

The Monster and the Machine: Degeneration and Technology in H.G. Wells's *The Time Machine*, Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, and Joseph Conrad's *The Secret Agent*

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis argues that the otherwise polarized criticism of degeneration literature of the fin de siècle is reconciled by observing a shift in degeneration as scientific theory to social phenomenon. This shift is prominent in three texts published at the turn of the nineteenth century: H.G. Wells's *The Time Machine* (1895), Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897), and Joseph Conrad's *The Secret Agent* (1907). Max Nordau, a cultural critic during the eighteenth century, expressed anxieties about cultural degeneration in Europe. Nordau argued that cross-dressing created an immoral and sexual ambiguity. Moreover, Nordau locates degeneration in the rising decadence of art and culture and fears that Europe is in decline. Moreover, declining birthrates, rising notions of positive eugenics, and middle class perceptions of the lower classes and aristocracy as the degenerate classes tease out the implications of imperialism, hybridity, masculinity, and technology and their contributions to the rising milieu of degeneration during the fin de siècle in England. This thesis explores Nordau's sense of degeneration through a post-imperial lens and with an eye on Thomas Carlyle's binary of the dynamic and mechanical cultural poles. It also draws connections between the decline of masculinity, hybridizing identities, mechanical degeneration, and the reliance upon technology in these texts—technologies used to combat scientific and cultural degenerations.

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For Abbey

## Chapter I

### INTRODUCTION

Sentiments of degeneration during the fin de siècle resonate in a telling scene from Robert Louis Stevenson's *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1886), as the respectable lawyer Mr. Utterson exclaims, "God bless me, the man seems hardly human! Something troglodytic, shall we say?" (Stevenson 25). Several things work in this passage to illuminate the larger problem of degeneration in the late Victorian period. A respectable lawyer provides the voice of the description, which places concerns of degeneration in the mouths of the educated middle to upper-middle class citizens. Jekyll finds it increasingly difficult to return from the Hyde state, which is induced by drinking the experimental potions he creates; his struggle suggests that degeneration is a force that is addictive and irreversible.

Even further, it marks a connection between science and physical degeneration. Degeneration finds a social and cultural connection in the psychological treatment of criminality and mental disorders, posits Andrew Smith in *Victorian Demons: Medicine Masculinity and the Gothic at the Fin-de-Siècle* (2004):

Degeneration had its roots in the work of Bénédict Augustin Morel, who ... attempted to explain psychological abnormalities through a theory of mental decline that was to influence the later work of criminologists,

sociologists, psychologists and, towards the end of the nineteenth century, cultural commentators. (14)

Smith's assertion places degeneration within the realms of natural, biological science and social science, but it also marks a shift in degeneration theory from a scientific approach to social, cultural, and even pseudo-scientific approaches. In Robert Louis Stevenson's text, Hyde murders one of his victims "with ape-like fury," in which he brutally stomps and beats his victim (37). Hyde's fury resembles the unthinking, gratuitous violence of the degenerate mind to which Andrew Smith points. The transition from Jekyll into Hyde is a model par excellence of degeneration as both a physical shift and a more implicitly cultural shift from being civilized to a much darker, criminal, and brutish state. Although published significantly later than Stevenson's degeneration narrative, H.G. Wells's *The Time Machine* (1895), Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897), and Joseph Conrad's *The Secret Agent* (1907) also exhibit a notable shift from scientific, biological, or (d)evolutionary degeneration to degeneration as a social phenomenon rooted in the imperialistic and burgeoning technocratic milieu of the Victorian period, which threatens national, racial, and social identities.

Late Victorian fears of degeneration connect to and derive from a multitude of causes, which many critics of the phenomenon point out. In *Degeneration, Culture, and the Novel, 1880-1940* (1994), William Greenslade notes a relationship between atavism and degeneration during the late Victorian period. From a post-Darwinian world view, the notion of atavism—that recurrence of ancient forms or reversion to the past—becomes a critical element in the anxieties leading up to the turn of the century. Greenslade highlights this as he argues, "Degeneration facilitated discourses of

sometimes crude differentiation: between the normal and the abnormal, the healthy and morbid, the ‘fit’ and ‘unfit’, the civilized and the primitive” (2). Thus, the issue of degeneration during the late Victorian period is a struggle between binaries—the struggle of moving forward or progressing, without a reversion to the past. The binary draws into perspective ways in which we view progress. One such way of viewing progress is linearly—e.g., moving from point “A” to point “B” on a line. Degeneration, then, would be reversions to points on the line, which have already been passed, while still seemingly moving forward. Thus, degeneration is constitutive of moving forward and backward simultaneously. This measure of progress, then, is seemingly related to how degenerate others are. That is, is it possible for one social class or group to progress without causing or witnessing the degeneration of a social class or group below them? Moreover, do science and technology facilitate or even equate with this “progress?”

The Victorians experienced great scientific and technological achievements, which begs us to consider the effects and connections of these technologies on Victorian society and late Victorian complacencies more specifically. A post-imperial lens teases out the implications and connections of Victorian “progress” and its relationship to fin de siècle degeneration. Greenslade attributes late Victorian complacency to imperialism and the use of post-Darwinian science to justify the imperialistic impulse, which hints at the notion that British cultural, political, and economic dominance is a product of racial superiority.

England’s imperial success throughout the nineteenth century is remarkable. However, at the century’s close, other imperial powers were on the rise (Germany and the United States), which threatened England’s imperial superiority. Moreover, as Anne

McClintock points out in *Imperial Leather* (1995), racial superiority, preserving and supporting the imperial state, and even masculinity are rooted in protecting national, racial, and cultural identities, as well as female purity (47). To accomplish this, female sexuality was placed under scrutiny and controlled. Investigating the fin de siècle through a post-imperialist lens highlights that the sense of masculinity, seemingly restored by controlling female sexuality, was on the wane. Lawrence Kramer argues this in his article, “Fin-de-siècle Fantasies: ‘Elektra,’ Degeneration and Sexual Science” (1993), and provides insight into the cultural climate of degeneracy. He delves further into the notions of supremacy and imperialism at the end of the nineteenth century. Kramer argues that supremacist culture arises from economic and social stresses placed on the middle-class family. Sexual, class, and race distinctions reside within supremacy, which Kramer draws out of Otto Weininger’s *Sex and Character* (1903). He claims that Weininger’s text gives rise to a cultural formation of supremacism, which he defines as “the separation of what was ‘higher’ and ‘lower’ in human nature and society” (142). Due to a shift in perceptions of evolutionary theory attributable to Charles Darwin and Herbert Spencer—whose theories effectively dismantle the concept of evolution as “The Great Chain of Being”—humanity, and emphatically white, northern European males, are no longer at the top of the evolutionary ladder. This destabilizes white male power and authority, and Weininger’s categorization seeks to reassert power and authority. He replaces the northern European man at the top of the evolutionary and social ladder, and women, the urban poor, and those who populated the colonial worlds—“savage ‘lower races’” (142)—were socially and naturally beneath the northern European male. Through this lens, Lawrence reveals that the northern European man is innately the harbinger of

civilization and its protector, as he argues, “Modern history had revealed that supremacy was innately vested in civilised [sic] Man, the normative human type” (142). The normative type Lawrence refers to has a counterpart in the rest of humanity (or any deviation from this norm) represented as abnormal—the degenerate.

