory of evolution, more than anything else, and scientific advancements clashed with religion, leading to a crisis of faith and a questioning of century-old beliefs. This loss of faith and identity contributed to a search for new moral values and ideologies. This gave ground to religious revivalism, seeking shelter from this overwhelming anxiety, and looking for a sense of purpose in religion, despite it being challenged by all the new discoveries in science. Furthermore, the Victorian Era was marked by notable social reforms. One among many, the Factory Act of 1833, for example, aimed to regulate child labor and improve working conditions in factories. Social reforms also extended to education and public health. The establishment of the National Health Service and the Education Act of 1870 aimed to provide access to healthcare and education for all members of society, regardless of their social status. These reforms were part of a set of efforts to improve the condition of the working class, but at the same time of society.

In summary, the Victorian Era in British society was characterized by rapid industrial and technological progress, which brought both benefits and challenges. It led to urbanization, social inequalities, and concerns about public health and social disintegration. The era also witnessed a loss of faith and identity due to scientific advancements and a changing social landscape. However, efforts were made to address these issues through social reforms, aiming to improve working conditions, education, and public health. The rise of scientific discoveries and theories, such as Charles Darwin's theory of evolution, challenged religious beliefs

and raised existential questions about human existence and the nature of life. This clash between science and religion created a sense of uncertainty and anxiety about the meaning and purpose of life. Because of this uncertainty, alongside the many accounts from overseas, monsters as a concept grew in popularity, becoming a topic discussed both in literature and science itself. (J. Reid 2006, 55-58)

The theories of evolution brought to the scientific field by Charles Darwin play a leading role when defining monstrosity and anxiety. To understand that we will try to define what was considered monstrous and why the term was attached to everything that is extraneous. Providing an overview of the concept of the monstrous is no easy task, given the vagueness of the term and the diverse representations of monstrosity. As Asa Simon Mittman explains in *The Ashgate Research Companion to Monsters and the Monstrous*, defining a monster based solely on physicality is inadequate since the definition of monstrous varies across cultures. The monstrous is often associated with the unknown and the different, as they escape the normal cognition of society at a given time, which is deeply intertwined with the specific society being analyzed. Human beings find comfort in categorization and order, seeking reassurance in what can be neatly structured and labeled. Monsters, on the other hand, defy categorization and stand outside the boundaries of ordinary everyday life.

Mittman expresses the focal point of monstrosity by focusing on their resistance to structures and categorization: "By definition, the monster is outside of such definitions; it defies the human desire to subjugate through categorization" (Mittman 2017, 50). Because of this innate capability, we can understand why

monsters are so frightening, and why subsequently the other is as well. Monsters resist being included in any systematic structure and challenge the human tendency to classify and relegate into orderly structures. Consequently, monsters become not only physically but also mentally frightening due to the human inability to understand them fully. Moreover, they are quite often a bridge representing a connection between two things. As Cohen suggests, they defy structures, existing in the realm between imagination and reality, while still possessing certain characteristics that connect them to the real world.

“This refusal to participate in the classificatory "order of things" is true of monsters generally: they are disturbing hybrids whose externally incoherent bodies resist attempts to include them in any systematic structuration. And so, the monster is dangerous, a form suspended between forms that threatens to smash distinctions.” (Cohen 1966, 6)

For instance, witches exist in the liminal space between the real world and the imaginary realm of magic, representing women who have mastered the dark arts. Vampires possess human-like features, simultaneously existing as both alive and dead, both monsters and fascinating creatures. Likewise, werewolves give flesh to the fusion of human and beast, the bridge between impulse and reason. These creatures pose a threat to humanity not only due to their physical strength or supernatural abilities but also because they are something beyond human control and understanding. They defy every attempt at dissection, labeling, and categorization. Therefore, categorizing monsters proves challenging due to their inherent nature of liminality. However, in most cases the monster is something

mysterious, yet familiar, like what Freud refers to in his *Uncanny*: something that is familiar, yet unfamiliar can often evoke a sense of distress of the strongest kind. According to Freud, the uncanny feeling is evoked when something that is familiar and known becomes repressed and then returns in a distorted or unsettling form. It involves a feeling of something being strangely familiar yet simultaneously strange and unfamiliar.

We can examine this through the ideology of monstrosity originated from the Caribbean and its reverberations in Europe. The tales and accounts of the Caribbean region circulated during the early modern age, spreading through Europe via the narratives of the conquerors. As Braham points out:

“Christopher Columbus is without a doubt the single greatest influence in the creation of monsters of the Latin American imaginary” (Braham in Mittman, 2017, 65)

Christopher Columbus played a significant role in shaping the monsters of the Latin American area. His horrifying tales of cannibalism created a strong basis for the prolific literary production surrounding zombies, flesh-eating demons, and vampires. The exotic lands of the New World became a breeding ground for imagination, as the unknown savages engaged in atrocities that struck fear into the hearts of the civilized Europeans. Cannibalism is an intriguing aspect, as it involves transgressing the boundaries between food and humans. It embodies the literal danger of being preyed upon, a return to a primal wilderness where such scenarios are not mere fantasies but actual possibilities. Additionally, the concept of someone who is both human and a consumer of humans introduces the unsettling idea of

liminality and aberration. These individuals exist outside the norms familiar to the "civilized people" of Europe.

These vivid and frightening images endured throughout the centuries, influencing subsequent periods, and providing fertile ground for thinkers like Charles Darwin. Darwin's publication of *On the Origin of Species* in 1859 shook the foundations of common knowledge and confronted the theological foundations of the time. The Victorian era, characterized by advancements in science, industry, and culture, saw a clash between traditional theological beliefs and the emerging theories of evolution. The new scientific discoveries challenged the prevailing optimism of natural theology, which believed in a harmonious and purposeful creation, as S.T. Asma suggests in his work:

“The natural theologians tried to show that nature was elegant, economical, and rational, a perfect incarnation of God’s blueprint [...] But it was becoming increasingly difficult to maintain this optimism when paleontology was uncovering massive evidence about extinct genera.” (Asma 2009, 164)

Evolution presented a harsh reality, wherein humans were no longer the divinely ordained pinnacle of creation but rather part of an intricate web of life. Darwin’s colleague, Richard Owen, pointed out two theories about the creation of monsters and the similarities between the structures shared by many animals. He theorized that the similarities between the species were a derivation of God’s original idea for all creatures and that monsters were originated both from changes in environmental conditions and internal germs. That had the implications that evolution and monsters’ generation was made on purpose, all part of a scheme. Even monsters had

a purpose in the grand scheme. While this kind of debacle could develop into some interesting points, Darwin was more focused on the implication this had on evolution: he, however, pointed out that even though monsters could be considered a launching point for transmutation and change, he found the theological solution too convenient. During his more mature studies, he even suggested that monsters were often objects of human needs, because the only way these beings could thrive in nature was by the monstrous process of breeding (S.T. Asma, 168). Monstrous and humanity are therefore strictly interlinked, and often dependent one on the other. This led to a strict differentiation between what is human and what is monstrous, both from a physical point of view and a moral point of view. During the latter half of the eighteenth century, reason was exerting a strict force for the whole age: John Herdman in his "The Double in Nineteenth-Century Fiction" gives an overview about how the idea of dualism, already vivid in the Eighteenth century, became enriched with the new age's preoccupations:

The concept of moral evil became associated with the primitive, the savage and the untamed in the human spirit, which contact with the native cultures of newly explored or colonized lands was forcing upon the collective attention, and still more upon the collective unconscious of Enlightenment man. (Herdman, 1990, 11)

Therefore, when compared to the civilized man of the nineteenth century, the savage man coming from the newly colonized lands was a menace and a threat, thus a reason for fear. That was true not only from a physical point of view, but also because the lack of reason and culture represented by the savage populations was a threat to



“... the values of rationalism, to the ideals of progress and human perfectibility.” (Herdman 1990, 11-12) The Victorian man was after the better version of himself, trying to cultivate his qualities, defining morality at the best of his abilities. This revelation not only altered perceptions of the natural world but also raised existential questions about the nature of humanity and its place in the universe. The implications of these shifts can also be found in art, literature, and popular culture, manifesting in the renewed fascination with monstrous creatures and the anxieties they evoke.

In conclusion, the theories of evolution introduced by Charles Darwin played a significant role in defining monstrosity and anxiety. The Victorian era, with its clash between traditional theological beliefs and emerging scientific theories, witnessed a change in perceptions of human existence. The notion of monsters became intertwined with the questioning of humanity's place in the universe, leading to a renewed fascination with monstrous creatures and the fears they symbolized, while also becoming attached to everything that is extraneous. These cultural transformations influenced art, literature, and popular culture, reflecting the anxieties and existential inquiries of the time.

To understand these characteristics of monstrosity, and how they are linked to anxiety, we must examine an influential study of the time, *Degeneration* by Max Nordau. Despite having been heavily discussed and challenged by Freud himself, the essay gives us a brilliant overview of ideas that were widespread during its times. The first chapter of the essay, “Fin-de-Siècle”, describes a scenario made of rich

people slowly degrading because of their new lifestyles, thus creating a new generation of individuals both ill from a physical viewpoint and from a mental one.

“Fin-de-siècle is a name covering both what is characteristic of many modern phenomena, and also the underlying mood which in them finds expression.”

(Nordau, 1895, 1)

Therefore, it was common for people to fear this process of degeneration, a rejection of social values and morality. The author makes a case from a physiognomic point of view, expressing how degeneration came to be classified as a real illness: it encapsulates physical disabilities or mutations, and mental anomalies, such as hysteria. The author defines degeneration as something deviating from the norm, a “morbid deviation from the original type” (Nordau 1895, 16) which can also apply to the process of describing the Other as a monster that the colonies were undergoing because of imperialist propaganda of the time.

The concept of degeneration had two main effects on Victorian society: for starters, it questioned the moral qualities of English society itself. The menace of erosion of traditional values and the so-called societal decline described by Nordau brought the need for a stricter moral code, and called for a stricter social order, which was also represented by the flourishing production of many novels about order, such as detective novels. Secondly, it also brought forth the concern about the colonies and their population challenging the British Empire. The idea of degeneration fueled fears of a potential reversal in power dynamics, also according to the Social Darwinism theories, in which Darwin himself believed at the time of the publication of his *Origin of the Species* (Mc Connaughey 1950, 404).

We can therefore conclude that degeneration played a crucial role in shaping the many anxieties that permeated Victorian Society. We examined the causes of the frantic search for order that reverberated through major novels of the time, identifying those causes in a drastic change in lifestyle, both because of globalization and industrialization, and how those changes led to major breakthroughs in science and society. The social advancements also brought social fragmentation, widening the rift between social classes, bringing to light the inequities of Imperialism. That reflected onto a propaganda that designed everything that was foreign or unknown as monstrous, that we read the Unheimlich lens to focus on the similarity that often becomes frightening, while also keeping accounts from the Caribbean as an example, despite being far in time. In conclusion, degeneration could be considered as a founding element of Victorian society, in which the imperial discourse could take place.

## Chapter 2: A British detective in an imperial setting

The imperial era was a period of endless possibilities for whoever was able to be on the right side of history: the colonies offered a chance for greatness to whoever could exploit them. However, given the double nature of wealth and fortune, exploitation meant that someone was bound to get the short end of the stick, thus leaving behind a trail of poverty and misery. Arthur Conan Doyle, who lived during this period of enormous disparity between social classes, had not failed to notice this phenomenon. In fact, most of the characters who return from the colonies in his novels are presented as crippled or maimed in some aspect, or otherwise are the pinnacle of perfection, almost on the point of uncanniness. This consistency in representing the physical degeneration of those who met the colonies, is symptomatic of the recurring anxieties which were commonplace in England, thus making Doyle's novels an honest reflection of the process of degeneration which perceived to be taking place in England. (Siddiqi 2006, 233)

In this chapter we will examine the basic structure of the detective story, alongside with the reason that made Sherlock Holmes so popular; the various couples of characters associated with wealth and misfortune in *The Sign of the Four* and *The Hound of the Baskervilles*, followed by the effect of the characterizing the Other as dangerous in a context made of Englishness, and finally on the role of the archetypal character of the returnee, allegedly infected by the degenerative force of the colonies.

Detective stories prove to be the perfect area for the imperial discourse to be developed in, and Arthur Conan Doyle, also because of the historical period in which it stemmed: Darwin's research was recently published, leaving the public without their anthropocentric view, England was going through a period of frantic expansion and serial crime would soon find one of its most famous perpetrators in history:

“And less than a year after the publication of *A study in Scarlet*, modern crime – serial crime, senseless crime, crime as urban dread – would find its first demon incarnate. A person (or persons) never identified would commit a series of disgusting murders of female prostitutes in Whitechapel, London's red-light district. Newspapers reporters quickly dubbed him Jack the Ripper.”

(McConnel 1987, 174)

The existence of someone lurking in the shadow, who was above the law and Scotland Yard, called for the creation of a character who was able to reassure the new reading class, mainly made of factory workers and housewives who kept hearing stories about the unknown world overseas, but were frightened by it. Thus, Sherlock Holmes was born, and became Doyle's most famous character. Although the author soon grew impatient to kill it off, his fame and success made him immortal, effectively making the author write his return from the battle to the death with his arch nemesis, James Moriarty. The framework of the detective story, in which a crime is committed, and the detective works its way backwards towards the culprit, just armed with reason, proved to be extremely reassuring for the uncertainties of the age. Reason was a weapon that humanity could hold against the uncertainty of the

future, shook by the new discoveries made by Charles Darwin – through reason, and their passionate commitment to the art of analysis, Sherlock Holmes imposes the idea that the cold and uncaring universe in which Victorian society was plunged, could be understood through “sheer force of intellect”, and its secrets were open to the men with the abilities to understand them (McConnel 1987, 176).

To add more to this sense of safety that Sherlock Holmes was able to offer his readers, while the first two novels were published separately, many of the short stories featuring the detective were a product of a profitable wedding between *the strand magazine* and Arthur Conan Doyle. As Clarke suggests in her *Doyle, Holmes and Victorian Publishing*, Holmes had a significant impact on Londoner’s lives, because of the societal and the technological advancement of the time. The novel, as a genre, was at an all-time low decline, because of the expensiveness of the three-book formula with which it was published, in favor of the more affordable periodic publication of paper, such as in the Strand Magazine. Because of technological advancement, it was cheap to include illustrations in the stories printed on paper, making them even more immersive. Moreover, the introduction of the Education Act of 1870, which made basic education compulsory for everyone, almost created an entirely new reading class (Clarke, 2019, 47-49). The Londoners craved for a new figure that could reassure them, and the periodical publication of Sherlock Holmes’ stories gave them something to look forward: indeed, many libraries had to accommodate for the literal assault they were suffering each week, due to the publishing of Doyle’s stories. This, to say that detective fiction was on the rise during Victorian Age, and Sherlock Holmes was an incredibly prolific literary phenomenon

for the age, becoming one of the most spread kinds of literature, both because of the themes it touched and the sheer amount of hope it could provide their readers, about this guilt-cleansing process that narrative was tasked to enact.

The environment was thus perfect for Sherlock Holmes, the detective fending off disorder with reason, to flourish. His stories are quintessential in representing the key issues with the Imperial dilemma, both because of the author's background and because of the characters involved in his detective fiction. Arthur Conan Doyle lived during the apex of Victorian imperialism, being born in Scotland, and having his literary authorship blossom during the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century. At the time imperial endeavors and colonization were seen as the pinnacle of progress and selflessness, as imperialism was seen as a gesture of kindness towards the poor uncivilized savages who lived afar. Moreover, Doyle also was a medical officer during the Boer War, giving him a deeper understanding of British colonialism – his participation in the war, however, made his belief in the imperialist cause even more fervent. In one of his writings, *The Adventure of the Bleached Soldier*, Doyle provides a description of a leprosy ward during the Boer war, told from the eyes of a veteran of the war. The trick of describing the sick people little by little, by their uncanny features, just fuels the ideal of degeneration taking place in the colonies, ready for exportation. Siddiqi makes the case that Doyle "...saw the Boers as hapless victims, but as degenerate nonetheless" (Siddiqi, 2006, 235), as if something greater was taking place there – something was corroding the people in the faraway land, something that was ready to come and take England by force. The threat had to be faced and confronted somehow, and that is where Sherlock Holmes, the detective

representing order, finds his place, as his character holds all the ideals of the Victorian gentleman. Indeed, he is a completely rational being, while often asserting the superiority of England, or at least an appreciation of its ideals. For example, despite often dismissing the abilities of others as vastly inferior to its own, the Detective appreciates inspector Lestrade openly in *A scandal in Bohemia*:

"Inspector Lestrade was the best of the English detectives, and a well-known figure. I was still balancing the matter in my mind, when a hansom cab drove up to Briony Lodge, and a gentleman sprang out." (Doyle 1891, 8)

Holmes often shows a strong pride in English culture, methodology and reasoning over everything else. Moreover, he reflects all the quintessential virtues of English society of the time: honor, sense of duty, responsibility and an unwavering faith in the truth were all the mirror of what imperial propaganda was at the time. In *The Study in Scarlet*, Holmes briefly describes his investigation methods, accurately making an outline of scientific thinking, a characteristic typical of English mindset.

"Detection is, or ought to be, an exact science and should be treated in the same cold and unemotional manner. You have attempted to tinge it with romanticism, which produces much the same effect as if you worked a love-story or an elopement into the fifth proposition of Euclid." (Doyle 1887, 10)

This mindset, when juxtaposed with the background of the author itself make our case study, *The Sign of the Four*, an example for how novels were used as a mechanism enacted to suppress the accountability for all the Imperialist horrors English society at the time. The parallelism between Sherlock Holmes and



Englishness holds value even to this day, because of how known the detective from Baker Street has come to be: the adaptation of Conan Doyle's work is plenty, and has touched every type of media, from movies, to serialized shows and every other kind of graphical representation. Even today, Holmes himself is as popular as he was during Victorian Age: Baker Street is a famous touristic waypoint, and every place in England that has a remote connection to Holmes stories has plenty of advertisement about it, to attract as many aficionados as possible. In whichever media he is represented, Sherlock Holmes keeps the main focus about him: he is an apparently weird man who is entirely devoted to the truth and the scientific method of deduction, which is the foundation of his very being. As shown in this famous passage from *The Sign of the Four*, his method relies on absolutes.

“It is simplicity itself,” he remarked, chuckling at my surprise,—“so absurdly simple that an explanation is superfluous; and yet it may serve to define the limits of observation and of deduction. Observation tells me that you have a little reddish mold adhering to your instep. Just opposite the Seymour Street Office they have taken up the pavement and thrown up some earth which lies in such a way that it is difficult to avoid treading in it in entering. The earth is of this peculiar reddish tint, which is found, as far as I know, nowhere else in the neighborhood. So much is observation. The rest is deduction.” (Doyle 1890, 13)

In this piece, Holmes explains clearly that observation is on the table for everyone, with enough preparation. The skill needed to recover all the information necessary to his deduction is something that requires knowledge, while instead deduction

consists in connecting all the dots in order to formulate a hypothesis, which in Sherlock Holmes' case is always correct. By a painstakingly methodic elimination process, the detective removes every option that does not answer all his questions, leaving him with the only possible truth.

“How, then, did you deduce the telegram?” “Why, of course I knew that you had not written a letter, since I sat opposite to you all morning. I see also in your open desk there that you have a sheet of stamps and a thick bundle of postcards. What could you go into the post-office for, then, but to send a wire? Eliminate all other factors, and the one which remains must be the truth.”  
(Doyle 1890, 14)

That brings us to the conclusion that the truth is lying there, somewhere, and it is only left to human reason to unveil it. However, that reasoning is obviously flawed, because it is quite simplistic – it is also needed to note that Sherlock Holmes novels were aimed at the general public, and therefore probably had the purpose of entertaining the masses. However, it comes without saying that Sherlock Holmes is the only one in the stories who is fully capable of discerning the truth, where everyone else would be just grasping at straws. Having established the detective as the product of pure reason, and having associated him with England, the stories describe a positive outline for the Empire, while at the same time enforcing the idea that the colonies are a dangerous place, capable of corrupting those who encounter those populations.

I took it up between my finger and thumb. It came away from the skin so readily that hardly any mark was left behind. One tiny speck of blood showed

where the puncture had been. "This is all an insoluble mystery to me," said I. "It grows darker instead of clearer." "On the contrary," he answered, "it clears every instant. I only require a few missing links to have an entirely connected case." (Doyle 1890, 50)

In this passage, taken from the first moments of Holmes' investigation on the murder scene of *The Sign of the Four*, the detective has already figured out almost everything that happened in that room. However, his conclusions are not fair, for the reader: indeed, we are still lacking the elements to formulate our own hypothesis, and that is typical of Doyle's detective stories. While many others are offering a fair challenge to the reader, it may almost seem that Doyle's literary production is just showing off Holmes skills, while we, the reader, are left wondering for the next move of the detective extraordinaire, just like Watson. Holmes – or rather England's -presence is enough to calm down everyone, because the detective is going to take matters into his own hands. In the same page, just after having proclaimed that the mysteries that just unfolded is close to a solution, he is able to reassure Thaddeus Sholto, who is at risk of being accused of the murder.

"You have no reason for fear, Mr. Sholto," said Holmes, kindly, putting his hand upon his shoulder. "Take my advice and drive down to the station to report this matter to the police. Offer to assist them in every way. We shall wait here until your return." (Doyle 1890, 51)

We have already established Holmes' faith in institutions: it should not come as a surprise that the detective suggests calling the police. It is however important to note that he does so, because it serves to further enhance the idea of trusting the

system, whose role is to bring order back to the now chaotic Pondicherry Lodge. Sherlock Holmes could probably solve the mystery on its own, as he already affirmed, but he chooses to do things by the book, even though bureaucracy could slow him down. Maybe he just does that to be able to look at the crime scene alone, which he does afterwards, but it is relevant to this agenda of describing order and institutions as completely positive. Sherlock Holmes is not only described as a man of wits and mind, but it is also a man of many interests, albeit sometimes weird and strange. Moreover, he is a good fighter, and a fit person in general – effectively becoming the fittest individual for the concept of survival of the fittest presented by Darwin. Sherlock Holmes discards what does not interest him or is not useful for his profession. He is indeed shown not to have a clue about how the universe and the solar system works, because he does not want to clutter his mind with information not relevant to his area of expertise, which is deduction. During the time in which Watson was slowly growing to know the detective, the two had an exchange about how flawed Holmes' knowledge actually was, when taking into consideration popular culture and even basic scientific facts that should be absolutely known to the 19<sup>th</sup> century man.

His ignorance was as remarkable as his knowledge. Of contemporary literature, philosophy and politics he appeared to know next to nothing. Upon my quoting Thomas Carlyle, he inquired in the naivest way who he might be and what he had done. My surprise reached a climax, however, when I found incidentally that he was ignorant of the Copernican Theory and of the composition of the Solar System. That any civilized human being in this

nineteenth century should not be aware that the earth travelled round the sun appeared to be to me such an extraordinary fact that I could hardly realize it. (Doyle 1887, 14)

The vastity of Holmes' knowledge is notable, because of the incredible amount of information he is able to summon at will when necessary: however, that comes at a cost. The man is indeed oblivious to anything that was not directly connected to his work as a detective. And the price of that, if we are to believe Darwin, should be extinction, hence this way of deliberately neglecting knowledge could be the doom of Sherlock Holmes: however, since he is put together with Watson, an everyday man who is efficient in the areas where Holmes is lacking, the duo is able to overcome any challenge:

“You see,” he explained, “I consider that a man's brain originally is like a little empty attic, and you have to stock it with such furniture as you choose. [...] Depend upon it there comes a time when for every addition of knowledge, you forget something that you knew before. It is of the highest importance, therefore, not to have useless facts elbowing out the useful ones.” (Doyle 1887, 15-16)

However weird it may seem, this careful selection of knowledge allows Sherlock Holmes to be skillful in everything that might come useful to him: despite that being how the character is written, the detective displays incredible feats of resistance and ability. His capabilities are often displayed at every turn of the page, such as in this passage from “The Hound of the Baskervilles”, set during the climax of the story, a moment of pure danger and adrenaline.

But that cry of pain from the hound had blown all our fears to the winds. If he was vulnerable, he was mortal, and if we could wound him, we could kill him. Never have I seen a man run as Holmes ran that night. I am reckoned fleet of foot, but he outpaced me as much as I outpaced the little professional. (Doyle 1902, 228)

It is not to forget that Watson, the narrator, despite having been injured during his military service, is nonetheless a former soldier, who should be able to outpace everyone on the scene because of the adrenaline originated from the fight or flight effect. However, the detective who should be famous for his brains, is able to easily outpace his colleague. The very chapter begins with a strong affirmation from Watson, who defines the detective as someone who has plenty of faults, but however immediately justifies that behavior in the following paragraph.

One of Sherlock Holmes's defects—if, indeed, one may call it a defect—was that he was exceedingly loath to communicate his full plans to any other person until the instant of their fulfilment. Partly it came no doubt from his own masterful nature, which loved to dominate and surprise those who were around him. Partly also from his professional caution, which urged him never to take any chances. The result, however, was very trying for those who were acting as his agents and assistants. (Doyle 1902, 221)

If taken through the lens of the analogy between Motherland and Holmes, this passage takes on a new meaning. The language used by Watson in describing what should be a fault in Holmes' character is quite mild, almost apologetic. The medic admits himself to have been subjected to emotional distress because of Holmes'

behavior, but nonetheless he accepts his faults entirely, Riding on the detective popularity, this kind of positive reinforcement could reach a wide variety of people, thus justifying the imperialistic endeavor with the juxtapositions of English characters and the colonial Other.

Because of its popularity, Sherlock Holmes stories held a strong captivating force over Victorian Society, which makes our case study, *The Sign of the Four*, an important mirror for the societal anxieties we have been discussing. The atmosphere described in the story is, moreover, haunting and keeps the reader on the edge: the novel begins with an eerie mystery, followed up by a murder perpetrated by a foreigner and is culminated with the discovery of a culprit, who emerges from an evil that happened in the past. All these elements further reinforce the concept of retribution and survival of the fittest: whatever is lying in wait in the colonies, is just waiting for the chance to strike back and destroy civilization as it was known at the time, both with his horrendous physical appearance and with his savageness. Just like if ready to act on Darwin's prophecy about the need to become the fittest exemplar in the nation, or else be ready to face demise, the villains in these murder mysteries are infiltrating England at every turn of the page. However, Sherlock Holmes, representing the perfect English gentleman, readily brings order back to the scene that was turned on its own by the intervention of this force of retribution. Thanks to his intervention, indeed, the foreign element is soon removed from the picture, and all the wrongdoers are consigned to justice. This contrast between the clean figure of the Englishmen and the corrupted returnee or foreigner is created to further enhance the feeling of English superiority, as Berberich suggests:

“If Doyle’s criminals are not outright foreigners, then they are Englishmen who have lived in and been tainted by foreign lands that have led them to forget English values. But the fact that Holmes is usually victorious hammers home the message of English superiority over other nations.” (Berberich 2019, 65)

We will examine this concept later, but it is crucial that usually the antagonist in these novels is none other than someone who has been characterized as *other*, and often bears monstrous features or is different from the ordinary Englishman, or even worse is someone from England who has been corrupted by the colonies, becoming the furthest thing from Englishness that one could imagine.

This scheme of events is also true for many other stories featuring the detective extraordinaire, such as *The Hound of the Baskervilles*, that also features a monster shrouded in mystery, directly bringing elements of horror and fear to the story. Therefore, Sherlock Holmes is the embodiment of the main ideals and values of Victorian Imperialism, thanks to his belief in rationalism and his methodical approach. This, together with the precise narrative scheme of the detective stories, in which chaos is brought back to order through the determination of the detective, provide the reader with a sense of control and closure, a real medicine for the imperial complexities and fears that plagued the Victorian Society.

*The Sign of the Four* has been selected as a case study because of how well it embodies all these characteristics. It is a story that revolves around a treasure stolen from India, with murders and double crossing involved: The plot itself is a foil for the imperial setting in England. In the light of this idea, it is relevant to examine the plot



in its entirety, because of how every element refers to a faraway and exotic place, in which betrayal and sordid events take place. The novel begins with Miss Morstan visiting Sherlock Holmes and Watson, presenting them a mystery to be solved: her father, a captain of the British army, disappeared into thin air ten years ago, shortly after his leave of absence. She has been receiving a pearl in the mail once a year, and she has been asked to meet the sender of these jewels for more information about the disappearance of his father. Here the heroes make acquaintance with Thaddeus Sholto, the son of Major Sholto, who was a friend of the late Captain Morstan. The man reveals that Captain Morstan died during an argument with Major Sholto, because of what he calls "The Agra Treasure", an immense collection of jewels which was partly rightfully destined to Miss Morstan. While the two men were viciously arguing about it, the captain fell to the ground lifeless, because of a heart attack. Later, the Major had passed away as well, dying of sudden shock while on his deathbed because of the view of someone at the window, a bearded man. The treasure was hidden at the time, and Major Sholto died as soon as he was about to reveal its location: all that Thaddeus could do is give a pearl to miss Morstan until they could have found the entirety of the fortune, which recently came to light, thus the summoning of the young woman. Sadly, as soon as they reach for the location of the treasure, they find it gone, and Thaddeus' brother is dead, killed by a poisoned dart. This soon leads to another man, responsible for this trail of death that he is leaving behind because of the treasure: Johnatan Small, aided by his sidekick, the savage Tonga. Once he is captured, the man reveals that the treasure is the product of another murder, which happened in the faraway lands of India. Small was a

guardian in the fortress of Agra, who had to guard two men, Mahomet Singh, and Abdullah Khan: the two tempted Small with the idea of killing a merchant who was passing by in the fortress and stealing his treasure. Together with Abdullah's cousin they made a pact to share that treasure, signing a paper which they named The Sign of the Four. The group was however captured and taken to a prison camp, where Small made the acquaintance of Sholto and Morstan, making plans to share the treasure with them, had they helped him escape. He was betrayed however, thus setting in motion the events of the novel, slowly spreading the mark that came to be characterized as the sign of the four over every murder linked to the Agra Treasure.

This is the outline of the story, which soon reveals the existence of an incredible treasure, promising wealth to those who have rights to it, but at the same time bringing misfortune upon those who try to seize it. From the beginning to the end of the chain of events, nobody questions the idea that the treasure was the product of a murder and a robbery, and that it should be returned to the original owner, the Rajah in India. Instead, everyone believes it to be the rightful propriety of the men who stole it from the merchant, regardless of if it is Johnathan Small or Captain Morstan and his associate.

“It is my treasure; and if I can't have the loot, I'll take damned good care that no one else does. I tell you that no living man has any right to it, unless it is three men who are in the Andaman convict-barracks and myself.” (Doyle 1890, 81)

These words, coming from the mouth of Johnatan Small, the felon itself, are quite representative of the hypocrisy that permeated the whole of England society at the

time. The colonies were considered just a thing to be exploited to the end, although rich in culture and novelty, they were seen by many as a treasure chest to be plundered. Moreover, it was not only a treasure that was up for the taking, but the Empire had a right to it, because the savages in the colonies could not use it well. It should not come as a surprise, then, that Sherlock Holmes, despite being usually the most attentive and able person in the room, is the first to describe Tonga as a savage, and his people as well, finding his counterpart, Doctor Watson, to completely agree with him. His description seems to be extracted from those ancient accounts from the savage lands of America, while instead it is entirely found in the Eight chapter of the story, coming from Sherlock Holmes' mouth, nonetheless.