Kelly Hurley’s text, *The Gothic Body: Sexuality, Materialism, and Degeneration at the Fin de Siècle* (1996), connects “abnormality” to class distinctions and during the fin de siècle. The degeneration of the human subject during the fin de siècle was explicitly tied to the rise to British Gothic fiction at the end of the nineteenth century (Hurley 3). With threats to identity looming everywhere, the human subject experiences “a body metamorphic and undifferentiated . . . [and] in place of a unitary and securely bounded human subjectivity, one that is both fragmented and permeable” (Hurley 3). Hurley terms this human subject as “abhuman,” or that which is “becoming not-itself, becoming other” (4). Most notable in their “abhumanness” is the lower class, which the middle class viewed with fascination and disgust as an “exotic native” (Hurley 161). The Gothic resurgence during the fin de siècle is not simply reactive, but also due to a “general malaise occasioned by the sciences” (Hurley 5). The rise of science during the Victorian period leads to theories and diagnoses of degeneration, which eventually dominated the ideologies of the period. As a result, populations and their identities became fragmented, and the theories leave no social class or group’s identity unscathed.

On the national scale, however, the government established programs such as the Inter-Departmental Committee on Physical Degeneration to combat degeneration. During the Boer War, the military experienced a decline in personnel numbers and sought large numbers of recruits indiscriminately as Daniel Pick points out in *Faces of Degeneration:*

*A European Disorder* (1989), that the “Committee is usually seen as a kind of English empiricist refutation of degenerationism . . . it did refuse to adopt the word ‘degeneration’ . . . and rejected the argument that the race as a whole was unfit or degenerate” (185). On the other hand, Richard A. Soloway’s *Demography and Degeneration* (1995) claims that it did adopt the term “deterioration” and “[n]early everyone . . . agreed that the evidence of deplorable ill health and physical incapacity was indisputable” (45). However, it was primarily the middle class that held views of degeneration. That is, the poor who were termed “degenerate,” and the term degeneration was geopolitically located in dense populations considered to be slum areas of cities, in which “overcrowding” was viewed as a “principal cause of degeneration” (Pick 185). Additionally, the aristocratic English population was also considered degenerate because of their proclivity for incest and decadent, idle lifestyles. The population booms in the cities were due, in part at least, to the rise in factory work in the cities, which brought masses of people into confined areas where the possibility of class comingling between lower, middle, and upper class citizens was unavoidable; it further established a juxtaposition of lifestyles between the machine-operating working poor and those of the normative middle and decadent upper class.

To better understand the fin de siècle milieu of degeneration and technology, it is imperative to look at Victorian attitudes towards technology at the beginning of the period—attitudes that express a cautious optimism. In almost prophetic fashion, Thomas Carlyle’s “Signs of the Times” (1829) posits that the Victorians have already witnessed the total industrialization and mechanization of their lives:

Men are grown mechanical in head and in heart, as well as in hand. They have lost faith in individual endeavor, and in natural force, of any kind.

Not for internal perfection, but for external combinations and arrangements . . . for Mechanism of one sort or other, do they hope and struggle. Their whole efforts, attachments, opinions, turn on mechanism, and are of a mechanical nature. (Carlyle 444)

Carlyle warns of the dangers that inhabit the evacuation of the dynamic—the arts—side of culture, in favor of the mechanical or industrial. However, he remains optimistic that Victorian society, with technological advances at its disposal, can overcome these dangers: “Therein let us have hope and sure faith. To reform a world, to reform a nation, no wise man will undertake; and all but the foolish man know that the only solid, though a far slower reformation, is what each begins and perfects on *himself*” (459). Carlyle calls for individual reformation—that each man reform himself in accordance with Victorian principles and society at large. Carlyle understands the possibilities of progress that come with industrialization, but he warns against the release of that energy into a singular direction—the mechanical. Rather, he implores the middling, working-class man—the citizen of the mechanical—to reform himself to include the dynamic side of culture.

Much like Carlyle, John Stuart Mill’s “The Spirit of the Age” (1831) also notes the social change and transition occurring: “Mankind have outgrown old institutions and old doctrines, and have not yet acquired new ones. When we say outgrown, we intend to prejudge nothing. A man may not be either better or happier at six—and-twenty, than he was at six years of age: but the same jacket which fitted him then, will not fit him now” (5). Mill’s metaphor builds on Carlyle’s call for individualism. Laws and social mores no longer fit, especially with a rising middle class. Thus, there is a need for change, and though the beginning of the Victorian period marks a point of change, there is no fear of

atavism. Instead, the call for progress is a call for a clean break away from the old ways—keeping their faces turned ahead and not looking back.

The cultural flux at the end of the Victorian period carries a distinctly different sentiment, and Max Nordau, in *Degeneration* (1892), expresses the heightened anxieties at the fin de siècle regarding English culture and the notion of hybridity as a symptom of imperialism. Hybridity refers simply to a mixing or blending of cultures, races, and nationalities that occurs in imperial epicenters, such as London, as a necessary result of imperialism. However, as the post-colonial theorist Homi K. Bhabha points out in “Signs Taken for Wonders” (1985), hybridity in “unsettles the mimetic or narcissistic demands of colonial power but reimplicates its identifications in strategies of subversion that turn the gaze of the discriminated back upon the eye of power” (1175). That is, hybridity contains a subversive mimicry in which the colonizer’s dominant culture is distorted or redefined, as the colonized culture permeates the colonizer’s culture.

We see both of these forms of hybridity in Nordau’s cultural polemic. In contrast with the positive and progressive attitudes marking the beginning of the period, the problem and views of degeneration become apparent: “We stand now in the midst of a severe mental epidemic; of a sort of black death of degeneration and hysteria, and it is natural that we should ask anxiously on all sides: ‘What is to come next?’” (Nordau 537). Where Carlyle and Mill see potential, Nordau’s concerns center on a cultural blurring. In chapter two, Nordau notes that women dress as men to attract men, clothing is mixed from various parts of the world to create horrendous outfits, and these things present a threat and a fear of diluting a particular Englishness. Distinctiveness in culture, especially in booming epicenters of population such as London, is so muddled that any

cultural particular is hard to recognize, and the natural fear is of a complete fragmentation and loss of English cultural identity altogether.

Although Soloway points out that Nordau is one of many cultural critics participating in the degeneration conversation during the fin de siècle (41), Nordau's work illustrates the fruition of Carlyle's fears of losing any semblance of cultural creation, ingenuity, or even identity through mixing cultures, which still constitutes a sort of fragmentation. For instance, he rants about English dress becoming a mixture of different clothing styles from around the world, which presents the person dressed in this manner as different fragments of varying cultures—essentially leading to the notion of a decaying cultural and national identities. David C. Cody, in his article "Faulkner, Wells, and the 'End of Man'" (1993) points to Julia Kristeva's theory to explain the fin de siècle fears and anxieties of the loss of identity:

In her *Powers of Horror* (1982), Julia Kristeva defines 'abjection' as that which 'disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules. The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite.' Such encounters appear so frequently in the horror literature of the fin de siècle that they might almost be called a defining characteristic of the genre, just as the literature itself was a symptom of the intense anxiety which existed in the culture that engendered it. (468-69)

Three such texts that remarkably exhibit the qualities of the abject Kristeva describes are Wells's *The Time Machine*, Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, and Joseph Conrad's *The Secret Agent*. In *The Time Machine*, the Traveller catapults millions of years into the future to witness the degeneration of Earth and the natural world at the hands of a dead sun.

Additionally, he witnesses the cultural degeneration and devolution of humanity portrayed by the Morlocks and Eloi. In *Dracula* we return to the notion of atavism through the character of Dracula himself—an ancient figure who traverses ages and feeds on the living. Moreover, The Count is particularly interested in expanding his feeding grounds into England, which calls into question notions of border crossings and the disruption of order. Lastly, in *The Secret Agent*, Mr. Verloc, a lower class anarchist Russian spy residing in London Soho, attends secret meetings to rant about and devise plans to thwart the current political paradigm. *The Secret Agent* creates uncertainty by making Verloc simultaneously likeable and detestable. Moreover, we are never fully aware of his nationality or his motives. The only thing we can be sure of is his laziness—a distinctly negative quality in the Victorian period, which is commonly associated with Protestant work ethic.