“Now, then, listen to this. 'They are naturally hideous, having large, misshapen heads, small, fierce eyes, and distorted features. Their feet and hands, however, are remarkably small. So intractable and fierce are they that all the efforts of the British official have failed to win them over in any degree. They have always been a terror to shipwrecked crews, braining the survivors with their stone headed clubs, or shooting them with their poisoned arrows. These massacres are invariably concluded by a cannibal feast.' Nice, amiable people, Watson!” (Doyle 1890, 87)

These characteristics, put together all at once, make Tonga a completely negative character, without a hint of redemption. He is able, at the same time, to ruin Johnatan Small's plan, who had initially no intention of murdering his old associate, and be a threat to England as a whole. Despite him being completely loyal to his master, who is nonetheless a criminal, he meets his demise in a gruesome way. Johnatan Small,

despite being the mastermind behind the whole crime, is described in a milder tone, as if he was a victim of his experience in the colonies.

Our captive sat in the cabin opposite to the iron box which he had done so much and waited so long to gain. He was a sunburned, reckless-eyed fellow, with a network of lines and wrinkles all over his mahogany features, which told of a hard, open-air life. There was a singular prominence about his bearded chin which marked a man who was not to be easily turned from his purpose. His age may have been fifty or thereabouts, for his black, curly hair was thickly shot with gray. His face in repose was not an unpleasing one, though his heavy brows and aggressive chin gave him, as I had lately seen, a terrible expression when moved to anger. (Doyle 1890, 110)

This description of Jonathan Small, which opens the eleventh chapter of the story, is filled with words carefully chosen to describe the ruthlessness of the culprit, but at the same time convey the transformation he underwent. His obsession is presented as determination, almost becoming a positive quality. His physical appearance reflects his experience in the colonies, during his time as a convict. His rugged expression, and situation, made him shift from a man who looks almost pleasing, when not subjected to anything that might anger him, to having to resort to violence to obtain what he claims to be rightfully his. Therefore, while Tonga is described in a way that leaves him no redeeming qualities, Jonathan Small who is the mastermind behind all the events in the story, gets the chance to tell his whole story.

The colonies exert a transformative force on those who visit the place looking for fame and fortune – however that often happens in pairs. Doyle represents the

return of the colonials from the faraway land in a twofold fashion: those who were victim of the degenerative force of the colonies are usually crippled or horrendous in appearance, while their counterpart who gained something from the colonial experience are wealthy. (Siddiqi 2006, 236). Examples of this stark contrast can be found in many of Sherlock Holmes' tales, like in *The Hound of the Baskervilles*, or *The Sign of the Four*.

In the first novel, the author portrays this contrast to explore the degenerative effect of colonial life, with the characters of Jack Stapleton, also known as Sir Roger Baskerville, and Sir Henry Baskerville. The character of Jack Stapleton, the main antagonist of the novel, is the perfect example for the concept: while he is presented at first as a good-natured entomologist, the ending of the story soon reveals him to be an heir to the Baskerville fortune, whose father was assumed to have died unmarried in the colonies in South America, which brought the Baskervilles their wealth. Stapleton, also because of the transformative force exerted by the colonies, is obsessed with Baskerville's fortune and is ready to murder to retrieve it. The reveal of his malice and true intentions are in contrast with his appearance in the earlier stages of the story, where he is portrayed as a mild-mannered entomologist, a perfect concealment for this true nature, one of a murderer. Because of the difference between his harmless appearance and his horrendous actions, this wolf in sheep's clothing is a fitting representation of the complexity of the colonial situation, where the Empire had to keep the image of a rigorous and illuminated nation while exploiting the colonies. On the other hand, Sir Henry Baskerville, the current heir of the Baskerville fortune is also a returnee from

overseas but stands at Stapleton's opposite. Sir Henry embodies all the qualities typical of the Victorian man and is portrayed as handsome and wealthy. He came back to England as a man of success, apparently impervious to the degenerative force which consumed Stapleton.

Likewise, in *The Sign of the Four*, the characters of Johnatan Small and Major Sholto are a foil to each other: they represent the winners and the losers of the colonial encounter. In this case, however, both the parties involved find a bitter ending, because the first is enslaved for life because of his crimes, and the latter lived a life full of anxiety and regrets, dying violently because of it, as expressed by its own words:

“But it does seem a queer thing [...] that I who have a fair claim to nigh upon half a million of money should spend the first half of my life building a breakwater in the Andamans and am like to spend the other half digging drains at Dartmoor. It was an evil day for me when first I clapped eyes upon the merchant Achmet and had to do with the Agra treasure, which never brought anything but a curse upon the man who owned it. To him it brought murder, to Major Sholto it brought fear and guilt, to me it has meant slavery for life.” (Doyle 1890, 76-66)

In the last chapters of the story, Small confesses to his crimes, regretting how his life is about to end. He deems his ending as almost ironic: a man who came back to England to seek fortune ended up with nothing in his hands but the threat of manual labor. Johnatan Small's actions act like a curse from the past of Major Sholto, destroying everything he has built up – in an equivalent manner to the actions of

Jack Stapleton. Both Jack and Johnatan are the embodiment of the anxieties of the Victorian age, and the peculiar sense of guilt that permeated society at the time. Doyle's use of these contrasting characters suggests the existence of distinct roles: those who are corroded by the colonial life, turning into something monstrous, or those who exploited the colonial experience to the very core, becoming wealthy and prosperous, and probably are destined a horrendous demise, if not for Sherlock Holmes, who acts as a stand-in for order and England itself. In both cases, however, there is a degenerative force in action, corroding or dooming the returnees, who in Doyle's tales are often someone who has been deeply changed, physically or emotionally, by the colonial experience, and could very well infect England with their degeneration. The feelings they evoke are negative, and their characteristics fit the concept of Unheimlich by Freud, because of how they are at the same time both familiar and strangers to England. As Siddiqi claims, this doubling has a deeper meaning:

“The doubling and return of colonials - some abject, some not - is, then, a trope that expresses a number of underlying cultural anxieties. It suggests that the colonials who return to England have become estranged from their native country.” (Siddiqi 2006, 242)

Siddiqi makes the case that this uncanniness is what ties these characters to the Victorian anxieties, making them both familiar and strangers in their home country. They are identified as the natural predator of the successful repatriated colonial, and as abject, following the definition given by Julia Kristeva in her *Powers of Horror, an essay on Abjection* (1982), because of their physical deformities or differences from

the healthy individuals of the Empire. Kristeva's idea of abject is perfect when juxtaposed to the returnees and the colonized, because of their existence between two worlds, a position of uncertainty.

Throughout a night without images but buffeted by black sounds; amidst a throng of forsaken bodies beset with no longJng but to last against all odds and for nothing; on a page where I plotted out the convolutions of those who, in transference, presented me with the gift of their void—I have spelled out abjection. Passing through the memories of a thousand years, a fiction without scientific objective but attentive to religious imagination, it is within literature that I finally saw it carrying, with its horror, its full power into effect. (Kristeva, 1890, 260)

Kristeva points out that the abjection, this concept existing beyond subject and object, could be found out in narrative just next to the sublime. Escaping categorization makes the returnees much closer to a monster than ever: these characters are always moved by a deep desire, which could be revenge, or self-assertion. Only within the boundaries of literature, therefore, these characters could be fleshed out completely and given an identity, albeit liminal. That one that they share with the horrifying vampire or wolfman: that of a monster. They could be connected to these creatures both because of their behavior, as they are indeed usually the ones perpetrating murder, breaking, and entering and every kind of crime and atrocity, and because of their inability to “respect borders, position, rules” (Siddiqi, 242). Their existence itself threatens the fabric of society, the order which the detective must be preserving with his reasoning.



“It is thus not lack of cleanliness or health that causes abjection, but what disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, position, rules. The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite. The traitor, the liar, the criminal with a good conscience, the shameless rapist, the killer who claims he is a savior... Any crime, because it draws attention to the fragility of the law, is abject, but premeditated crime, cunning murder, hypocritical revenge are even more so because they heighten the display of such fragility.”

(Kristeva 1892, 4)

Although Kristeva analysis focuses more on the psychological aspect of abjection, these concepts could also be applied to a more society-wide area of study. The returnees are threatening order because of their monstrous characteristics, such as their being contaminated by the virus of degeneration from the colonies. Moreover, those returnees symbolize the repression of the trauma England brought to the colonies, which was hidden beneath the celebratory tales of the colonial enterprise. The idea that such characters could stay hidden for a long period of time, premeditating atrocities such as murder, usurpation or theft is a cause for anxiety: these characters serve the purpose of exposing the fragility of the law, and the detective serves instead the idea that England is a safe place to live in, because order will be brought back, and the citizens will be protected. The character of John Watson, similarly, is a returnee who experienced this degenerative force, but because of its vicinity to Sherlock Holmes, he could be considered cured of its degeneration. For starters, his character is the reason for which the detective himself is so compelling: Holmes' charisma is enhanced by Watson's averageness. Although

John Watson is above the average person, being a skilled doctor, a former soldier, and an overall intuitive person, he pales when put in comparison with the brilliant detective. His role is that of the storyteller, but at the same time he is our point of view character. The reader, like Watson, is baffled at every turn of Sherlock Holmes genius, and without him we would just be left with a strange man who consumes cocaine on a whim and makes discourses that are too complex to be understood – a weird man, an outcast from society. (McConnel 1987, 179) Through his presence, Watson acts as an anchor to reality for Holmes, who would not be perceived as a hero without him: he would just be another weird man, and not the force of order he is.

John Watson is therefore a fundamental element in the dichotomy reason-emotion made with Sherlock Holmes, which serves to set apart Doyle's novels from the others, giving a fresh and unique perspective of a detective story told by a third party, and not the detective itself. This choice serves the purpose of making Sherlock Holmes even more amazing in the reader's eyes, while giving a perspective that is more on the average person's level of understanding. Arthur Conan Doyle with this portrayal of the returnees from the colonies gives a vast representation of the cultural complexities of the imperial dilemma: these characters, whether abject or estranged, represent the threat of degeneration, and give a physical representation of the fears widespread among the population at the time. Doyle's juxtaposition of wealth and monstrosity, and the use of familiar places and concepts tainted by the omnipresent colonialism, when weaved together via a detective narrative provides an analysis of the main psychological and societal issues of the Victorian Age.

The degenerative force acting in the Empire is also represented with physical effects on characters in Doyle's novels. Siddiqi makes the case that, often, male soldiers from England are subject to physical deformities or injuries when fighting overseas in the colonies: Watson is a prime example of that. The very first Sherlock Holmes novel, *A study in scarlet*, begins with the account of John Watson's misfortunes during the Afghan war, which profoundly changed his life. The war medic was wounded in battle, and was deemed unable to fight anymore, thus sent back to England. The description of his misadventure proves to be relevant when examined through the lens of imperialism:

"...worn with pain, and weak from the prolonged hardships which I had undergone, I was removed, with a great train of wounded sufferers, to the base hospital at Peshawar. Here I rallied and had already improved so far as to be able to walk about the wards, and even to bask a little upon the verandah, when I was struck down by enteric fever, that curse of our Indian possessions." (Doyle, 1887, 3)

The expression used by Doyle in this context when referring to the enteric fever is "that curse of our Indian possession" and I believe it to stand for a sort of retribution for England's immoral acts in the colonies. Moreover, Watson situation is grim, after his period of leave in the colonies: his salary is not enough to allow him to live alone in the city, or as he defines it "London, that great cesspool into which all the loungers and idlers of the Empire are irresistibly drained." (A.C. Doyle 3, 1887) He is judged to be unable to fight and his means make him unable to live his life to the fullest in the Capital. He does not belong to either world, he is just like the other returnees in

Doyle's stories, a stranger in his home country. The encounter with Sherlock Holmes is fortuitous, yet the only thing that saves Watson from his fate of degeneration is the presence of Sherlock Holmes, who acts as a shield between him and corruption.

John Watson is once again put to the test against the imperial enterprise in *The Sign of the Four*, together with Miss Morstan, who will grow to be his love interest. Through the whole narrative, the two characters slowly grow closer, albeit carefully observing the dangerous fate looming over their chance at a relationship: the Agra treasure will definitely put Mary Morstan out of Watson's reach, transforming the woman from an ordinary customer that entered the Baker's Street apartment door to seek Holmes and Watson's help to a rich heiress who will never stand on the same floor of ordinary people again. The treasure, despite being usually associated with wealth, is instead a curse in disguise, the same curse that wounded Watson and made him a stranger in his hometown: the colonies exert a destructive force upon the order and stability of England, degenerating it and corrupting the homeland. The passage in which Watson realizes his love for Miss Morstan is now free from any restraint expresses the role that wealth has in the story.

"The treasure is lost," said Miss Morstan, calmly. As I listened to the words and realized what they meant, a great shadow seemed to pass from my soul. I did not know how this Agra treasure had weighed me down, until now that it was finally removed. It was selfish, no doubt, disloyal, wrong, but I could realize nothing save that the golden barrier was gone from between us. "Thank God!" I ejaculated from my very heart. (Doyle, 1890, 117)

Describing the idea of the treasure as “a great shadow” weighing on the soul could also serve to further enhance the idea of the displacing of guilt. Having canceled every trace there is left of the deal between the Four, the murdering of the merchant in India can no longer impair Watson in confessing his true feelings. The colonial past that has been hanging over the heads of Mary Morstan is gone, allowing the doctor to go after his happiness.

“Because you are within my reach again,” I said, taking her hand. She did not withdraw it. “Because I love you, Mary, as truly as ever a man loved a woman. Because this treasure, these riches, sealed my lips. Now that they are gone I can tell you how I love you. That is why I said, ‘Thank God.’ ” “Then I say, ‘Thank God,’ too,” she whispered, as I drew her to my side. Whoever had lost a treasure, I knew that night that I had gained one. (Doyle 1890, 118)

The Agra treasure is indeed a curse, standing in the way of true love – Mary has no doubt in accepting Watson’s confession. Losing the treasure was a good thing for everyone, in a likely manner as the novel might suggest that cleansing the guilt from the imperial endeavors could lift the veil of anxieties suffocating England. On the subject of curses, there is a literal one hanging over the head of Sir Henry: his bloodline threatens to be his demise, because of what has been committed overseas. His vindictive relative might be able to take everything from him, if not for Sherlock Holmes’ intervention. While the idea of categorizing the Agra treasure as a curse might be subtle, in “The Hound of the Baskervilles” it is clearly stated that the family is allegedly haunted by a curse, that has taken the physical form of a massive hound who threatens physically the family members. In the act of hiring Sherlock Holmes,

Sir Henry Baskerville brings a manuscript that describes the curse in detail, which is met with Holmes' initial skepticism: "But I understand that it is something more modern and practical upon which you wish to consult me?" (A.C. Doyle, 32, 1890). Despite that, the detective is eager to listen to whatever is troubling the nobleman. The story that is told is of a crime that has been committed in the past, and that generated a horrible beast that has been haunting the noble family ever since.

Such is the tale, my sons, of the coming of the hound which is said to have plagued the family so sorely ever since. If I have set it down it is because that which is clearly known hath less terror than that which is but hinted at and guessed. Nor can it be denied that many of the family have been unhappy in their deaths, which have been sudden, bloody, and mysterious. (Doyle 1890, 36-37)

The final piece of the manuscript from the legend describes the aftermath of Hugo's conjuring of the infernal hound, leaving all his heirs with this sword of Damocles hanging over their heads. They need to know, because of the characteristics typical of fear: humans are usually scared of what is unknown, far from their everyday knowledge. Moreover, the piece culminates with a confirmation of the legend, of some sort, pointing out that many members of the families have perished gruesome deaths, hinting that it may be because of the Curse. The hound acts as a stand-in for retribution coming from the colonies, just as it will do physically in the climax of the novel, trying to go after the heir of the Baskerville's fortune, to allow Stapleton to take Sir Henry's place. The use of wounds, blood and such gruesome display of violence is useful in slowly associating these wounds to the societal disparities that

were taking place in England, therefore, making the association between a wounded body and England much easier.