Further posing a threat to identity, purity, and distinct borders, is the rise of urban centers of population into which the social classes were crammed together, in which previously distinguishable borders begin to break down—the lower classes, the destitute, and factory workers with their machinery are lodged juxtaposing against the wealthier classes and their decadence. These conditions of urban life, a common thread among these texts of degeneration (they are all set in heavily populated London), is a major contributor to fears of degeneration:

[T]he diagnostician of degeneration is vigilant in alerting the reader of the threatening proximity of the city condition, which may, at any time, manifest itself in the unsuspecting city-dweller. Social groups and deviant types are tactically dispatched to a ‘safe’ zone of abnormality . . . The

referents are manifold: men of genius, anarchists, lunatics, hooligans, prostitutes are all dealt with by . . . attributing to them symptoms of pathology, congenital criminality, hysteria or neurasthenia.

(Greenslade18)

In the case of each text we find at least one degenerative characteristic. The time Traveller is a man of genius eager to test a time machine that does not break the borders of the city. Rather, the machine remains stationary as time speeds up outside of it. Dracula represents the degenerate lower class and degenerate aristocracy, is the congenital criminal “other” from a foreign land, and his need to feed brings him to London. He (or It) is the quintessential non-northern European murderer/parasite. Mr. Verloc is the lower class, Russian anarchist spy (criminal “other” reiterated) struggling to deal with the intellectual disability of his brother-in-law, Stevie—an example of the notion of degeneration as hereditary.

Drawing upon Greenslade’s critique of degeneration literature of the fin de siècle and Edward Saïd’s *Culture and Imperialism* (1993), Chapter 2 of this thesis will investigate the notion of degeneration in Wells’s *The Time Machine*, in which he offers us a glimpse into the future of humanity, a Darwinian speciation of humans into Morlocks and Eloi. There is an inherent class critique in Wells’s text—the Morlocks as working class and Eloi as upper class, both of which were considered degenerate by the Victorian middle class. This chapter will further the class critique and examine the connections between technology as a harbinger of progress, the Traveller’s station as a middle class Victorian man, and his role as the middle-class, northern European male savior and protector of Victorian masculinity, and the ramifications of these relationships.

The text hinges on the time machine itself, which is a spectacular feat of human ingenuity. The Time Traveller is at the apex of technological ingenuity in his time. That is, the present moment is seemingly the apex of technological advancement for any civilization, and the Traveller uses his futuristic machine to see the effects of technology on humanity. He finds the toiling Morlocks who feed on the Eloi as if they are “fatted cattle” (62). In light of this, the text becomes an inversion of the hope for a technological utopia, and instead finds humanity returned to barbarism. Moreover, it reveals a fear of degeneration, even in its crudest forms (fit/unfit, civilized/uncivilized, healthy/morbid), and the fear of the abject—that lack of boundaries, rules, or explanations and essentially the world that the Traveller encounters on his 30,000,000-year trek into the future.

Chapter 3 examines Bram Stoker’s *Dracula*, and investigates the implications of using technology to destroy a degenerative and degenerated monster. That is, the protagonists use technology to expedite communication (e.g., phonographs and typewriters), which ultimately allows them to finally discern what and who Dracula is and overcome the foreign threat. Much like Wells’s text, this text lends itself to a political reading, and if we turn to Edward Saïd’s *Culture and Imperialism*, the text’s politics become clear. In *Culture and Imperialism*, Saïd makes a distinction between colonialism and imperialism, which are both found in *Dracula*. Colonialism, according to Saïd, “is almost always a consequence of imperialism, [and] is the implanting of settlements on a distant territory”; imperialism, however, “means the practice, the theory, and the attitudes of a dominating metropolitan center ruling a distant territory” (9). In light of this, *Dracula* is an inversion of the power structure that Saïd points to. That is, Dracula (re)colonizes and (re)imperializes England for food, which, as it turns out, repopulates

the country with the foreign other—more vampires—and Mina, Jonathan, Seward, and company must use technology to rid England and the world of these “others.” They must purify the degenerative abject “other” from not only their country but also the world. This chapter seeks to mark a shift in notions of degeneration from more explicitly natural or biological degeneration to a hybrid sense of degeneration that incorporates culture and the notion of degeneration garnered from Nordau’s fear of cultural hybridity.

Chapter 4 focuses on Conrad’s *The Secret Agent* and traces the evolution of degeneration from the hybrid notion found in *Dracula* into a more significantly cultural degeneration. More specifically, this chapter examines Verloc and his family as lower class citizens relegated to abnormality, as they struggle to live up to traditional notions of family. Mr. Verloc’s abnormality stems from his position as an immigrant, anarchist spy and from his position as the proprietor of a pornography shop, which serves as a cover for his spy identity. Mrs. Verloc’s abnormality derives from her hereditary connection to her degenerate mother and brother.

I argue that their failure as a family traces the movement of degeneration from a more broadly conceived cultural phenomenon to that of a more narrowly focused degeneration of the family, exemplified by the lack of heteronormativity in the Verloc household. Moreover, points out that positive eugenics and the Fabian Society played a crucial role in perceptions of generation during the fin de siècle. The Fabian Society wanted to sterilize the “unfit” and promote marriage of the “fit.” For instance, Francis Galton established theories of eugenics and was a proponent of positive eugenics—marrying and matchmaking based on “good” physical qualities and genes. Galton believed that since “no more than one-quarter of the children born to an able couple were

likely to be as well endowed as their parents, it was important that desirable matches be made . . . [to] net an increase in the proportion of the ‘naturally gifted’ population” (Soloway 63). Thus, according to the sentiments of positive eugenics, the marriage between Winnie and Adolf Verloc is doomed from the start because they are a genetic mismatch. Winnie is from a physically degenerate family evidenced through her brother and mother, and Verloc is the embodiment of anti-Victorian laziness.

Coincidentally, the text less explicitly uses technology in conjunction with themes of degeneration. However, there is yet an example of implementing technology for destructive purposes in *The Secret Agent*. Verloc, the immigrant anarchist spy, provokes his mentally challenged brother-in-law to blow up the Greenwich Observatory, which again suggests boundary breaking and brings to light the foreign “other” as an infiltrator of London. The Greenwich Observatory is on the prime meridian and is the mark of zero time. It stands as a time boundary between East and West and bombing the observatory symbolically shatters this boundary. The degeneration of the family and heteronormativity in the case of the Verlocs suggests that middle class definitions of degeneration trap the lower class families into a self-perpetuating cultural narrative of degeneration.

These chapters illuminate a shift in Victorian perceptions of degeneration. Beginning with a much more scientific perspective of degeneration illustrated through H.G. Wells’s *The Time Machine*, the concept of degeneration becomes a part of English culture in subsequently published degeneration texts—*Dracula* and *The Secret Agent*. All three of these texts nuance the imperialistic impulse of the period into the fear of degeneration, as degeneration seems an unavoidable consequence of imperialism. That is,

imperialism opens a passage into the cultural center of the empire, and in our case, that cultural center is a heavily populated London. Industrialization in these major population centers creates tensions between social classes who are forced to exist in such close proximity that avoiding contact with one another is impossible. The rise of science and technology throughout the Victorian period ends with a much more technocratic culture at the close of the nineteenth century.

## Chapter II

### THE MACHINE OF PROGRESS AND THE VICTORIAN MAN: IMPERIALISM, TECHNOLOGY, AND MASCULINITY IN H.G. WELLS'S *THE TIME MACHINE*

In *The Lives of Machines* (2014), Tamara Ketabgian offers a convincingly reimagined critique of machinery and its impact on Victorian views and culture. Her argument seeks to redefine the relationship between humans and machines—a relationship otherwise viewed as pessimistically alienating. Ketabgian offers one such reimagining in her notion of organic and mechanical hybridity (a mixing between human and machine) as prosthesis: “Victorian thinkers did *not* find humanness and the body congruent. Instead, they questioned the position of a subject that is no longer, strictly speaking, a body but a prosthetic part” (18). In relation to industrial settings, factory workers are conceived of as extensions of the factory, or a prosthetic part, in which the machine needs the particularly human part in order to function properly. In this case, the worker is an extension of the machine and is incapable of mastering it in this condition.

Although he is not a factory worker, the prosthetic relationship between human and machine is apparent in H.G. Wells's *The Time Machine*. For example, the time machine cannot function without an operator, and the Traveller cannot time travel without the machine. Their relationship is mutually dependent, and out of this arises a hybridity of dominance between operator and machine, as Ketabgian aptly puts it, drawing on Karl Marx's theory of the human and machine relationship: “the worker

makes use of a tool; in the factory, the machine makes use of him” (qtd. in Ketabgian 21). That is, the machine dominates the operator insofar as the operator needs the machine to perform a specific function—like time travelling—thus defining the operator’s function. On the other hand, the operator dominates the machine insofar as the machine relies on the operator to pull the levers, to press the buttons, to maintain it, and to repair it.

The hybrid relationship between human and machine is prevalent at the end of the text, as the Time Traveller’s survival and return to his own time depend on his knowledge of and closeness to the machine: “Then I had simply to fight against their persistent fingers for my levers, and at the same time feel for the studs over which these fitted” (Wells 80). This scene portrays the Traveller and the machine as simultaneously separated and at one. For instance, the levers belong to the machine for it cannot operate without them, but the Time Traveller refers to them as *his* levers. Not only are they a tangible *thing* for the Time Traveller to use, but they also—prosthetically and as phallic symbols—aid in the construction of his identity. If he indeed loses the ability to travel through time by losing the levers he carries in his pocket then we could hardly call him a “time traveller,” which is the sole name he goes by in the text. Moreover, in an intimate display of connection with the machine, the Traveller feels his way into placing the levers in the correct spot. In order to do this as quickly as he does, the Traveller must know where to place his hand to find the studs, but more importantly what the studs feel like. In a phallic display of familiarity with his time machine, the Time Traveller is successful, activates the machine, and escapes. The Traveller’s intimate connection with and mortal reliance upon his machine reveals a deeper sense of masculine inadequacy throughout the

text, one which informs the imperialistic impulse and sense of cultural degeneration at the end of the nineteenth century and marks *The Time Machine* as a hybrid between Victorian and Modernist ideals.

*The Time Machine* garners a variety of critiques including psychoanalytic, historical, post-colonial, technological, utopian, and dystopian readings. In “Zola, Wells, and the ‘Coming Beast’” (1981), E. D. Mackerness argues the similar prophetic nature between H.G. Wells’s and Emile Zola’s works. The authors and their works, argues Mackerness, were influenced by “the general fin de siècle concept of Social Darwinism, and their work is best appreciated against the broad spectrum of ideas deriving from the study of ‘scientific sociology’” (143). Out of this scientific sociology, Mackerness views the similarities between the texts in their thematic uses of degeneration to speculate the end of humanity. Counter to Mackerness’s reading, Frank Scafella’s “The White Sphinx and *The Time Machine*” (1981) offers a less pessimistic and more comparative reading of *The Time Machine* in which he argues that the text parallels the fable of “Oedipus and the Sphinx.” Drawing on Francis Bacon’s assertion that sphinxes represent two kinds of riddles, “one concerning the nature of things, another concerning the nature of man” (256), Scafella argues that the text’s emphasis on the white sphinx calls for a reexamination of the scientific community. The emphasis of degeneration is placed on humanity—not in such a way that emphasizes devolution, which is so often the case in degeneration texts—but in a way that places the onus of progress on the ways in which science is used. That is, it connects cultural progress with knowledge and its uses to dominate otherwise restricted fields. For instance, the Time Traveller uses his knowledge

of and connection to machines to build a contraption that he can manipulate time with, which, in turn, allows him to expand his knowledge of humanity's distant future.

Concomitant with the Traveller's use of machinery to manipulate and even break through temporal boundaries, Colin Manlove's article, "Charles Kingsley, H.G. Wells, and the Machine in Victorian Fiction" (1993) examines the role of technology in the Victorian period. He argues that the period is "an age that is most truly founded on the machine and the progressivism that its powers invoke" (214). However, Manlove creates a distinction between Wells's technology and the traditionally pessimistic views of technology characterized by nineteenth-century industrial texts. Manlove establishes a duality in Victorian views of machines through Dickens's "gaze on man-made machinery" and Kingsley's "engine of nature" (224). Through these authors, according to Manlove, we arrive at the duality of Dickensian mechanical and Kingsleyan organic—technology and biology. However different these authors are, argues Manlove, they nonetheless share the view of the machine "as identified with society" (224). In his treatment of Wells however, he concludes that *The Time Machine* is "an awful warning about technology" while simultaneously glorifying technology (Manlove 230), which is precisely where he locates the theme of degeneration in the text. Technological advancement ultimately leads to biological decline in the text: "a time machine divorced from the real world and a science that defeats nature produce devolution and solar entropy" (Manlove 239), which is precisely what the Time Traveller witnesses at the end of the text. That is, the Time Traveller uses his machine to travel 30,000,000 years into the future and experiences Julia Kristeva's abjection in his "deadly nausea" (Wells 85), and he witnesses the "sun grow larger and duller in the westward sky, and the life of the

old earth [sic] ebb away” (84). That is, the Time Traveller watches the sun die out, and subsequently, he witnesses the death of a planet now unrecognizable to him.

More recent criticism moves beyond what is seemingly the consensus of degeneration and warning readings of Wells’s *The Time Machine* and offers readings that treat the text as a point of transition into the Modernist Period. For instance, Paul A. Cantor’s and Peter Hufnagel’s article “The Empire of the Future: Imperialism and Modernism in H.G. Wells” (2006) centers on themes of empire in Wells’s works. They argue that the theme of empire is a specifically modernist characteristic in *The Time Machine*. Even as the Time Traveller courses 800,000 years into the future, posit Cantor and Hufnagel, “he finds the Victorian class system still intact” and characterized through the Morlocks and Eloi—the working class and aristocracy respectively (36). For them, the text becomes a critique of Victorian imperialism, and this imperialism “is clearly evident in the nature of the natives the Time Traveller meets” (38). Through the lens of Edward Saïd’s orientalism, Cantor and Hufnagel establish the imperialist tendency of the West to define itself in opposition to the East. Though the Time Traveller does not travel to the East, he still defines himself as “too Occidental for a long vigil” (Wells 38), which places him as the oppositional Westerner to the Eastern, oriental Morlocks and Eloi.

Moreover, as Michael Parrish Lee notes in “Reading Meat in H.G. Wells” (2010), the East and West binary returns in the form of savage versus civilized, which reintegrates degeneration into the conversation. Lee rightly points out the connection between the cannibalistic savagery of the Morlocks and the Time Traveller’s hunger for knowledge of the future. However, what happens when the Time Traveller reaches the future again aligns with Cantor’s and Hufnagel’s assertions of imperialism: “[T]he [Time

Traveller's] desire to examine and understand other people is in essence the desire to consume them" (Lee 252). Lee furthers this argument and places it in the locus of imperialism as he claims, "[T]his desire [for knowledge] is also hungry—showing not merely a drive to pry open its objects in order to control them, but betraying too a carnal, corporeal urge to ingest and assimilate them" (Lee 252).