When taking up the imperial discourse, often Doyle tends to project the idea of England as an ill body, prone to infection and penetration from the outside forces of the colonies, as suggested by Caroline Reitz in "The Cambridge Companion to Sherlock Holmes" (2019). A British body, Watson's, is wounded in the very first page of the series of novels, a wound which will never fully recover. moreover, the wound is caused by a foreign bullet and the use of words employed by Doyle makes the reader question the legitimacy of England presence on Indian soil: albeit the word "possessions" is used to refer to the land where the battle is fought, Watson is not scarce in his comments about his fate:

"Doyle does not represent his military service with waving flags: 'The campaign brought honours and promotions to many, but for me it had nothing but misfortune and disaster'" (Reitz 2019, 131)

Reitz also points out the splitting and doubling of Holmes and Watson as an entity, both to afford rent and to investigate the imperial murder that brought revenge across the empire itself. In a similar fashion, also *The Sign of the Four* begins with a similar intrusion: Doyle goes out of his way to describe Sherlock Holmes using drugs and a needle penetrating his skin: the drug he is using is cocaine, which was spreading its influence during those years and came from the colonies. Moreover, Watson is heavily irritated at this sight, pointing out the long-term consequences of using that kind of drug, almost serving as a reminder of his own scar with imperial experience. Moreover, going back on the connection between England and Sherlock

Holmes, Watson's disgust at the idea is even more significant. Indeed, he could be worrying about this, like the Empire subject would. However, Holmes is quick in his answer, justifying his consumption of the substance with ease.

He did not seem offended. On the contrary, he put his fingertips together and leaned his elbows on the arms of his chair, like one who has a relish for conversation. "My mind," he said, "rebels at stagnation. Give me problems, give me work, give me the most abstruse cryptogram or the most intricate analysis, and I am in my own proper atmosphere. I can dispense then with artificial stimulants. But I abhor the dull routine of existence. I crave for mental exaltation. That is why I have chosen my own particular profession, or rather created it, for I am the only one in the world." (Doyle 1897, 10)

Albeit agreeing with the medic, justification for the use of the substance is his greatness: the need for exaltation, because of the fear of stagnation. Similarly, this passage could be interpreted as dismissing the fear of degeneration and invasion with a celebration of Englishness.

*The Sign of the Four*, in particular, has a strong imperial presence throughout the whole novel: even when the Agra treasure is not discussed, the characters take every chance to bring the subject back to the faraway lands: the colonies have infiltrated the Baker's Street living room from the beginning of the novel, in the form of the foreign substance of cocaine, doctor Watson tries to entertain a worried Miss Morstan with accounts of his misadventures in Afghanistan. Then, Bartholomew Sholto is revealed to live in Pondicherry Lodge, an estate named after a city in India that was fought over by the French and the English (Reitz 2019, 136). This choice of



placing the estate in London and naming it after an Indian location is revealing of an increasing preoccupation with contamination. Moreover, the description of Pondicherry Lodge's inhabitants is not flattering at all: Thaddeus Sholto is indeed made to be a not so nice-looking young man, who looks older than he is.

A blaze of yellow light streamed out upon us, and in the centre of the glare there stood a small man with a very high head, a bristle of red hair all round the fringe of it, and a bald, shining scalp which shot out from among it like a mountain-peak from fir-trees. [...] Nature had given him a pendulous lip, and a too visible line of yellow and irregular teeth, which he strove feebly to conceal by constantly passing his hand over the lower part of his face. In spite of his obtrusive baldness, he gave the impression of youth. In point of fact, he had just turned his thirtieth year. (Doyle 1891, 31)

The tiny foreigner is described accurately, to paint a picture of someone deeply different from the absolutely English Miss Morstan. However, despite his appearance, he is filled with kindness and mannerisms, offering wine to his guests, trying to be as good of a host as he can possibly be. His rather modest villa is quite unremarkable on the outside, but is described as a pure jewel on the inside, because it is filled with artifacts and pieces of art.

The richest and glossiest of curtains and tapestries draped the walls, looped back here and there to expose some richly mounted painting or Oriental vase. The carpet was of amber and black, so soft and so thick that the foot sank pleasantly into it, as into a bed of moss. Two great tiger skins thrown athwart increased the suggestion of Eastern luxury, as did a huge hookah which stood

upon a mat in the corner. A lamp in the fashion of a silver dove was hung from an almost invisible golden wire in the center of the room. As it burned it filled the air with a subtle and aromatic odor. (Doyle 1897)

His house is filled with objects coming from overseas, which however are not displayed to his guests, nor receive the right attention they should. However, the host is instead preoccupied with his health conditions, and his eyes almost sparkle with joy as he learns that Watson is a doctor: they reference heart conditions, which are directly related to anxiety issues, which are crucial to the imperial dilemma. Sholto is, despite indirectly, consumed with guilt for the whole Agra treasure situation. This atypical house, however, is not the only indoor ambience displayed in Holmes' stories.

“A large number of Holmes stories involve such a traditional, quintessentially English manor house or rural farm initially connoting prosperity, ancestry, and tradition. They provide a seemingly safe and protected space – but by repeatedly making these places the sites for inexplicable mysteries and crime, Doyle again and again feeds into contemporary fears of the unknown, the uncanny, the Other.” (Berberich 2019, 61)

By placing the estate in London, at the heart of the Empire, Doyle just fuels the anxieties of the time about a wrathful vengeance coming from the suppressed. By making these homely, safe havens of locations the scene of many awful crimes, Doyle effectively evokes the feeling of *Unheimlich*, transforming a place that is supposed to be close to the readers, known and therefore completely safe, a place of violence and murder. Berberich also makes the case that many of Doyle's novels make clever use

of the scenery to enforce this idea of danger lurking in the heart of England, just like in *The Hound of the Baskervilles*. In the novel set in Dartmoor, there are all the elements typical of Doyle's novel about Imperialism and contamination: the once glorious manor of the Baskervilles has been brought to ruin because of the colonial activities of the family, it has been left behind, in a way. Jack Stapleton, the embodiment of the colonial identity, is a pretender to the inheritance of the Baskervilles and with his mere existence he threatens the national identity of Britain. (Berberich, 57, 2019) When describing Baskerville's Hall, the first impression we are given is that of a once wealthy estate that has been taken over by nature, because of its master's absence: his return, with the wealth obtained in the colonies is the only thing that is able to restore it to its former glory.

The driver pointed with his whip. "Baskerville Hall," said he. Its master had risen and was staring with flushed cheeks and shining eyes. A few minutes later we had reached the lodge-gates, a maze of fantastic tracery in wrought iron, with weather-bitten pillars on either side, blotched with lichens, and surmounted by the boars' heads of the Baskervilles. The lodge was a ruin of black granite and bared ribs of rafters, but facing it was a new building, half constructed, the first fruit of Sir Charles's South-African gold. (Doyle 1902, 95-96)

However, because this wealth comes from the colonies, it also brings forth the ancient curse, that of a horrible crime committed by Sir Henry's ancestor. In reality, it is becoming this dangerous because of the situation with Jack Stapleton's who found in the old legend a way to take revenge for his circumstances. While Berberich

focuses on the Gothicizing of the swamp of Dartmoor, The parallelism made between the sceneries being corrupted by crime and Englishness is quite on point: the whole swamp is described as an unhomely place, thus privy of the classic characteristics of the South-East of England. However, albeit because of all these gothic descriptions the interplay between unhomeliness and the absence of Mother England's gaze can take place: *The Hound of the Baskervilles* plays with the presence of Sherlock Holmes, who is hiding for a major part of the novel. We have already established the connection between England and Sherlock Holmes, and the scene in which the presence of the hidden detective is poignant in making this connection even more vivid. Holmes' return reassures the lost Watson, but at the same time also gives hope to the reader for a swift resolution of the conflict. The situation in Dartmoor is dire: there is an assassin lurking in the shadows, a wolf in sheep's clothing. Watson, despite his best efforts, might not be able to solve the mystery on its own, just like the average person in the Victorian society is unable to cope with the imperial iniquities of the time.

For a moment or two I sat breathless, hardly able to believe my ears. Then my senses and my voice came back to me, while a crushing weight of responsibility seemed in an instant to be lifted from my soul. That cold, incisive, ironical voice could belong to but one man in all the world. "Holmes!" I cried—"Holmes!" "Come out," said he, "and please be careful with the revolver." (Doyle 1901, 188)

Not only Sherlock Holmes reappears in the hour of need, when the mysteries was threatening to end up unsolved, but he is also able, simply by making himself present

in the situation, to reassure the worried Watson, who literally is lifted of his responsibilities because of the presence of the detective. The timely intervention of the detective is representative of the presence of the English government, ready to look after its loyal subjects. Just like England's intervention in everyday life is subtle, yet present, also the colonial returnees and natives are well entwined within Victorian society. In *The Sign of the Four* this process of mixing and intertwining takes place throughout the whole novel, and the most poignant example of this infiltration are the characters of Tonga and Johnatan Small, bringers of death and misfortune upon the Londoners. It is indeed Tonga's dart, coated with a lethal neurotoxin, that horribly deforms Bartholomew Sholto's facial features, making them akin to a mask of horror, and Doyle goes a great length in describing these effects:

“I stooped to the hole and recoiled in horror. Moonlight was streaming into the room, and it was bright with a vague and shifty radiance. Looking straight at me, and suspended, as it were, in the air, our companion Thaddeus. There was the same high, shining head, the same circular bristle of red hair, the same bloodless countenance. The features were set, however, in a horrible smile, a fixed and unnatural grin, which in that still and moonlight room was more jarring to the nerves than any scowl or contortion. So, like was the face to that of our little friend that I looked round at him to make sure that he was indeed with us. Then I recalled to mind that he had mentioned to us that his brother and he were twins.” (Doyle, 1890, 31)

In this passage, described by Watson as he peeks through the hole of the door to Bartholomew's studio, just after Holmes has done the same, two elements immediately come to attention: the first one being the description of the effects of the neurotoxin, and the second one the affirmation that Bartholomew and Thaddeus are twins. The features described by Doyle are deeply unsettling, transforming the facial features of Bartholomew into something terribly different from a human being, yet still human. At the same time, describing the two brothers as identical serves the purpose of enhancing the weirdness of the whole episode, reinforcing the idea that something deeply unsettling is happening within a – once – safe space. These strange occurrences could be considered typical of the gothic novel, bringing the weird, the concept of revenge and strong emotions into decadent places. Doyle however moves the Other, which during that period was characterized as heavily dangerous, to London.

“Many of Holmes mysteries thus combine the Gothicising of the house with the threat of the foreign and unknown in a process of Gothicising Orientalism, an intermingling of the uncanny with the imperial Other. Different from the Gothic tales of the late eighteenth century, where such uncanny sites as ruined castles of labyrinthine houses were usually located abroad to feed their readers' fear of the foreign unknown, Doyle stories bring the foreign 'home', thus emphasising its potentially even greater danger.” (Berberich 2019, 61-62)

This connection between the uncanny and the Other is crucial and fundamental in the process of justifying, albeit keeping in check, the Imperial endeavors. Various of

Doyle's characters returning from the colonies are either criminals or savages. They often are the perpetrators of the crimes that break order in England, and assigning guilt at the end of each novel is fundamental in cleansing the Empire of their own guilt. The search for the culprit serves the purpose of displacing the guilt of the atrocities of colonization, making the angry reaction shown by Tonga, or the returnees from the colonies a display of monstrosity and a justification for hating on the Other. Watson, on his own, stands as the prime example of how degeneration is not an inescapable process: through faith in the Empire, and a strict following of the principles of reason it is possible to escape the fate of savageness and return to nature shown by the many negative characters presented by Doyle. Therefore, the detective fiction serves the purpose of assigning guilt, "by imposing hermeneutic and juridical order upon an unquiet and dangerous world." (Siddiqi, 244). In this particular action Doyle succeeds, despite not taking a definite position through his novels on the imperial occupation. This process of guilt-assigning is not always clear-cut and definite, but in these case studies it is for the most part working towards the justification of the Empire and the dismissal of the Other as dangerous.

### Chapter 3: **Monstrosity, inside evil and outside evil**

When delving into the realm of horror, the initial response is typically one of fear and repulsion, typical of abjection, like Kristeva suggested in her work, *Powers of Horror, an Essay on Abjection*. On the other hand, nowadays Horror as a genre is incredibly popular, with many representations of the genre in popular culture such as movies, books, comics, and every kind of media. Despite the variety of horror representation that are available to the public today, which are often very different from their historical counterparts, the influence of their original representation, of what can be named the "cornerstone trio of horror" is undeniable: the Wolfman and its variation on the theme, the Vampire, and the tragic yet monstrous creation, Frankenstein's monster. These figures came to be fundamental in shaping the landscape of horror, because of their reception and their popularity among the masses. This chapter wants to explore how this horrific representation plays a pivotal role in shaping the conception of Other that was typical of the Victorian period, while making *The Strange case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* the case study for this analysis.

In order to explain how the representation of humanity's suppressed desires in horror became extremely popular and actually still is, this study will first analyze horror as a concept, by isolating what we will refer to as "art-horror", point out how these representation served the purpose of categorizing the Other as dangerous and then the elements that make horror interesting and enticing will be examined, in order to be able to conduct our case study on *The Strange case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*.



According to Twitchell in his *Dreadful Pleasures*, the last decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century were fundamental in the definition of horror as we know it today. His study first gives a broad overview of these fundamental figures of horror, and then it delves on the psychological reasons behind the attraction for horror, the causes that bring people to appreciate the genre. We shall delve into his considerations, to apply them in our field of study and our case study, Stevenson's novella.

Often most, when delving into popular culture and the horror representation, the heroes are rarely remembered, because they pale in comparison to their antagonist, the monsters. He makes a sharp distinction between "classic horror" and "modern horror," which he attributes to respectively before and after the Victorian Age.

But what separates "old" horror from what I call "modern" horror is that, prior to romanticism, horror monsters were usually the means by which the artist held his audience's attention while he prepared his protagonist for heroism. (Twitchell 1985, 25)

Twitchell notices and points out a change of focus from the anthropocentric pre-romanticism era to a representation of monsters that usually made them more memorable than their good counterparts. Probably, that could be attributed to the period in which these novels were written. *The Strange case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, and in general every iteration of the wolfman, could easily be represented as a cautionary tale about the evil lurking inside humanity, the corruption running rampant inside the civilized towns. These tales focus on the duality of humanity, threatening a return to savageness, because of the degenerative force enacted by the

colonies. Instead, *Dracula* by Bram Stoker, is a tale about a danger coming from a foreign country – Transylvania – and could easily be connected to the whole experience about defining the Other coming from afar as extremely dangerous, thus a representation of the outside-evil. The character of Dracula in particular, could be put at the center of a discussion about social anxieties and hierarchies in Victorian Society. The presence of the vampire, instead, could serve the role of a parasitic entity sucking off energy from the mainland, just as – in a way – the empire saw the colonies, but at the same time mimicking the act of exploitation carried out by England.

The late nineteenth century saw the publication of three texts with striking representations of social and somatic domination. In these works, the Victorian paranoia concerning social degeneration, compounded by a nexus of evolutionary, psychoanalytic and imperial discourses, was expressed as a Gothic reimagining of monstrous social hierarchies. (Taylor Brown 2015, 12)

The three works quoted in this passage are *Dracula*, by Bram Stoker, Richard Marsh's *The Beetle*, and Arthur Conan Doyle's *The Parasite*. In his analysis, Emilie Taylor Brown points out that the main social anxieties of the Victorian Age were reflected in the three novels she took as her case study, but that is also true for many other publications of that age. Her analysis also points out the similarities between the actual parasites found in nature and the literary ones: taking into consideration those characteristics, we could easily label many other literary characters as such. One of the main characteristics that Taylor Brown attributes to *Dracula* is his similarity with an actual parasitic disease: it comes from afar, threatening to destroy

Britain from the inside-out. Nonetheless, Dracula also had social aspirations. These are all characteristics shared with many of Sherlock Holmes villains, such as the ones depicted in *The Sign of the Four*, or even *The Hound of the Baskervilles*. And again, that idea holds true even for *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, thus making this parasitic representation of Otherness a recurring element in Victorian Narrative, because of how prominent the anxieties about degeneration were in society: with these elements resonating deeply with the average reader's mind, these stories were successful upon their publication: moreover, the reason for their popularity is also to be found in the overwhelming attraction to horror that started to grow rampant in Victorian society: understanding what draws the human mind to horror is crucial in understanding the process of degeneration in Victorian Society.