Rudimentary, yet overlooked, access to the imperialist vein running through the text is notable in the Time Traveller's scientific approach to and opinions of the people of the future. The point of contact with imperialism is best understood through Edward Saïd's notion that the past and present are never fully separated from one another: "[T]here is no just way in which the past can be quarantined from the present. Past and present inform each other, each implies the other ... and each coexists with the other" (23). In *The Time Machine* the main character, a Victorian man, propels into the distant future and brings the past with him. In essence, once the Time Traveller reaches the future—the year 802,701—it becomes his present. In leaving behind his own time, it becomes a past for him once he arrives in the future year. Borrowing from Mikhail Bakhtin's *The Dialogic Imagination*, the Time Traveller is a chronotope indicative of the Victorian period but only insofar as he is in the future. For Bakhtin, a chronotope is "the intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships" (84), and it "determines . . . the image of a man in literature as well" (85). The Time Traveller is a spatial and temporal embodiment of Victorian ideologies because he is from the Victorian period and brings those ideologies with him into the future as a lens through which to interpret his surroundings. He represents both Victorian time and space in the year 802,701, standing as a monument to his own people's time and space, and this is evident in several ways.

The inseparability of past and present are explicit at the beginning of the Time Traveller's experiences of the future. One of the first things the Time Traveller observes in 802,701 is a white sphinx, which Larry T. Shillock argues in "'Are We Not Men?' Degeneration, Future-Sex and *The Time Machine*" (2012) is an "impossible species—part lion, in its haunches, part bird, in its wings, and part woman, in its features. Greek legend represents it as a figure of mystery and taboo as well as a sign associated with interpretive possibility" (156). In another connection to his ancient past and to the Greeks, he describes an Eloi male as "clad in a purple tunic, girdled at the waist with a leather belt [and] [s]andles or buskins . . . were on his feet" (Wells 23). The Time Traveller's narrative creates a connection with the ancient world, as future inhabitants wear clothing reminiscent of past civilizations and their art resonates with the symbolism of past civilizations.

Upon further examination of the sphinx, the Traveller notices weathering on it, which "imparted an unpleasant suggestion of disease" (Wells 21). Given Shillock's explanation of the symbolic nature of the Greek sphinx, it is easy to ascertain that the sphinx's weathering is symbolic of natural degeneration and cultural degeneration. The weathered appearance is due to some form of erosion. However, it also indicates a lack of care for the statue—that neither the Eloi nor the Morlocks take the time to protect the sphinx from eroding or to repair the erosion that has already occurred. The deterioration of the sphinx, in this sense, rings with undertones of the devaluation of art and subsequently culture.

As a member of The Linnean Society (a biological society in London), the Traveller understands the symbolic significance of the deteriorating image. He

experiences the degeneration suggested by the sphinx's condition, as it causes him to speculate on what humanity—specifically men—may have evolved into in this future time: “What might not have happened to men? What if cruelty had grown into common passion? What if in this interval the race had lost its manliness, and had developed into something inhuman, unsympathetic, and overwhelmingly powerful” (Wells 22)? His speculation centers on masculinity and its connection with degeneration. Through a negative definition, the Time Traveller reveals that manliness and sympathy are connected, and for men to grow unsympathetic they lose their manliness and degenerate. Moreover, we must question why the Time Traveller makes the connection of masculinity and degeneration. Are men the only sex that can degenerate? This question is best answered by returning the notion of imperialism.

Ranu Samantrai's article “Claiming the Burden: Naipaul's Africa” (2000) argues that the European colonizer is typically viewed as the masculine savior of an inferior, uncivilized, and ultimately feminized race. “If the ‘probes,’” she writes, “of the colonial endeavor are the expression of the peculiar and obviously masculine energy of a race, then it is only logical that the group with superior virility should win” (54). She drives at the notion that imperialism is an expression of European masculinity through the colonization of a “feminized” Africa. Furthering her argument, Samantrai posits, “Africans are never represented in the masculine position” (54). Instead, they are considered lethargic, consuming, castrating, feminine, and feminizing people. Considering Samantrai's gendered theory of colonialism and imperialism, the Time Traveller's imperialist masculinity is revealed. As the Time Traveller regains his senses after speculating on the possible degenerative outcome of humanity in 802,701, he

encounters the Eloi for the first time and immediately feminizes them: “He struck me as being a very beautiful and graceful creature, but indescribably frail. His flushed face reminded me of the more beautiful kind of consumptive—that hectic beauty of which we used to hear so much” (Wells 23). The Time Traveller recognizes a male with his use of the pronoun, “he,” which signifies his recognition of another man. However, in a maneuver to place himself above the native Eloi man, the Time Traveller establishes his own masculine dominance through an ambiguous duality. That is, the feminizing description distinguishes or separates the two characters, though they are both men, into masculine and unmasculine. Though the Eloi is male, the Time Traveller lives up to Samantrai’s description of the masculine European invader. Moreover, the Time Traveller’s fear is culled through feminizing the native man as he “regained confidence” at the sight of the Eloi and is able to “remove [his] hands from the machine” (Wells 23).

The removal of the Time Traveller’s hands from the machine signifies that not only has the Time Traveller reached a comfort level with his new time and surroundings—that he is now courageous after encountering the seemingly harmless, feminine, childlike Eloi—but it also reintroduces the Traveller’s prosthetic relationship with the machine. His newly found courage (which is contingent with the machine’s safety) allows him to separate from his previous source of comfort and to investigate the new time and future of humanity. Subsequently, the Time Traveller spends time with the Eloi in order to learn about the futuristic form and fate of humanity. He eats with them, attempts to learn their language, and observes them in their daily habits. Particularly significant to the Traveller’s cultural participation with the Eloi—eating and language learning—is Michael Parrish Lee’s argument that eating with the Eloi is metaphorically

intertwined with gaining knowledge: “[N]ot only does food carry information, but information itself is essentially a form of food . . . collecting becomes a mode of eating, and the accumulation of social knowledge constitutes a kind of cannibalism wherein the observer ‘consumes’ those whom he observes” (255). The Time Traveller is a scientist on an investigative mission to *learn* the fate of humanity in 802,701. He spends much of his time in the text speculating on the cultural dynamic the future humanity develops. At one point, the Traveller believes his conjecture that the Eloi are communist is accurate as he says, “I thought that in this simple explanation I had mastered the problem of the world—mastered the whole secret of these delicious people” (Wells 33). This passage draws attention to the Traveller’s desire to “master” the Eloi through a “hungry gaze” (Lee 256). Moreover, it reveals the Traveller’s perception of the future world and its inhabitants as other—to be conquered, to be learned.

As the Traveller reveals, he is wrong in his assertions—several times—and wakes the next morning to find his time machine missing. This aspect of the plot consumes the Traveller’s attention for the rest of the text, as he is hell-bent on finding the Machine from this point forward. He is unnerved at the loss of his machine and at the possibility of “losing [his] own age, of being left helpless in this strange new world” (Wells 34). This reestablishes his prosthesis with the machine and presents the reconnection as a form of security for him. Previously, the Traveller’s mind was free of these worries, and he was able to hypothesize about his new surroundings because he knew the machine was intact and attainable. However, his fear of losing his “own age” is really the fear of being stuck in the future and the fear of being forced to conform to his new surroundings. The binary of the cultural other—masculinity against femininity—begins to break down, which is

why finding his machine is tantamount to the preservation of his masculine, Victorian identity.