In his analysis, Twitchell makes two important statements: the first being the liminal characteristic of monsters, then, he explores the reasons for being drawn to horror stories and fear in general. We shall first understand some of the characteristics of a monster, and then try to give a broad definition of fear, to view them in the light of our case study, *The Strange case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*.

Twitchell states that a monster, to be defined as one, needs to be interstitial, an idea that was particularly unsettling in the Victorian Age, but is nonetheless scary even nowadays, with our belief in science being stronger than ever. This concept of existence between two worlds, the idea of liminality, is a cornerstone of monster studies, as many other studies agree on this broad definition. For instance, Noel Carrol in his *The Philosophy of Horror, or Paradoxes of the heart*, during his research

has also reported this characteristic of duality, or fractured identity typical of the monster. In doing so he explores the concept of *impure* which is like the idea of *abject* explained by Julia Kristeva.

Following Douglas, then, I initially speculate that an object or being is impure if it is categorically interstitial, categorically contradictory, incomplete, or formless. (Carrol 1990, 32)

The theory Carrol is referring to is from Mary Douglas' *Purity and Danger: An analysis of concepts of pollution and Taboo (1966)* in which the idea of impurity and corruption is explored thoroughly. By being impure, and defying categorization, a being can evoke primal fear in the neatly categorized mind of humans. Even more so when considering that most of these stories developed in a setting that is deeply rooted in order and reason, and because of the plethora of scientific and cultural breakthroughs, people are actively looking for something ordered and reassuring. Every monster is liminal, in a way – the witches are from both the human world, because of their ability to act as normal women and at the same time they belong to the world of the Sabbath. Likewise, the mythological vampire is both alive and dead at the same time, a creature existing between two worlds. The wolfman is the prime example of this connection, acting as a missing link between feral instincts and reason, beasts, and humans. Therefore, a monster is something interstitial, capable of evoking strong feelings of fear – because of its ability to provoke both emotional distress and physical harm, while at the same time threaten order with its existence as a liminal being. However, what is the reason for fearing a fictional being in the first place? Of course, many readers are aware that such things such as vampires,

wolfmen and creatures born from body parts do not exist, and were skeptical of the scientific nature of many of those reads: however, with the accounts of stories from the colonies, a place far away and that many had never seen, the newfound beliefs found in *The origin of the species*, being able to read about monsters from the comfort of their own homes, had a totally different appeal. Moreover, going back on the definition of monstrosity, it is not only something that is supernatural that could be considered a monster.

However, even if a case can be made that a monster or a monstrous entity is a necessary condition for horror, such a criterion would not be a sufficient condition. For monsters inhabit all sorts of stories – such as fairy tales, myths and odysseys – that we are not inclined to identify as horror. If we are to exploit usefully the hint that monsters are central to horror, we will have to find a way to distinguish the horror story from mere stories with monsters in them, such as fairy tales. (Carrol 1990, 16)

Indeed, categorizing monsters as something that does not exist, and therefore able to invoke terror, is not enough. Carrol clearly explains that there is a sharp difference between the monster who can evoke fear, terror, and therefore is useful to the imperialistic propaganda in our example, and other kinds of creatures. The key role that these stories had to serve when describing these monstrous characteristics in their negative characters was to shape the antagonists coming from afar as horrible creatures capable of equally horrible acts, thus shaping the collective imagination in a convenient way. Noel Carrol, later in his analysis, fleshes out another characteristic needed by these monsters to be defined as such.

The argument for these results can be neatly summarized by recalling that virtually the same monster—in terms of its appearance—can figure in both a work of horror and a fairy tale. (Carrol 1990, 54)

It is useful to our analysis wondering if the same reactions could be observed in shaping a “human monster” in a Victorian Novel both if coming from the colonies, or rather if coming from the English slums. While this kind of discussion could be considered relevant even nowadays, it could be argued that the monster shaped by Victorian stories had a purpose: that of evoking repulsion and fear. Twitchell makes a good distinction between “art-horror” and “natural horror”. The former is a kind of emotion felt when something tragic happens in our life, such as a natural disaster, the feeling of danger born from being physically or psychologically threatened by something that is happening in real time. It is a strong kind of emotion, but of little relevance to our research. Instead, when talking about art-horror, Carrol is talking about the kind of fear generated from reading, or viewing, something that could be easily reconnected to the forms of horror-art that became popular in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century. Art-horror is the kind of art that evokes an addicting kind of fear, which people are unusually drawn to. It is also worth noting that when speaking about a natural disaster, it could be easy to connect this concept of fear to how pale and little the human is, when compared to entities that are much bigger than humanity itself. This could easily be connected to Lovecraft’s idea of Cosmic Horror, but it is more relevant to our argument to question how some sort of Eco-Horror would fit into the discussion. Ecology and nature, in general, are the closest thing there is to primitivity, which is also a major concept in degeneration. Nature, atavism, and fear

are therefore strictly intertwined, to understand when art-horror is terrifying, and therefore addicting, he uses Dracula as an example, but his analysis is valid to every other instance of the uncanny or monstrous.

I am currently art-horrified by some monster X, say Dracula, if and only if 1) I am in some state of abnormal, physically felt agitation (shuddering, tingling, screaming, etc.) which 2) has been caused by a) the thought: that Dracula is a possible being; and by the evaluative thoughts: that b) said Dracula has the property of being physically (and perhaps morally and socially) threatening in the ways portrayed in the fiction and that c) said Dracula has the property of being impure, where 3) such thoughts are usually accompanied by the desire to avoid the touch of things like Dracula. (Twitchell 1985, 27)

Therefore, the main points identified by Twitchell are reflected both in the reaction caused by such a monster and in its characteristics. The agitation typical of the *fight or flight* typical of the natural world has two definite triggers: the physical one, being scared for the well-being of our body, and the thought of the existence of such monsters, which would be an event probably even more dangerous than death itself, because it would let society collapse on its own. He also reiterates the idea of impurity typical of monsters, and the *abjection*, born from the need to avoid being touched, or touching such monsters. Almost every kind of monster presents such characteristic: the idea of touching one is absolutely repulsing to the human mind – rotting flesh in the zombies, the absurd union of body parts of which the Frankenstein monster is made of, are good examples of this innate repulsion triggered by these liminal creatures. At the same time, in this time, one could argue

that art-horror and natural horror could easily merge into a more modern kind of sensation, originated from the many representations of natural disasters. Although natural horror only refers to things that can be observed in nature, the technological advancements of the medias and human's ability to bring them to the masses, have made horror a more available item of entertainment, thus probably leading Twitchell analysis being a fertile ground for categorization.

Twitchell brings another example, to better show the effects of this repulsion exerted by the monstrous creature, by quoting a piece by *Frankenstein*, by Mary Shelley. In particular, the seconds following the awakening of the monster, in which Doctor Frankenstein starts to realize what his science has done, and how he trespassed into a realm which is not of its competence.

“I had worked hard for nearly two years, for the sole purpose of infusing life into an inanimate body. For this I had deprived myself of rest and health. I had desired it with an ardour that far exceeded moderation; but now that I had finished, the beauty of the dream vanished, and breathless horror and disgust filled my heart. Unable to endure the aspect of the being I had created, I rushed out of the room and continued a long time traversing my bedchamber, unable to compose my mind to sleep. (M. Shelley 1818, 78)

This passage holds all the relevant elements for our study: the monster is a new creation, supposedly born from science and technology, or to be more precise, something that transgresses the borders of science. Moreover, while the immediate reaction is of simple disgust at the idea – and the physical appearance – of what he has created, as soon as the monster enters his bedroom while the doctor's sleeping



and allegedly tries to touch him with his hand, causing a prima reaction from Victor, who immediately flees the room, horrified at the idea of a physical touch of his monster. The concept of abjection and repulsion is immediately shown in this passage, in which the ordinary human shudders and refrains from the touch of the liminal creature. Moreover, Victor immediately assumes that his creation wants to hurt him. It is not difficult to see a parallelism with Imperialism, where the Other is immediately deemed as dangerous and ill-intentioned, while instead the newly created being was simply looking for physical touch. The event is however terrifying because of how it is described from Victor's point of view, who is holding prejudice against his creation, which science gave birth to – however, when the ardor of the discovery has fanned out, only disgust and regret remained in his heart. Frankenstein, Dracula, Jekyll, and Hyde are all examples of art horror, albeit describing different areas of interest, while still converging for our thesis purposes in the concept of categorizing the Other as dangerous.

With this, we can safely conclude that monsters in the literary sense are usually belonging to the wide area of art-horror: a creature generated for this kind of representation is usually brought to life through complex literary and even visual form of arts, ranging from paintings to modern movies representation. We described this sensation of dreadful horror, of shuddering at the mere idea of being touched by a monster – therefore, why are monsters so popular? How come that to this very day, we still remember and are interested in being scared for the simple purpose of being scared? Twitchell identifies three main reasons:

The attraction of Horror can be understood in essentially three ways: (1) as counterphobia or the satisfaction of overcoming objects of fear; (2) as the “return of the repressed” or the compulsive projection of objects of sublimated desire; and (3) as part of a more complicated rite of passage from onanism to reproductive sexuality. (Twitchell 1985, 65)

While Twitchell’s study does not discuss openly the validity of these criteria during the Victorian Age, I believe them to be as relevant then as they are now. The main selling point of horror stories is the chance to overcome human fears from the safety of a book, or another media. It is not difficult to be impressed by reading a poignant line of a horror story, imagining themselves walking down the corridors of the Castle of Otranto – it is, however, not more than that: imagining, thus, completely safe. It is nonetheless a chance for growth, to confront a particular fear and try to overcome it. That obviously generates a feeling of satisfaction, which is fundamental in understanding why horror was so enticing: during the Victorian Age, it also gave a feeling of being safe from these kinds of evil, reassuring the population in a time of uncertainty.

The other two points could easily be explained together, because of how strictly connected they are: horror could be conceived psychologically as a complex rite of passage from onanism to an enactment of the reproductive desires of adolescents. Twitchell affirms that horror stories are usually more popular with that specific demographic, because of the profound interest in “pulling the pop-top” off our urges (Twitchell, 65). Teenagers and in general people who are still growing up find interest in horror because of the similarities they share with the creatures

represented in the novels and on the screen: the wolfman is a good example of this juxtaposition. Both the teenagers and the wolfmen have a body that they cannot control completely, because of the new urges that they are experiencing. Full of possibilities, they are yet to comprehend what their growing body can achieve. While Twitchell discourse seems to focus on young teenagers attending movie representations of classical horror, I believe this concept could also be loosely attached to Victorian Age – not because of the parallelism with sexual desires being repressed, but more with desires in general, being equally repressed. Monsters were free and terrifying, powerful, and capable of incredible feats. The reasons for which monsters were so popular instead of the heroes facing them, is because of the peculiarity of their nature. The Victorian men grew fascinated with these strange creatures and wondered at their existence, both because of the presence of the colonies, which were a suitable home for these creatures, because of how far and exotic they were, and because of the concepts they explored. The stranger from Transylvania, the limits of science and the wonders of the deepest part of human nature.

When talking about giving expression to one's most repressed desires, Dr. Jekyll / Hyde is a prime example of this concept. The basic plot of the story is widely known in popular culture, albeit not in the deepest details: Jekyll transforms into a savage creature, giving way to all its desires, until they both meet their demise. The basic plot, however, does not reveal why the story came to be considered as one of the cornerstones of Victorian Literature: the strange case of Dr Jekyll and Mr. Hyde had every characteristic needed to be successful at that time. The story delved in the

modern setting, which made it more relatable to the audience, and it also was, similarly to detective stories, a story which reflected the Ripper-mania of the age, answering the urge to read about these stories about violence, just like Sherlock Holmes' stories. Moreover, analyzing the themes brought forth by the stories, Dr. Jekyll both explores the limits of science and psychology. At the time of publication, Degeneration studies were spreading through England. As Reid suggested:

Fin de siècle Europe was famously haunted by the fear of degeneration. With its roots in pathological medicine and biology and drawing on the Darwinian mechanism of natural selection, the theory of degeneration amounted to a reassessment of progressive narratives of evolution and a recognition that life did not always advance from the simple to the complex (Reid 2006, 56)

The fear of degeneration, both intended as losing technological advancements and order in society, and as a return of the primitive, are widely diffused in Stevenson's work. Indeed, one of the key concepts expressed in Nordau's work is about relationship of the degenerate individual with society: when looking at this paragraph through the lens of the two characters easily juxtaposed in the novel, such as Utterson and Hyde, it could be easily seen that natural selection and degeneration are crucial in shaping Stevenson's analysis of Victorian hierarchy.

If degeneration is deeper, and ego-mania is stronger, the latter no longer assumes the comparatively innocent form of total absorption in poetic and artistic coolings, but manifests itself as an immorality, which may account to moral madness. The tendency to commit actions injurious to himself or

society is aroused now and then even in a sane man when some obnoxious desire demands gratification, but he has the will and the power to suppress it. The degenerate ego-maniac is too feeble of will to control his impulses, and cannot determine his actions and thoughts by a regard to the welfare of society (Nordau 1892, 259).

Nordau points out that a sane man would never enact in actions that would later damage society. The act of rationally controlling emotions, which is something that Utterson carries out at every action, always taking society and reputation into account, is the exact opposite of what Hyde does: the man acts on his impulses, regardless of the consequences. While the example with Utterson and Hyde is more poignant to my opinion, the same is also true for Jekyll: albeit acting on selfish desires, his studies could be useful for mankind and society, but the doctor is unable to process the consequences of his actions, slowly starting to descent into degeneration himself. Hyde dying, is, after all the realization of the rules of natural selection:

Natural selection will never produce in a being anything injurious to itself, for natural selection acts solely by and for the good of each. No organ will be formed, as Paley has remarked, for the purpose of causing pain or for doing an injury to its possessor. If a fair balance be struck between the good and evil caused by each part, each will be found on the whole advantageous. After the lapse of time, under changing conditions of life, if any part comes to be injurious, it will be modified; or if it be not so, the being will become extinct, as myriads have become extinct. (Darwin 1866, 201)

The debate about which part is the one that is dangerous for the organism is open, in my opinion, because both Jekyll and Hyde have characteristics that make them one and the same, but at the same time, two different entities. While Jekyll has spiraled down into degeneration because of his curiosity and will to shape his negative part in order to get rid of it, Hyde is instead fitter to conquering and invading society, because of his link to the feral world. However, with their demise, the fears that characterized Nordau's work and Victorian society became a reality: therefore, the story that best embodies these fears is our case study, because of its setting and its plot. Stevenson was particularly interested in degeneration studies, both because of their novelties and because of how they reflected the Victorian situation.

As suggested by Reid, Stevenson wrote many letters in which he explores this theme of double consciousness. He often laments having another entity inside of him, called *triple-brute*, and it's not difficult to see the similarities between what he suggests is happening to him and the study on degeneration put in narrative that is *The Strange case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (Reid, 55, 2006). Stevenson describes himself as split into two personalities, one capable of many acts of intellect, such as speaking foreign languages, but nonetheless is a part of himself: this is just one of many representations of degeneration in Stevenson's autobiographical work. The author was concerned with "mental instability and fractured identity" which were the cornerstone of our case study. This interest manifests itself with the connection that the novel has to the various representations of the contrast between inheritance and environment, and at the same time many critics have interpreted Hyde as

“representing the threat of deviance, returned to haunt the middle-class psyche which constructed it” (Reid, 94, 2006). Despite being usually relegated to a superficial battle between good and evil, Hyde’s story is instead a thorough representation of the mental issues of the time, elegantly wrapped in a pseudo-detective story about the horror of the human mind.