While searching for his machine, the Traveller encounters the Morlocks who are subterranean dwellers that work tirelessly on unspecified machinery and cannibalize the decadent Eloi. The Traveller deduces that the Morlocks must have taken his machine, and he must find a way to retrieve it. In his search for the means to retrieve the machine, the Traveller enters The Palace of Green Porcelain—an abandoned museum of science and culture—and senses the presence of the threatening Morlocks. He spies an old piece of machinery and speculates on its origins; in a frantic effort to regain his mechanical prosthesis—not having the time machine to do so—the Traveller realizes that he “was wasting [his] time in this academic examination of machinery” (Wells 67). In a phallic scene, the Traveller snaps a lever off of the machine to use as a weapon. His prosthetic relationship is refurbished and masculinity restored; he is now capable of protecting himself and Weena from the carnivorous Morlocks.

Once the Traveller regains his prosthetic connection, his “mace in one hand,” he grabs Weena in the other hand and leaves the museum. It is crucial to pause on this image, as it reveals the Time Traveller carrying two things in opposition to one another. In one hand, he carries a makeshift mace. Not only does this reflect his ingenuity to create a primitive weapon out of something previously un-weaponized, but it also alludes to evolution and the development of primitive tools. Moreover, it reflects the Traveller’s connection to the murderous, cannibalistic Morlocks. The Time Traveller seemingly attests to this as he exclaims, “I longed very much to kill a Morlock or so. Very inhuman, you may think, to want to go killing one’s own descendants!” (67). In his other hand, the

Traveller carries Weena and is intent on keeping her safe. Though she represents the devolution of humanity, he resolves to protect her anyway. What comes out of this image is a Victorian man straddling opposite sides of a shared degeneration of humanity. He takes on qualities of both the toiler and the decadent, meanwhile turning his critical Victorian gaze upon them. He is Bhabha's subversive hybrid.

No other critic rails so incessantly against the notion of hybridity—especially Bhabha's sense of a distorting hybridity—during the fin de siècle than Max Nordau. In a (comical) spitfire against the movement of art into the avant-garde, and against the possibility of a developing licentiousness within European culture, Nordau turns to an assuming sexual deviance and cross dressing to prove his point, which ultimately reveals his fear of hybridity:

Sexual psychopathy of every nature has become so general and so imperious that manners and laws have adapted themselves accordingly. They appear already in the fashions. Masochists or passivists, who form the majority of men, clothe themselves in a costume which recalls, by colour and cut, feminine apparel. Women who wish to please men of this kind wear men's dress. (538-39)

On the surface, Nordau attacks cross-dressing and relegates it to degenerate, criminal behavior, drawing on Lombroso's criminal psychology to prove his point. However, buried in his attack is Julia Kristeva's notion of the abject, which she defines as a disturbance to identity, system, and order (4). Thus, what begins as an attack is shown as a revelation of fear of the unknown—that men and women are indiscernible as they

exhibit, through dress, qualities that break down the ability to distinguish the gender binary.

In fin de siècle spirit, the Time Traveller seemingly joins the debate with Nordau towards the end of the text, and their words echo one another. Where Nordau argues that “[p]rogress is only possible by the growth of knowledge” and that it is a matter of “consciousness and judgment, not of instinct” (554), the Traveller similarly argues that “[n]ature never appeals to intelligence until habit and instinct are useless” and that “[t]here is no intelligence where there is no change and no need of change” (Wells 79). They both see the issue of degeneration as a product of decaying knowledge. However, the Traveller takes into account the occurrence of natural change—evolution—and the changing needs for survival over time, which he sees as the source of intelligence. Thus, his notion of “progress” is not inherently or solely connected to knowledge the way it is for Nordau. Rather, progress is the product of natural forces imposing the necessity to change (the force of change naturally occurs and is not treated negatively like Nordau supposes), which gives rise to intelligence. This intelligence is what gives rise to the use of tools and machines to alter or augment existence—to time travel.

Wells’s *The Time Machine* finds an answer to Nordau’s interrogation of “What is to come next” for humanity seemingly on the culturally degenerative wane (537). In establishing a prosthetic relationship between humans and machines, the text creates an answer not significant enough to quell fin de siècle fears but good enough to plant a seed of optimism for the future. Through the depiction of the masculine Victorian hero as a hybrid between the mechanical, troglodytic Morlock and the decadent, childish Eloi, the fiction shows his ability to adapt to the changing hypotheses and revelations that come

his way. He is able to survive because he is able to shift between the two sides of the binary. Instead of sharing the degenerative fate of an unchanging humanity exemplified by the Morlocks and Eloi, the Traveller's hunger for knowledge (and imperialist prowess in this regard) equip him for adaption to change. He is a model par excellence of intelligence—the scientist, the inventor, the adventurer, the masculine, the imperialist, and the hybrid.

### Chapter III

#### ‘THE BLOOD IS THE LIFE’: RESISTING DEGENERATION AND DEFEATING THE (RE)IMPERIALIZING OTHER IN BRAM STOKER’S *DRACULA*

Chapter one establishes that hybridity, found in Wells’s *The Time Machine*, raises issues of identity and can ultimately lead to abjection. Continuing with the notion of hybridity, Bram Stoker’s *Dracula* also uses Bhabha’s distorting, mimetic hybridity to draw out fin de siècle fears—especially those that echo Nordau’s fears of degeneration—most notable in the figure of Dracula himself. Where Bhabha see hybridity as a tool for subverting the power of the dominant cultural group, Nordau demonstrates the success of this subversion of his ideal of man. Further teasing out this subversive hybridity is Judith Halberstam’s “Technologies of Monstrosity: Bram Stoker’s ‘Dracula’” (1993) in which she posits, “ [Dracula] is monster and man, feminine and powerful, parasitical and wealthy; he is repulsive and fascinating . . . lives forever but can be killed” (334). An example of this hybridity occurs as Jonathan Harker is on his way to castle Dracula. He is met and transported to the castle by a mysterious coachman. Once they reach the castle, after the coachman wards off hungrily approaching wolves, Jonathan stands at the door for a while, as though no one is there to answer. The count finally comes to the door and Jonathan’s nightmare stay in the castle ensues. Both the castle and the odd sleeping hours of The Count bewilder Jonathan, but he begins to make some sense of his experiences before dinner one night, as he observes Dracula performing the role of a servant:

He did not come at once to the library, so I went cautiously to my own room and found him making the bed. This was odd, but only confirmed what I had all along thought—that there were no servants in the house. When I later saw him through the chink of the hinges of the door laying the table in the dining-room, I was assured of it; for if he does himself all these menial offices, surely it is proof that there is no one else to do them. (Stoker 32)

This passage reveals Dracula's station as not only aristocratic but as also the servant class. The Count embodies two roles simultaneously, which is seemingly a disruption to social order and to a firmly attainable identity. The Victorian middle class viewed the lower class and aristocracy as degenerate. That is, the middle class and aristocracy viewed the lower class not as unfortunate but rather as a product of "prolonged exposure to the demoralizing and degenerating conditions of city life" (Soloway 40). Ironically, the middle class also viewed the aristocracy's inbreeding and idleness as a form of degeneration as well. In this light, Dracula presents a double threat of the combination of lower class and aristocratic degeneration to the strident middle-class protagonists. As Nina Auerbach and David J. Skal remark, Dracula's position as his own servant blurs lines between masculine and feminine—that to readers of the text during the time of its publication, this portrayal may have looked "evilly unmasculine, and thus inhuman" (32)—further establishing Dracula as a hybrid. Hybridity in Bram Stoker's *Dracula* blurs otherwise stringent roles and illuminates the culturally resounding fear of degeneration as a product of the Victorian imperial impulse and the desire for racial purity, which blends scientific and social perceptions of degeneration.

The connections between degeneration and Bram Stoker's *Dracula* are explored by many critics and in various ways. One such critic is Stephen D. Arata, and his article "The Occidental Tourist: 'Dracula' and the Anxiety of Reverse Colonization" (1990) argues that it is necessary to relocate critiques of *Dracula* within the historical contexts of the late Victorian period, which is precisely where and how its themes of the gothic and degeneration are drawn out as Arata argues, "Late-Victorian fiction in particular is saturated with the sense that the entire nation—as a race of people, as a political and imperial force, as a social and cultural power—was in irretrievable decline" (622). Arata sees the perception of degeneration as "transformed into narrative" (622), and these narratives—*Dracula* specifically—seek ownership of, accountability for, and defenses against "the anxiety attendant upon cultural decay" (623). For Arata, the most important aspect of cultural decline pointed to in *Dracula* is the rising notion of and fear of reverse colonization—that Dracula as a cultural other represents real-life immigration to the cultural center of London with devastating effects. Arata traces imperialism throughout the text and connects it with the rise in travel texts during the Victorian period—particularly travel to the East. It is in the East that the text brings emphasis to racial, imperial, and political strife, with the many take-overs, rises and falls of empires in the Carpathians (Arata 629). Thus, Dracula's arrival in London brings all of the aforementioned strife to the home front for the Victorians and presents fears of degeneration as both biological and social.

Where Arata sees a blending of natural and social degeneration, Patricia McKee, in "Racialization, Capitalism, and Aesthetics in Stoker's 'Dracula'" (2002), leans more towards the social connotations of the regenerating capitalist efforts of the Western

protagonists. She argues that the group of Westerners use their mobility to reestablish racial dominance through the use of “modernized whiteness” and “the productivity of late capitalism,” which further allows “whiteness to claim regenerative powers” (McKee 42). For McKee, Dracula’s race is “incapable of the regeneration practiced by the West” precisely because of his resistance to it (43). However, her argument, though very well established, precludes the possibility that Dracula is a product of imperial capitalist endeavors, and arrives in London to capitalize on the abundant resources—to feed. That is, Dracula’s need to feed on human life echoes profoundly with capitalist ideologies of acquiring more (creating more vampires and finding an abundant food source in London). Moreover, in studying English customs, as exemplified by his profuse library of books on English culture, English maps, English customs, and even England’s train schedule, he is seemingly indoctrinating himself with English imperial and capitalist views. Thus, Dracula does use the capitalist model for regeneration, which comes in the form of feeding and regaining his powers.

Considering McKee’s stance, it is important to return to Edward Saïd’s definitions of colonialism and imperialism. Saïd argues that colonialism and imperialism are inherently connected. He sees colonialism as a direct result of imperialism in that imperialist powers establish settlements in foreign lands after culturally infiltrating the territory. We get a quite explicit example of this practice early in Stoker’s text. Jonathan, the Westerner, travels to Transylvania to finalize a business deal with Dracula, bringing Western economy to the doorstep of the East, in order to secure property for the Count in London. Through the business endeavor, Jonathan is surprised to learn that Dracula is educated about London, as he remarks on the library he finds in the castle,

In the library I found, to my great delight, a vast number of English books, whole shelves full of them, and bound volumes of magazines and newspapers . . . The books were of the most varied kind—history, geography politics, political economy, botany, geology, law—all relating to England and English life and customs and manners. (Stoker 25)

We find through this passage that Dracula is highly educated about England, and though Jonathan does not directly impose imperialistic practices on Dracula, the publication and dissemination of books does. The problem here is twofold. On one hand, Jonathan is the Western representative of imperialism seeking a business deal—capitalist in nature—with a foreigner. In other words, Jonathan spreads capitalism to the East by brokering the exchange. However, Dracula has already consumed Western ideology through reading books for countless years and seeks to turn the capitalist ideology back on the West. His motive for moving to London resides in the city's enormous population, which will not only provide a seemingly endless food supply but also allow him to create more vampires (i.e. capital).

Anne McClintock's *Imperial Leather* further contextualizes the idea of degeneration within the imperialism of the late-Victorian period. As established in the preceding paragraph, imperialism seemingly opens a gateway for the imperialized to mingle with the imperialists—a necessary consequence. This, coupled with the rising imperial pressures from the United States and Germany, establishes an “atmosphere of impending catastrophe,” which “[gives] rise to major changes in social theory, which drew on the poetics of degeneration for legitimation” (McClintock 46). For McClintock, degeneration is a social issue finding roots in retaining “boundary order” (47). The

degeneration crisis carries several distinct factors. McClintock points out that degenerates are defined as “departures from the normal human type” (46), which allows the middle class to self-define and establish their relationship with progress based on how far others lag behind. That is, the measure of a possible middle class progress can only be defined by how far the degenerate class lags behind; moreover, it allows the middle class to create an identity apart from the aristocracy, as well, since the middle class viewed the aristocracy as decadent, idle, and subsequently degenerate. Thus, the middle class can project themselves as normative and apart from the other social classes.

Out of this self-definition arise issues with boundaries, since the classes are so close in proximity in the cities—especially London—of teeming millions. The boundary issue gives rise to the treatment of degenerate classes as contagious. In particular, as McClintock notes, the idea of bad blood arises with the Victorian emphasis on boundaries, as she claims, “Panic about blood contiguity, ambiguity and *metisage* [cross-breeding of races] expressed intense anxieties of the fallibility of white male and imperial potency” (47).

Stoker’s text calls into question this notion of boundaries through Lucy Westenra’s blood transfusions. Almost immediately upon his arrival to London, Dracula targets Lucy as his first victim. Lucy is the daughter of a wealthy family and spends her time going to “picture-galleries and for walks and rides in the park” (Stoker 56). She is the ideal aristocratic representative of the West and a perfectly symbolic target for Dracula, given that the aristocrats were both at the top of the food chain and seen as falling into decadent, degenerate ways. Once The Count feeds on Lucy, the process of her physical degeneration begins. She sleepwalks, has bad dreams, and appears increasingly

anemic the more Dracula visits her. However, four men attempt to save her life through blood transfusions—Holmwood (the aristocratic inheritor of a title and estate), Dr. Seward (psychiatrist and operator of a lunatic asylum), Van Helsing (a Professor and medical doctor among other things), and Quincy Morris (a Texan who is also seemingly upper-middle class). These blood transfusions combat the vampiric bite of Dracula, which increasingly turns Lucy into the representative foreign other. Moreover, the symbolic nature of the act carries various meanings. After the fourth transfusion, Lucy carries the fluids of six characters—her own, Dracula’s, Holmwood’s, Seward’s, Van Helsing’s, and Morris’s. This concoction speaks to the potency in which the Victorian’s view the metaphoric “bad blood.” That is, the bite of the cultural other—Dracula—is powerful enough to single-handedly overcome the English blood of four virulent men.

Dracula’s bite is much more contagious than simply turning Lucy into a vampire; it corrupts her sexually as McClintock notes, “Body boundaries were felt to be dangerously permeable and demanding continual purification, so that sexuality, in particular women’s sexuality, was cordoned off as the central transmitter of racial and hence cultural contagion” (47). Once Lucy is bitten, she is sexually corrupted and becomes McClintock’s cultural contagion. Once viewed as “sweet and lovely” (Stoker 63), with hair of “sunny ripples” (Stoker 147), and in a seemingly innocent pure fashion, Lucy inevitably turns into a vampire and becomes the sexual seductress preying on children. The “Bloofer Lady,” as the children call her, is identified by the protagonists as Lucy, and when they finally catch her out of the grave, she is described as a “dark-haired woman” whose “sweetness was turned to adamantine, heartless cruelty, and the purity to voluptuous wantonness” (Stoker 187). Her sweetness and purity degenerate into

vampiric, deadly, sexual, and impure attractions. Thus, Lucy-the-vampire must be purified into Lucy-the-light-of-the-West.