Before delving into the plot, it is important to determine which are the main ideas that were circulating regarding degeneration and why they were influential in the context of Victorian novels. Reid makes the case that Lombroso’s theories were heavily relevant in shaping the appearance of Hyde, which resembled more that of a feral ape rather than a man itself (Reid, 95). Because of how widespread the fear of degeneration was, Lombroso’s theories described in his *L'uomo delinquente* (1886) are often put together with the character of Hyde, these studies are relevant in our analysis because they describe physical characteristics leading to criminal behavior. Lombroso was the founder of the Italian school of criminology and many of his theories were the basis for modern criminal anthropology. However, many of the concepts expressed in his most prominent work have been scientifically rejected, despite still holding research value because of its interest in atavism. It should be therefore easy to notice the similarities between Hyde and the perfect criminal described by Lombroso, but as Stephen D. Arata points out in his “The sedulous Ape: Atavism, Professionalism and Stevenson’s Jekyll and Hyde” the most obvious comparison is not always the most interesting:

From the first publications of Stevenson’s novel, readers have noted the similarities between Lombroso’s criminal and the atavistic Mr. Hyde. Less

often noted is how snugly descriptions of criminal deviance fit with longstanding discourses of class in Great Britain. (Arata, 1995, 234)

Arata is referring to the social rupture that took place during the Victorian age, because of the differences between the well-endowed members of society and the working class. While also taking into consideration Nordau's work on the subject, Lombroso's theories were often associated with the class discourse: indeed, these theories found fertile soil in Great Britain's middle-class because of Havelock Ellis's *The Criminal* (1890) and because of how they worked on concepts that were already diffused in society at the time and juxtaposing the criminal with atavism and both with the lower, poorer classes just made the differences between social constructs even more pronounced.

Therefore, what is the role played by Hyde? While it could be just the manifestation of all Dr. Jekyll's repressed desires, he also stands to represent the degenerate aristocracy. There is a stark contrast between Hyde appearance, behavior, and his interests: for example, Arata presents the issue with a poignant example, showcasing a letter exchange between Stevenson and F.W.H. Myers, who had very strong ideas about Dr. Jekyll's brute counterpart. In the discussion, Myers focuses on the lines of degeneration that Hyde's behavior takes, making the case that for instance, in the mauling of Carew's, Stevenson described an "act [that] was untrue to Hyde's nature" (Arata, 236). This is just an example, but many of the points brought forth by Myers focus on this concept: if Hyde stands to be the representation of Hyde's degeneration, he should not be associated with "jaded voluptuaries", such as those who look for satisfaction in art, or erupt in such atavistic representations of



violence. Myers reading of the novel, of this “contradiction” that he points out, brings Arata to an important conclusion:

Edward Hyde may not be an image of the *upright* bourgeois male, but he is decidedly an image of the bourgeois male. While Hyde can be read as the embodiment of the degenerate prole, the decadent aristocrat, or the dissipated aesthete, it is also the case that his violence is largely directed at those same classes. (Arata 1995, 238)

This idea opens many frightening conclusions about how that could have propagated in the middle-class reader’s mind. Seeing the representation of what the aristocrats could become, when exposed to the degenerative force that was at large, made the novel terrifying to say the least. *The strange case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* when assimilated into the degeneration discourse can be read as a thorough representation of the dangers of letting the *Other* corrupt society. While in the end Arata makes the case that Hyde belongs to the upper class nonetheless, he also expresses the idea that he is a magnet for the fear of Others, intended as those not belonging to the upper class:

Mr. Hyde thus acts not just as a magnet for middle-class fears of various Others, but also as an agent of vengeance. He is the scourge of a (bourgeois) God, punishing those who threaten patriarchal code and custom. Indeed, the noun used most often in the story to describe Hyde is not “monster” or “villain” but- gentleman. (Arata 1995, 238)

The uncanniness in Hyde's behavior is even more frightening, when taking into consideration a Victorian reader's perspective. Jekyll, a respectable gentleman, is hiding a new kind of gentleman inside of himself, who acts on his desires and punishes those who are different from him. In his first draft of the novel, Stevenson had Hyde murder Mr. Lemsome, which had all the characteristics of the aesthete so despised by Myers: hence, the reason for which Arata labels Hyde as an agent of vengeance. While this representation of Other well fits Victorian society, it could also be extended to the other living overseas, in the colonies. To this reader, Jekyll and Hyde also feels like a cautionary tale about degeneration.

The basic plot for Jekyll and Hyde is quite simple, at first glance. The everlasting battle between good and evil, takes place in Dr. Jekyll's mind and body. However, as the story progresses, the simple, yet brave premise, develops into an analysis of the limits of the human mind, and most importantly, the consequences of repression and tampering with liminality. The narrative brings together mystery, philosophy, and horror, also because of the careful choice of point of view and style of narration. Most of the novel is indeed told from John Utterson's perspective – a lawyer, standing to represent the good citizens of London, the upstanding society. Albeit acting as a stand-in for reason and order, just as Sherlock Holmes, differently from his counterpart, the good lawyer is not actually interested in finding out the truth: his interest lies mainly in defending his friend's good name. One example of this attitude shown by Utterson can be found in the fifth chapter of the novel, shortly after the Carew murder case had made the news.

The lawyer listened gloomily; he did not like his friend's feverish manner. "You seem pretty sure of him," said he; "and for your sake, I hope you may be right. If it came to a trial, your name might appear." (Stevenson 1886, 27)

Even though an awful murder had just taken place, the main piece of warning that Utterson brings to his friend is not about being careful because of the danger that lurks in the streets, but immediately brings his profession to the table, warning his friend against the danger of being publicly accused of anything. As expressed by Irving S. Sapsonik, this is a story about gentlemen, and the first one being introduced to the reader, the lawyer, Utterson. The very first thing that the reader comes to know about this man, is his profession:

Mr. Utterson the lawyer was a man of a rugged countenance that was never lighted by a smile; cold, scanty and embarrassed in discourse; backward in sentiment; lean, long, dusty, dreary and yet somehow lovable. (Stevenson 1886, 5)

The first words written about the point of view character of the novel are his profession, which defined his personality. The character of Utterson would have worked in a completely different manner if he had any other profession than Lawyer. In characterizing him like that, Stevenson can make him the moral compass of society itself, since Utterson is, because of his job, knowledgeable of every inch of the moral spectrum of Victorian society. He worries mainly about Jekyll's reputation because it was the thing that mattered the most during that period: when taking into consideration the danger Hyde poses to his friend, the first thing the lawyer thinks of is not the physical danger it may represent, despite having known of his recent

murder. The warning Utterson brings forth is immediately that of the brutal man tarnishing Jekyll's reputation, as if that is the thing that matters the most. Utterson also has the role of filtering what is told in the story through his point of view, which might be more akin to those that a respectable Victorian man could have because of his profession and respectability. The narrative also works because of his point of view, which is very different from the one that Richard Enfield could have had, for example: despite him being the one who witnessed Hyde's crime, his use as a point of view for the most violent crimes is crucial because of how well it makes the importance of reputation resound. While Utterson has bonds of friendship with Jekyll, Enfield could stand in for the public eye, because he is just a distant relative of Mr. Utterson, and not a friend of the esteemed doctor. Also, Saposnik values Enfield point of view even more, because of how the man grew disillusioned with the world:

Thus, when he describes Hyde as "displeasing" and "detestable", his verdict may be seen as more objective and more knowledgeable than his kinsman's.  
(Saposnik 1971, 720)

Richard Enfield is defined as "a well-known man about town", and therefore has the right kind of life experience to judge what he sees with enough detachment: the fact that this kind of man is terrified by Hyde and his actions makes the transformation from the mite doctor to the ruthless Hyde even more frightening to a Victorian eye. Yet, despite all these qualities as an observer, not even Enfield is able to grasp the true essence of Hyde, because of his characteristics as a monster: Arata suggests that this difficulty in shaping the monster comes from how much Hyde represents "... a bourgeois readership's worst fears about both a marauding and immoral underclass

and a dissipated and immoral leisure class." (Arata, 235, 1995). Albeit loosely, Arata makes the case that Hyde is none other than a degenerated gentleman, differentiating between his behavior and his vices and interests – and this kind of interpretation was even the more frightening to a Victorian man than the classic monstrous interpretation. Despite having an unusual appearance, escaping categorization such as all monsters do, Hyde still has all the characteristics of a professional man – and that could make the reader think about the risk of becoming Hyde, without needing a potion. Degeneration could indeed be considered a silent phenomenon, infecting the leisured population slowly. Just like they would of a monster, none of the renowned professionals are able to make out the exact figure of Hyde, with him escaping categorization fiercely.

In fact, no one can accurately describe him. "He must be deformed somewhere," asserts Enfield. "He gives a strong feeling of deformity, though I couldn't specify the point. He's an extraordinary-looking man, and yet I really can name nothing out of the way. No, sir ... I can't describe him" (34). Enfield's puzzled response finds its counterparts in the nearly identical statements of Utterson (40), Poole (68), and Lanyon (77-78). In Utterson's dream Hyde "had no face, or one that baffled him and melted before his eyes" (36-37). "The few who could describe him differed widely," agreeing only that some "unexpressed deformity" lurked in his countenance (50). (Arata 1995, 236)

What brings these characters together is their professionalism: they are all the stereotypical gentleman for the most part of their character, thus a multi-faceted representation of Victorian society. The fact that these character, despite their ability

to excel in their profession are unable to make a clear-cut description of the monster makes Hyde the ultimate representative of the degenerative force at work, having turned Dr. Jekyll into society's worst fear: an unhinged force of destruction and retribution. This is a failure even on Utterson's part, despite him being the reliable narrator that is supposed to deliver us the most truthful representation of reality, because he is our point of view character: the whole part about revealing Mr. Hyde begins with a description of his surroundings, slowly working its way towards the morbid curiosity that envelops the man's appearance.

From that time forward, Mr. Utterson began to haunt the door in the by-street of shops. In the morning before office hours, at noon when business was plenty, and time scarce, at night under the face of the fogged city moon, by all lights and at all hours of solitude or concourse, the lawyer was to be found on his chosen post. "If he be Mr. Hyde, he had thought, I shall be Mr. Seek."  
(Stevenson 1886, 10)

Apart from the wordplay, this passage is relevant to making Utterson completely blend with his surroundings, making him truly a part of the night landscape – it is only there that a character like him can meet Mr. Hyde, a being that had existed only in newspaper accounts and tales, up to that point. The gothic aura that characterizes the encounter between the two gentlemen sets the tone for the rest of their dialogue. The first reaction displayed by Hyde is not one typical of man, rather belonging to the animal realm.

Mr. Utterson stepped out and touched him on the shoulder as he passed. "Mr. Hyde, I think?" Mr. Hyde shrank back with a hissing intake of the breath. But

his fear was only momentary; and though he did not look the lawyer in the face, he answered coolly enough: "That is my name. What do you want?"  
(Stevenson 1886, 10)

Because he is scared by the sudden appearance of the lawyer, the first reaction shown by Hyde is that of hissing, which is not a verb usually associated with humans. Rather, it is typical of snakes, which are associated with danger, but above everything else they are an invasive species, capable of replacing themselves with the people they are invading. This single verb could also refer to the biblical representation of the original sin: therefore, it could be inferred that Hyde is a threatening presence on many sides, ranging from moral, to physical. The association with the animal realm when referring to Hyde is plentiful in the novel but reaches its culmination at the description of Carew's murder.

The old gentleman took a step back, with the air of one very much surprised and a trifle hurt; and at that Mr. Hyde broke out of all bounds and clubbed him to the earth. And next moment, with ape-like fury, he was trampling his victim under foot and hailing down a storm of blows, under which the bones were audibly shattered, and the body jumped upon the roadway. At the horror of these sights and sounds, the maid fainted. (Stevenson 1886, 42)

The maid's account describes a man who is closer to the animal realm rather to that of Victorian England: this event takes place after Utterson's initial meeting with the gentleman, however the reader could easily deduce that Hyde was up to no good, as the association with the animal realm serve as a warning to what will unfold later. Going back to Utterson's encounter with Hyde, it can be observed that there is a faint

presence of mannerism in the brute's behavior. Despite being taken by surprise by Utterson's sudden appearance and shrinking back in a feral way, Hyde soon regains composure, because despite being an individual in the process of experiencing degeneration, he is still upholding to his true essence, that of a gentleman. Indeed, despite being described as a feral individual and tainting himself with horrible crimes as the story goes on, he seems to be valuing truth above everything else, and gets angry when Utterson half-lies to him about the way in which he got to know the mysterious man.

“Common friends,” echoed Mr. Hyde, a little hoarsely. “Who are they?” “Jekyll, for instance.” said the lawyer. “He never told you,” Cried Mr. Hyde, with a flush of anger. “I did not think you would have lied.” “Come,” said Mr. Utterson, “that is not fitting language.” The other snarled aloud into a savage laugh; and the next moment, with extraordinary quickness, he had unlocked the door and disappeared into the house. (Stevenson 1886, 10)

The verb “to snarl” is used once again to put an emphasis on the role as a bridge between feral and human that Hyde has taken on, despite his best efforts to disguise himself as a human gentleman. The encounter is abruptly closed by Hyde, which leaves Utterson wondering about what he just witnessed. His description of Hyde's features is left at the end of the encounter, probably to further enhance the aura of mystery about the man.

Mr. Hyde was pale and dwarfish, he gave an impression of deformity without any nameable malformation, he had a displeasing smile, he had borne himself to the lawyer with a sort of murderous mixture of timidity and boldness, and



he spoke with a husky, whispering and somewhat broken voice; all these were points against him, but not all of these together could explain the hitherto unknown disgust, loathing and fear with which Mr. Utterson regarded him. "There must be something else," said the perplexed gentleman. "There is something more, if I could find a name for it. God bless me, the man seems hardly human! Something troglodytic, shall we say? [...]. (Stevenson 1886, 11)

Utterson description is filled with elements that could easily summarize the idea that Londoners had of anyone who came from the outside. Albeit Mr. Hyde truly shows these characteristics, the lawyer is answering on these elements from an instinctual basis, an impression he had from their short exchange. Mr. Hyde is giving voice to every fear about degeneration that characterizes Victorian society, both about the extinction of their species because of the infiltration of the inferior, yet stronger populations from overseas, and because of the disintegration of morals originated from opulence.

Moreover, this passage also serves the purpose of further establishing Hyde's role as a creature that exists on the border of realities, both on one side and the other, just like the monsters we have tried to categorize. Indeed, since their first encounter, the brutal gentleman has been firstly living only in verbal accounts, then is almost emerging from the night after hiding himself in the streets, and finally haunts Utterson's dreams and reflections. This haunting begins on the first pages of the novel, as the lawyer's sleep is disturbed because of the great turmoil the change in his client's will has brought him.

That was the amount of information that the lawyer carried back with him to the great, dark bed on which he tossed to and fro, until the small hours of the morning began to grow large. It was a night of little ease to his toiling mind, toiling in mere darkness and besieged by questions. (Stevenson 1886, 7)

Indeed, this kind of dreamlike representation of the wicked gentleman, who is initially shrouded in mystery that soon becomes horror and uncanniness, is repeated throughout the novel, until it culminates during the trip Utterson makes with Scotland Yard towards Jekyll's house, after the Carew's murder. Everything that Utterson feared, and predicted in his dream was becoming true, as Hyde had finally invaded reality, breaking free of the limitations of the night.

The dismal quarter of Soho seen under these changing glimpses, with its muddy ways, and slatternly passengers, and its lamps, which had never been extinguished or had been kindled afresh to combat this mournful reinvasion of darkness, seemed, in the lawyer's eyes, like a district of some city in a nightmare. (Stevenson 1886, 19)

The vocabulary used points in creating a sort of ephemeral London, existing in between two realms. This imagery could be linked to the transformation that Jekyll is going through, slowly transitioning towards something irreparable. And it probably is already too late, because while the lawyer is worrying about his client's reputation, "the fog lifted a little [...]" (Stevenson, 1886, 20) and then thickens again as they approach Jekyll's house. Experiencing London in such a state is a weird feeling, which reflects the definition of Unheimlich perfectly: a familiar

setting, tainted by something that makes it stand out, which is the threat of Hyde's incursion. The Unheimlich and the dangers of degeneration are woven together in describing the interaction between Utterson and Hyde, making them a dichotomy needed to understand the intricacies of the relationships between the so-called invading force of colonization and Empire.

Despite being the reliable narrator, however, it is important to note that like every human being, Utterson is flawed. Unlike Sherlock Holmes, who in despite faults, which almost become features needed to solve the mysteries, is able to find the answer to every mystery lying around in his world, the atypical detective described by Stevenson is unable to solve anything: indeed the chapter titled *The Last Night*, which would serve the role of a display of the detective skills in any other work of detective fiction instead exacerbates Utterson unwillingness to unveil the truth, making his investigation not sufficient, or rather, quite lacking.

Mr. Utterson was sitting by his fireside one evening after dinner, when he was surprised to receive a visit from Poole. "Bless me, Poole, what brings you here?" he cried; and then taking a second look at him, "What ails you?" he added; "is the doctor ill?" "Mr. Utterson," said the man, "there is something wrong." "Take a seat, and here is a glass of wine for you." said the lawyer. "Now, take your time, and tell me plainly what you want." (Stevenson 1886, 61)

The beginning of the chapter sets the tone and the roles the characters will be having for the remainder of the novel, until its disastrous ending. While the old servant is scared for his Master, Utterson seems to not have realized that

something is deeply off. Even in this situation of danger, he decides to resort to his mannerism by offering a glass of wine to the scared servant, which remains untasted for the whole exchange. After having entered Jekyll's residence, all the servants are stacked together, trying to face the atmosphere that is becoming heavier and heavier.

"It's all right," said Poole. "Open the door." The hall, when they entered it, was brightly lighted up; the fire was built high; and about the hearth the whole of the servants, men and women, stood huddled together like a flock of sheep. At the sight of Mr. Utterson, the housemaid broke into hysterical whimpering; and the cook, crying out "Bless God! It's Mr. Utterson," ran forward as if to take him in her arms. "What, what? Are you all here?" said the lawyer peevishly. "Very irregular, very unseemly; your master would be far from pleased." "They're all afraid," said Poole. Blank silence followed, no one protesting; only the maid lifted her voice and now wept loudly.

(Stevenson 1886, 63)

The first thing Utterson worries about is not the unsettling scene of all these people gathered together to muster the courage to face what is happening in the household, rather that the master would not be happy with how his servants are acting. Then again, Utterson seems to act as if he was oblivious to the things unfolding in his friend's house, despite being the one who has followed the events since the beginning, being a close witness to many of Hyde's atrocities. Both Hyde and Utterson play a major role in shaping Stevenson's ideas of Degeneration: the lawyer seems to be willingly shunning away from the truth, and it is strange. He

has a similar role to the detective in other detective stories, yet his analysis is somehow impaired by his absolute desire to maintain decorum and reputation. Lying behind the laboratory's door there is something that might completely shatter Jekyll's reputation, which the lawyer is terrified of discovering. Indeed, while Poole is explaining to Utterson that he has seen the deformity in his master first-hand, Utterson hypothesizes wild conjectures about a strange illness, almost ignoring the old servant's account.

“These are all very strange circumstances,” said Mr. Utterson, “but I think I begin to see daylight. Your master, Poole, is plainly seized with one of those maladies that both torture and deform the sufferer; hence, for aught I know, the alteration of his voice; hence the mask and the avoidance of his friends; hence his eagerness to find this drug, by means of which the poor soul retains some hope of ultimate recovery – God grant that he be not deceived! There is my explanation; it is sad enough, Poole, ay, and appalling to consider; but it is plain and natural, hangs well together, and delivers us from all exorbitant alarms.” (Stevenson 1886, 66)

The characteristics enumerated by Utterson are similar to those explained by Nordau in his work, “Degeneration”. Indeed, the unknown illness described by Utterson deforms and makes the diseased go through unbearable suffering. Nordau instead paints the picture of someone who detaches completely from society and is incurably different from everyone else in society.

Degeneracy betrays itself among men in certain physical characteristics, which are denominated ‘stigmata,’ or brand-marks—an unfortunate term

derived from a false idea, as if degeneracy were necessarily the consequence of a fault, and the indication of it a punishment. Such stigmata consist of deformities, multiple and stunted growths in the first line of asymmetry [...].  
(Nordau 1892, 16-17)

The physical form of degeneration described by Nordau implies the existence of a new form of human, threatening to make society collapse. And like a prophecy, Jekyll can stop Hyde from taking over completely by killing himself, just like severing a cancerous arm would save the patient. Jekyll transformation into a degenerate individual is therefore at the final stages during the scene that unfolds before his laboratory's door, and it is too late to act on it – Utterson takes the axe into his hands to take down the door, but it is too late for it to matter anymore. Once the lawyer and the servants enter the laboratory, they are met with the corpse of Mr. Hyde, and two letters that constitute the following chapters, which unveil the truth that Utterson has been escaping from for the whole time. Mr. Hyde has been existing, hiding in its laboratory, for a long time now: just like the seeds of degeneration have been planted long time ago in Britain, growing and slowly starting to take over arts and literature, and according to Nordau enough to take over every movement labeled as *fin-de-siècle*.

There might be a sure means of proving that the application of the term 'degenerates' to the originators of all the *fin-de-siècle* movements in art and literature is not arbitrary, that it is no baseless conceit, but a fact; and that would be a careful physical examination of the persons concerned, and an inquiry into their pedigree. (Nordau 1892, 17)

Nordau links back to Lombroso's theories, almost reprimanding him for his restricted application of such a science. However, his thinking is that degenerates are rooted in society and are spreading their ideas and illness. In Stevenson, however, this expansion and parasitic invasion is stopped by Jekyll, who ends his life and Hyde's.

Having examined the elements that make Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde a study of human degeneration, we now need to consider why it is so deeply rooted in the imperialist discourse. That will be done by first examining the dualistic nature of Jekyll and Hyde, and then by focusing on the author itself, Stevenson, and how his personal life and experiences affected his late production and his imperialistic views.

For starters, it is necessary to express how, even on surface level, the dualistic nature of Jekyll and Hyde could be perceived as a metaphor for imperialism itself. There is the respectable Dr. Jekyll, who serves as a stand-in for the colonizers – set to export culture, innovative technologies, and western culture overseas. On the other side, the much more brutal Mr. Hyde is instead the representation of the more brutal aspects of imperialism, such as exploitation, violence and the relentless search for wealth and profit. The case has been made that Jekyll and Hyde are not two distinct personas, but more of a single entity, divided in the middle but still strictly intertwined. And while many hypotheses about this Jekyll-Hyde relationship have been made, I believe the most fitting for our example is that Jekyll and Hyde are none other than the same entity, that slowly transforms the peaceful and progressive colonizer into the ruthless imperialist. The concept of transformation, moreover, fits

well in this example because of how even in the context of imperialism, the transition from one figure to the other is slow and happening little by little, but at the same time is astonishingly clear-cut. These entities moreover seem to exist in symbiosis, or even better, in a dependency relationship: at the beginning Jekyll, the peaceful colonizer, seems to be in control of Hyde, the ruthless imperialist, but just as in the novel, it soon becomes clear that the most violent one is unrestrainable – control is precarious, and the colonizer force is set to wreak havoc. This reading key gives perspective on the way the façade of progress and benevolence works wonders in concealing the true nature of imperialism, the exploitative and harmful intentions.

When talking about the intricacies of colonialism, it is necessary to bring into the colonial discourse the idea of decolonial studies, typical of the late 20<sup>th</sup> century. This kind of study originated from the need to answer the Western perspective shaped by centuries of Western domination. For example, it puts into perspective the idea that modernity is not always positive but could also lead to many aspects typical of degeneration.

"Prior to Quijano's work, the Peruvian intellectual and activist José Carlos Mariátegui (1894-1930) had raised questions of racism, land possession, and colonialism, which Quijano reworked under the headings of modernity, coloniality, and decoloniality" (Mignolo 2021, 3)

The themes brought in in these studies are reflected in the Victorian propaganda of the time: racism, despite being rooted in history, was the centerpiece of all the passages we have examined, becoming a pillar of modernity as it was intended. The imperial expansion came with the need to characterize the unknown stranger as



someone dangerous, who threatened the Empire, and thus had to be restrained. Decoloniality is based off the idea of removing the norms established by Europe in the context of imperial expansion and should probably be brought into discussion every time the colonial discourse is taken into consideration. This kind of propaganda is typical of colonization, and therefore decolonial thinking is needed to address it properly.

Quijano reframed development in terms of modernity and underdevelopment in terms of coloniality. The implication was that coloniality, being the darker side of modernity, would not allow underdeveloped countries to develop, because development needed underdevelopment for its very enactment. (Mignolo 2021, 12)

This connection, again, proves to be crucial to our analysis of Victorian literature: by representing England, through the positive characters, as a force of retribution and justice, restoring the order that the monstrous and abject foreigners have destroyed, the novels enact coloniality, shaping the story to the Empire convenience. Whether this is completely intentional, then, is a subject worth discussing, but it should be examined separately for each case. As Mignolo points out, there lies the inherent hypocrisy in the imperialistic agenda: to shape these positive characters as such, an antagonist is needed, a population that is described as awful and monstrous to make the contrast between foreigners and Londoners even more evident. Regardless of how cunning and capable Stapleton is in "The Hound of the Baskervilles" his defeat is absolute and crushing: both because of how evil and despicable the character is, and because of Sherlock Holmes' capabilities. This process could very well be

categorized as the coloniality process that was brought forth during the Victorian Age.

“As soon as coloniality becomes a point of reflection, decolonial thinking is enacted, for the simple reason that coloniality is a decolonial concept”  
(Mignolo 2021, 12)

Therefore, to understand what lies beyond the colonial discussion in these novels, it is necessary to consider this also from the viewpoint of coloniality. In Stevenson’s works and, as well in Conan Doyle’s, this process is fleshed out, despite their propaganda acting towards the opposite side: it is much more evident in Stevenson’s post-Samoa works, and it could be argued that Doyle’s efforts in killing off Sherlock Holmes could stem also from his will to adapt his point of view.

Stevenson, born in 1850 was as many authors a son of his time: he was set to inherit the family lighthouse engineering business, but had other ideas in mind: as suggested by John Herdman in his *The double in Nineteenth Century Fiction* the young Stevenson was immediately interested in the concept of double, beginning from the letters he exchanged with many authors of his times and his gothic production.

“Stevenson fell heir to the richest psychological insights of the imaginative exploration of mental and moral duality. He was also, however, deeply interested in the new discoveries of scientific psychology, and his most dualistic creation were, according to his life, inspired by the work of the French psychologists; towards the end of his life, he carried on a

correspondence with F.W.H. Myers, one of the most respected figures in the contemporary psychological world.” (Herdman 1990, 127)

This morbid interest never dimmed out throughout his whole life, as shown in his novels. Also because of the need of a more suitable climate for his health, Stevenson moved to Samoa in 1889. That became an occasion for cultural development, since being able to witness firsthand the kind of territory that was linked to the discourse of degeneration was something that not everyone could experience directly. The author indeed soon became strictly concerned with the Island’s people and politics, and created many writings about it, such as “The Ebb-tide” and “The beach of Falesà”. The latter is a perfect example of how Stevenson’s view and way of experiencing degeneration changed because of his time in the pacific: as suggested by Philips, the novel represents western character who are already degenerated, putting on display their worst characteristics. This is extremely relevant when taking into consideration that the degenerative effect of the colonies is not something they had experienced before showing such negative characteristics, but instead they are already showing this kind of ruthless behavior, thus making the case that the colonies’ presence has yet to exert its alleged degenerative force upon those characters.

Indeed, all the western characters in this story are either ethically, morally, or physically wanting, and often all three. Case and Wiltshire compete viciously with each other for local trade, physically acting out the competitive principle of capitalism. Tarleton is a hypocrite willing to encourage and profit from Wiltshire’s struggle with Case, while preaching peace and forgiveness to the

islanders. Galuchet, the local French Catholic missionary, is 'so dirty you could have written with him on a piece of paper' (Falesà, 115). (Philips 2007, 25)

Differently from the representations made by many of his contemporaries such as Conan Doyle, the Westerners represented by Stevenson are deeply flawed and corrupted by greed and capitalism. His representation of the human, but still virtuous Dr. Jekyll is slowly fading in favor of this ruthless colonizer. Because of his shift in perception and opinion about progress and the colonizer propaganda, Stevenson came to dislike civilization in general.

In September 1890 he wrote: "our civilization is a hollow fraud, all the fun of life is lost by it, all it gains is that a larger number of persons can continue to be contemporaneously unhappy on the surface of the globe" in Samoa, by contrast, one could see a "healthy and happy people". In 1892 Stevenson again wrote dismissively of "civilisation, if you take any store in that fraud, which I do not. I always thought I didn't. now I know." Overall, his attitude was summed up in the succinct judgement: Civilization is rot. (Roslyn 2010, 119)

While the whole passage examined by Roslyn Joyce is full of meaning, the word used at the end by Stevenson is crucial to our analysis of degeneration. This analysis of western culture is being written from the peaceful Samoa, a place in which the author had to retire because of his chronic illness – he found shelter in the allegedly uncivilized island, which was painted as a place full of savages by the Western propaganda: however, Stevenson grew in love with the place, to the point that he was able to identify the irreparable state in which his own society was in: degeneration

was slowly corrupting every layer of society, threatening its collapse. It could be argued that Stevenson perceived degeneration as a byproduct of colonialism, because of how corrupted Victorian society turned out to be, as it was represented in his post-Samoa works.

In conclusion, *Jekyll and Hyde* played a pivotal role in shaping the relationship between the process of characterizing the Other as dangerous and Victorian society. The simple fact that Hyde form is monstrous is crucial in understanding how the Victorian society viewed the Other and whatever was different from them. The many descriptions given by the character in the novel itself are of something that they have not fully discerned. The novel's overwhelming popularity and its deep roots in the Victorian setting make the imperialist discourse even more relevant to this context: *Jekyll and Hyde* serve the purpose of justifying or at its worst explaining the imperial setting and how those atrocities reverberated in Victorian society, because of the importance of reputation and appearance. During Stevenson's overseas trip, his ideology about imperialism slowly changed because of the new perspective he was able to acquire that is also true for other authors, such as Arthur Conan Doyle, as we will examine in the next chapter.

#### Chapter 4: **The mummy and the change of perspective**

Throughout this thesis we have discussed how many novels written during the Victorian Age served their role as a negative representation of the colonies, to justify – or maybe just hide – the questionable actions that the colonizers undertook to further expand their domain over the newly discovered lands. However, that perspective slowly started to change as the time passed, as we have examined in Stevenson. His worldview slowly became more lenient towards the colonies themselves, because of his life experience, and his works in a likely manner became more accurate in representing the differences between the colonies and the western culture. We could argue that the shift from making those novels a coping mechanism became even more apparent towards the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century – in Stevenson it could be easily noticed with novels such as *The Beach of Falesà*, which brings to the table a clear change of perspectives on the subject, also because of the settings. For this chapter, instead, we will examine *Lot 249* by Arthur Conan Doyle, trying to put a focus on how it shaped an important part of horror literature throughout the years, and why the novel serves a role in defining this passage from justification to acceptance of the role the Empire had in the representation of Imperialism.

In *Lot 249* the theme of imperialism is less subtle than in other novels: the centerpiece of this short story is indeed the exploitation of magic and foreign artifacts coming from Ancient Egypt, which become instrumental to carry Edward Bellingham's thirst for revenge. We will examine the complex intertwining between magic, gothic elements and the monster that Bellingham exploits, the mummy, to

highlight how this relationship is highly reminiscent of the one between Empire and colonies. The story takes place at Oxford University, where the main characters are three students who are different from one another: our protagonist, Abercrombie Smith, technically acts as our point of view character, and it is easy to spot a few similarities with Conan Doyle's most famous character, Sherlock Holmes.

Much like the renowned detective, Smith has exceptional observational skills and could be represented as a stand-in for reason and the Victorian characteristics of logic. The simple fact that Smith is smoking a "briar-root pipe" (A.C. Doyle, 3, 1892) could be a nod to Sherlock Holmes, because of the similar role they play in their stories. However, while the detective from Baker Street has shown a strong resistance to everything that is supernatural, as in *The Hound of the Baskervilles*, Abercrombie Smith is less resistant in that category, being easily fascinated by that which exists beyond the curtain of reason and logic. He is indeed a bit more human than the perfect, yet full of vices, detective: as soon as the boundary between the natural and the supernatural is transgressed, indeed:

Smith is submerged in fear and anxiety, he loses his human rationality, his bodily and mental stability. Completely and decisively defeated by the uncontrollable forces of the Orient [...]. (Romeo 2013, 352)

He acts quite the opposite of how Sherlock Holmes acted during his experience with the alleged supernatural: the detective kept his temper and wits about him for the whole duration of the segment, despite the danger. Smith, instead, maybe also because of his status as a young student, as soon as he gets the chance to destroy every single piece of the mummy, he can get his hands on it. The connection between

Smith and Sherlock Holmes, with the human fear that characterizes the first and the utter refusal of the supernatural's existence by the other, puts the focus on the exploration of supernatural responses in literature. The story works, and ultimately fails on purpose in the process of displacing the guilt, because Smith is a character that is immensely close to the middle Englishman, with its flaws. His fear can drive the story towards the uncanny and the monstrous, which in this context are crucial in an imperialistic setting. Smith reaction then symbolizes the era's anxieties about degeneration, however reminding the reader that the past is going to be haunting the future soon enough.

The mummy, therefore, is a monstrous entity that is exploited by Bellingham, but in the end seems to be the one controlling the Englishman through its connection to ancient magic: it is the ultimate symbol of revenge, making the prophecies about Degeneration almost come true.

Monstrosity, repulsion, and oxymoronic relationships characterize the depiction of the mummy, whose textualization emphasizes one of the major themes central to late Victorian ghost stories, that is revenge as the most primitive and punitive instinct, the impulse to inflict upon others, the same punishment one has received. (Romeo 2013, 350)

The mummy, just like the most famous representations of the Vampire, serves the purpose of representing the foreign culture, often described as monstrous because of the colonizers purpose. We have brought many examples of the effect of propaganda on what is characterized as Other, and these monsters in particular share many characteristics that make them a good fit for conveying the message of



how dangerous the Other is. Both the mummy and the Vampire come from a foreign country, and they threaten stability with their presence. However, the most important characteristic pointed out by Romeo in her article is that the mummy in this story is a means of revenge, therefore enacting the righteous retribution that the colonizers deserve. Having defined the relationship between colonizers and colonized as one of fear and revenge, such a story could be interpreted as a natural progression of Doyle view on imperialism when taking into consideration the Sherlock Holmes stories. While in *The Sign of the Four* and *The Hound of The Baskervilles* the colonies are represented as the place from which the corruption is originated, which slowly infects England like a disease, here the culture and religion of Egypt are instrumentalized to conduct the twisted desires of Bellingham.

Although the case can be made that “the mummy [...] is a permanent artifact which threatens the standardization and alleged impermanence of British commodities” (M. Romeo, 249, 2013) thus making this analysis quite like the conclusion we reached in the prior chapter, this kind of perspective can be turned on its own. The mummy and the ancient magic which Bellingham uses, are nothing more than an instrument, which is utilized by the wretched, demonic man to carry out his desires. In some way, it could also be argued that the mummy shares many similarities with Tonga, from *The Sign of the Four*, both of them in a way working with a white man in order to carry out nefarious deeds: the difference in this dichotomies is however crucial: while Tonga willingly works for the man who has been allegedly corrupted by his experiences with the colonies, the mummy is usually an inanimate object, and the need to grab a corpse from the realm of the dead, wake

it up with magic, serves the purpose of making the coping mechanism engine fall apart. The mummy serves not as an agent of vengeance, because it does not have a will of its own – it is commanded by Bellingham’s magic and haunts the English men living in the tower because of that. This simple displacement of guilt serves the purpose of making the complex mechanism fall apart completely.

Having selected the uncanny mummy as the medium of this representation, moreover, serves its purpose in strengthening the connection with the phenomenon of degeneration described by Max Nordau in his work, *Degeneration*. This begins with its physical appearance, uncanny because of the craftsmanship that made it both decay and still in time, to the final act of destroying the mummy, is an important representation of the dangers of degeneration as explained by Nordau. By juxtaposing the short story by Doyle and the essay it becomes clear how the mummy, acting as a dangerous threat throughout the whole story, becomes the very incarnation of the dangerous process of degeneration. We will examine it from four point of views: the first one is the contrast between technological advancement and magic, then the cultural and moral degeneration that characterizes the figure of the mummy and finally the act of destruction itself, trying to give closure to the frightening story.

For starters, the introduction of magic in the story, albeit directly linked to the cultural artifact that is the mummy, is a stark contrast with Doyle’s usual literary production: with his most famous character being a detective who could not be further from the supernatural, delving directly into mummies and magic could seem strange for the author: however, the horror comes not only from the physical and

emotional threat, but also from many other perspectives. One among all, is the potential reversal of progress that relying on this ancient magic could bring. Victorian society was built upon the strange equilibrium between workforce and industry: bringing into the equation the complex artifact that is the mummy makes room for an interesting debate.

The impressive craftsmanship of mummies provokes responses that marry aesthetic pleasure with repulsion...Victorians seized on the thought of mummies as commodities in order to avoid thinking of them as things created and with creative capacities. (Briefel 2008, 264-265).

Victorian society was enthralled, just like us today, with the complexity of the mummy as an act of craftsmanship, despite it being a macabre practice: it is undeniable that it required specific medical and chemical knowledge to pull off such a feat. It was at the same time a piece of art and an object of repulsion because it was made from human remains. Being nothing more than human remains, they reminded the observer of the fragility of life, being easily eerie and uncanny because of their stillness and existence between the realm of life and death. The decaying process was halted, thus making the Egyptian artifact something extremely liminal, making them cross the line between object and humanity. Briefel also makes the case that making the mummy carry out the deeds which an Englishman would carry out by himself showcase the loss of craftsmanship and skills which were slowly lost because of mass industrialization: displacing this desire onto the shaping of the Other as dangerous exacerbated the tension between the colonies and the colonizers even more. Focusing on the mummies as commodities, it was easier for the common

Victorian to avoid thinking about this double nature of the mummy. The process of erosion of the human-centric skills that the mummy represented was well noted even by John Marx in his *Popular Anxieties Revisited*.

“[Mummy fiction] ...turn[s] this integral element of capitalism into a horror show... [It] provides a space in which fantasies of an intermediate category of phenomena, part object and part image, are allowed to enjoy momentary ascendancy over the subject, only to be expelled from the narrative.” (Marx, 2000, 409)

In his analysis, mummy fiction and gothic novels themselves serve the purpose to reveal an underlying anxiety about mechanization and the slow erosion of human skills. In *Lot 249*, every time that Bellingham describes the mummy or the sarcophagus, both him and his observer are fascinated by the intricated drawings on the sarcophagus or the complexity of the process which made the mummy what it is. Bellingham character himself is the exact representation of the toxic connection between the colonies and Britain. His sick relationship with his artifacts, almost bordering obsession, is thoroughly represented at every turn of the page. His room is a museum, built around the centerpiece of his adoration, the mummy itself.

“The mummy case stood upright against the wall, but the mummy itself was missing. [...] The door, which he had closed behind him, was now open, and right in front of him, with the lamplight shining upon it, was the mummy case...now it framed the lank body of its horrible occupant” (Doyle 1892, 2)

Despite being described in a moment of crisis – just as it was discovered that ancient magic had been making the mummy move – the placing of the case right in front of the lamplight, with all the other artifacts lying around it, made clear that Bellingham revered the mummy, and exploited it to the very end. Unable to bring his deeds to fruition, it made the mummy do it for him, thus effectively making the mummy replace himself in the nefarious acts. This idea shows how much degenerated Bellingham has become, and not because of exposure to Egyptian culture, but rather because society was becoming less and less morally sound, because of the exposure to so many nefarious events.

The presence of mythical criminals, as well as the theories developed by Lombroso, all acted towards a disintegration of moral values, conveying a sense of a society which frantically tried to uphold moral values, while failing in the process: such is the centerpiece of my thesis, an endless act of justifying the actions enacted towards the colonized, failing towards the end of this process. Bellingham serves as the final product of that, the degenerate individual who would stop at nothing to obtain what he wants. Even in his presentation, made before the uncanny events of the story unfold, he is presented as a “a demon” (A.C. Doyle, 4, 1892) at Eastern languages, and in general there is not a single character in the story who has a good opinion of the man. Romeo provides a remarkable analysis of the period, by putting the fear of degeneration and of the supernatural at the center of many of those anxieties, such as “the loss of British Identities through overpowering foreign influence” (M. Romeo, 344, 2013) – and such is the case for the figure of the Mummy.

This mythological figure is the epitome of the failure of the process of displacing the guilt derived from the imperial endeavors.

Finally, taking into consideration the fact that mummies are often destroyed, or even worse, after all the events in the stories have taken place, this intricate piece of craftsmanship, that used to be a human, is reduced to ashes, or to a commodity. Briefel makes the case that such happens in Bram Stoker's *The Jewel of the Seven stars* in which the mummy that is a centerpiece to the events of the story, suffers the violent loss of a hand, which is later used as a mere decorative object. The act is not different in *Lot No. 249* in which the only way to find closure is by destroying every piece of the mummy, and even more, by threatening Bellingham at gunpoint, the protagonist is making the twisted perpetrator destroy the connection he has with the Egyptian artifact. While the act could be carried out in many ways, the author chose to represent it with a gruesome and almost personal one: the mummy is instead stabbed multiple times by Bellingham himself nonetheless, despite being coerced into it:

In frantic haste he caught up the knife and hacked at the figure of the mummy, ever glancing round to see the eye and the weapon of his terrible visitor bent upon him. The creature crackled and snapped under every stab of the keen blade. A thick, yellow dust rose up from it. Spices and dried essences rained down upon the floor. Suddenly, with a rending crack, its backbone snapped asunder and it fell, a brown heap of sprawling limbs, upon the floor. (Doyle, 1892, 32)

The violence displayed in such an act, that is being carried out with such methodical movements, is crucial to our analysis. If the mummy represented at first the Other coming for retribution, while unconscious and powerless, it becomes a stand-in for the relationship between colonies and oppressors, the means by which atrocities are being carried out. Despite Bellingham best efforts in trying to corrupt him, Smith is not persuaded even when offered the ancient knowledge that allowed the villain to control the mummy.

“But look here, Smith, you can’t really mean it! I’ll share the knowledge with you. I’ll teach all that is in it. Or stay, let me copy it before you burn it!” Smith stepped forward and turned the key in the drawer. Taking out the yellow curled roll of paper, he threw it into the fire, and pressed it down with his heel. Bellingham screamed and grabbed at it; but Smith pushed him back and stood over it until it was reduced to a formless, gray ash. (Doyle 1892, 33)

The pleads from Bellingham echo the sense of guilt derived from the imperialistic expansion, because everything is falling apart. The power derived from the exploitation of the mummy is ending up in the destruction of that intricate craftsmanship. The connection to the imperial situation is immediate, and moreover it reflects the idea of disrespecting the dead, and the futility of preserving such artifacts, and memories, against the passage of time.

Therefore, *Lot No. 249* serves as the culmination of the degeneration process, telling a story in which the displacement of guilt cannot take place. It may stem from a development in Doyle’s view on the matter, but most of all the short story,

alongside “The Beach of Falesà” marks an important turning point in the Imperial discourse. Despite being so different from the Sherlock Holmes novels, which are instead the centerpiece of detective fiction, the gothic characteristics and belonging to the Victorian period are made clear from the very beginning of the short story.

“Yet when we think how narrow and how devious this path of Nature is, how dimly we can trace it, for all our lamps of science and how from the darkness which girds it round great and terrible possibilities loom ever shadowy upwards, it is a bold and confident man who will put a limit to the strange by-paths into which the human spirit may wander.” (Doyle 1892, 2)

This quote, from the introduction to the short story, serves the purpose of setting the confrontation between Nature and Science, another centerpiece of the Victorian period and the events around the Mummy. The pursuit of scientific advancements leads along to degeneration, because of the moral decay necessary to pursuit the wealth derived from Imperialism.



## Conclusion

In this thesis we have analyzed through literature the anxieties typical of Victorian Society. Through the complex layers of degeneration, fear and the coping mechanisms employed to justify imperial guilt, we tried to trace an analysis of this process of defining the Other as something dangerous, and responsible for the Degeneration process. The analysis began with an overview of these anxieties, thanks to the influential work by Nordau, *Degeneration*, and the theories on evolution developed by Charles Darwin. We also put an emphasis on industrialization, the many scientific revelations, and the needed revolution in social and religious structures, which contributed to the widespread anxieties in Society. These anxieties were fueled by Freud's research in psychology, and the formulation of the concept of *Unheimlich*, which was reflected in many literary works of the time.

The concept of Degeneration was crucial in our analysis, both from a literal and a metaphorical point of view. We established that our case studies contributed to the characterization of the colonial "Other" as an object of fear, often described as a monster. Furthermore, we also pinpointed the fear of regression and retribution, linked to the evolution theory of Survival of the Fittest. These fears were soon reflected in literature, as many novels started to incorporate themes such as Science, Psychology and the latest anxieties that were growing in society. Because of that, the stories came with representations of Westerners displaying good qualities, restoring order, especially when put into contrast with the chaotic and monstrous Other.

We have contextualized these fears in one of the best-known detective novels of the time, the Sherlock Holmes' series. The novels that we examined, such as *The*

*Sign of the Four*, *A Study in Scarlet* and *The Hound of the Baskervilles*, were pivotal in describing this juxtaposition of colonies and homeland, both in theory and in the practical example of the characters of returnees, such as Doctor Watson, or the antagonists of the novels. Doyle's view on the imperialist issue turned out to be more nuanced than what we initially expected: because of his experiences during the war, he was not afraid of describing the world outside of his London as a corrupt place and imbued with a degenerative force. In some cases, this corruption came directly from the natives of the colonies, such as Tonga or the corrupted child of the Baskerville's family, or from someone who, having been exposed to the colonies' influence, became a negative character. His use of returnees in his stories, alongside his previous experiences in war, make his analysis on the imperial dilemma a quite interesting one, despite leaning towards propaganda. However, in that same period, Doyle also published the short story *Lot No. 249* which offers a new perspective on the matter: if Tonga and the antagonists of Sherlock Holmes' stories are corrupted by the colonies, in this case it is the imperialistic greed and corruption to taint the lifeless artifact that is the Mummy into committing atrocities.

A similar change of heart can be observed in Stevenson's narrative, which changes deeply in themes and perspectives when putting aside the viewpoints that characterize the gothic story, *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* and, in general, all his later works, after his retirement to Samoa. Juxtaposing these writings, when taking into consideration Stevenson's particular background and history, offers an interesting reflection on the duality of the human mind. In conclusion, we have pointed cases in which the narrative served as a coping mechanism for the

Imperial agenda, and others in which, instead, this process leads to an exposure of the flaws which characterized coloniality as described in Decolonial studies and made the exploitative mechanism. This instead of acting as a coping mechanism, which should justify the Empire's actions, serves the only purpose of fleshing out the flaws of the Imperial machine.

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