In “Purity and Danger: *Dracula*, the Urban Gothic, and the Late Victorian Degeneracy Crisis” (1992), Kathleen L. Spencer ties *Dracula*’s themes to Urban Gothic and romance genres. These two genres, according to Spencer, share a “concern for purity, for the reduction of ambiguity and the preservation of boundaries,” and they “[b]oth attempt to reduce anxiety by stabilizing certain key distinctions, which seemed, in the last decades of the nineteenth century, to be eroding: between male and female, natural and unnatural, civilized and degenerate, human and nonhuman” (203). It is precisely through this lens that Spencer interprets Lucy-the-vampire’s death scene. Spencer views the ritualistic killing as necessary to reestablish and preserve male identity—to purify the other. Her argument relies on Lucy-the-human’s relationship with her three suitors—Seward, Holmwood, and Morris—and the potential for violence to erupt between them because of their shared love interest in her. Killing the changed Lucy, for Spencer, is “an ideal solution to the problem she represented. In sacrificing Lucy, the four men purge not only their fear of female sexuality generally . . . but also . . . their fear of their own sexuality and their capacity for sexually-prompted violence against each other” (212). Like McClintock suggests, Spencer places the onus of English cultural and racial purity within the female body but fails to attribute the purity to imperialist ideology.

Spencer’s treatment of the death scene excludes the imperialist overtones McClintock points to in regards to degeneration—that the female body is the space in which the fight for racial purity and resistances to racial contamination begin in order to preserve the empire:

Controlling women's sexuality, exalting maternity and breeding a virile race of empire-builders were widely perceived as the paramount means for controlling the health and wealth of the male imperial body politic, so that, by the turn of the century, sexual purity emerged as a controlling metaphor for racial, economic, and political power . . . [T]he bounds of empire could be secured and upheld only by proper domestic discipline and decorum, sexual probity and moral sanitation. (47)

In this light, vampire Lucy must die because she embodies sexual impurity and the anti-mother; she embodies an antithesis of domestic discipline and blurs the roles within Victorian heteronormativity. Dr. Seward establishes Lucy as the corrupted, non-domestic female threat, in her telling death scene, when she looks at him with "unclean" eyes:

At that moment the remnant of my love passed into hate and loathing; had she then to be killed, I could have done it with savage delight . . . With a careless motion, she flung to the ground, callous as a devil, the child that up to now she had clutched strenuously to her breast. (Stoker 188)

Much like in Wells's *The Time Machine* we again see the strident middle class English man degenerate into a somewhat violent figure. Just as Wells's hero takes on the violent characteristics of the Morlocks he bludgeons with his phallic symbol, so too does Dr. Seward briefly succumb to characteristic degenerate violence. Symbolically and ironically, though, the aristocratic Holmwood is charged with striking the restorative blow, which pits English aristocracy against Dracula, the Eastern ambiguation of class (he is his own servant), race (he is white and yet still other), and gender (he is both masculine and feminine).

There are two physical sites for cultural mingling in Stoker's text, England and Transylvania, and in "Catastrophic Transculturation in *Dracula*, *The Strain*, and *The Historian*" (2012), Johan Höglund argues it is in these "contact zones" that two cultures clash. Moreover, he argues that the nature of these meetings is usually a struggle for dominance over the other: "When the empire and the other meet, the choice they both face is frequently between assimilation and annihilation, between cultural hegemony and a gothic apocalypse" (Höglund 1). English colonies were primarily susceptible to this theory of assimilation or annihilation, and "Englishness," he argues, "was understood to be not simply a set of cultural practices, but the result of evolution," and in this way, transculturation—hybridity—poses a threat to "Englishness," as it "could and would be invaded, infected and transformed in the colonies" (2). The arrival of The Count to England brings the threat of hybridity into England. Dracula is able to go to England through the opening created by the business deal, and England becomes a site of battle over transculturation. Seward, Van Helsing, Quincy Morris, Holmwood, Mina, and Jonathan must ritually destroy Lucy—the first victim in Dracula's transculturation of London. However, Dracula is not only interested in feeding. He has a much grander scheme to change London into a Transylvania of the West as Höglund argues, "[W]hile Dracula professes to be impressed with the gaslights, trains and modern mind of London, it seems to be his intention to change its current historical trajectory, to make London more like the castle in Transylvania he inhabits" (6). That is, Dracula's castle is the site of overwhelming hybridity, which represents the model of degeneration par excellence for middle class Victorians. In his castle in Transylvania, Dracula is both Count (nobility) and servant. He is a mingling of the two classes that the middle, normative class viewed

as degenerative. In effect, arriving in London, as Höglund argues, carries racial and class degeneration. However, Höglund dismisses the atavistic nature of degeneration in favor of a larger scheme of “reverse evolution” (6). By dismissing atavism, Höglund ignores the cultural aspects of degeneration and the nuanced western ideological implications of technology and modernity found towards the end of the text.

After the protagonists ritually “restore” Lucy to her English state, they chase Dracula out of England and into Transylvania. This becomes the second site of transculturation. In truly Western modernist and capitalist fashion, the company creates a “Council of War” to draw up battle plans for defeating Dracula; Lord Godalming (Holmwood) offers his money to procure a steam engine, Morris the Texan appropriately brings Winchester repeater rifles, as “they are pretty handy in a crowd,” he explains (Stoker 308). While the men construct their war plans, Mina takes on the voice of the strident middle class work ethic and raves over the men and their use of money:

Oh, it did me good to see the way that these brave men worked. How can women help loving men when they are so earnest, and so true, and so brave! And, too, it made me think of the wonderful power of money! What can it not do when it is properly applied; and what might it do when basely used. (Stoker 308)

Mina creates a stark contrast between Western use of money and Eastern use of money, though they are both used for imperialist gain. Dracula uses money to imperialize London and hybridize it, creating more of those like him. The wise and respectable use of money, then, is to “spend it so freely” as to defeat the foreign threat (Stoker 308).

With technology and money in tow, the “Council of War” races against time in order to track down Dracula and vanquish him before the sunset restores his power. As Jonathan, Seward, Godalming, and Morris converge on the box Dracula lay in, they return to an atavistic state in order to kill him, as though they must abide by the culture of the territory. On the way towards the castle, Mina remarks that the people she meets are “*very, very* superstitious” and the “country gets wilder as [they] go” (Stoker 313). Essentially, Mina’s comments reveal just how far away from modern, rational “civilization” the closer they come to exterminating The Count.

Thus, we again see Höglund’s catastrophic transculturation, though he fails to point it out in this part of the text. Once the group reaches Dracula, they do not use their technologically advanced weaponry to defeat Dracula; they revert to a ritualistic killing much the same as the killing of Lucy. Mina observes the “hate turn to triumph” in Dracula’s eyes as the sunset restores his power, but “on the instant, came the sweep and flash of Jonathan’s great knife . . . [she] saw it shear the throat; whilst at the same moment Mr. Morris’s bowie knife plunged into the heart” (Stoker 325). The technology of the West does not suffice to kill the monstrous hybrid or restore the light of the west. That is, the technology of blood transfusions fails to restore Lucy—the ideal aristocratic victim. The typewriter and typist, Mina, suffices to create a single narrative from which the protagonists can discern what Dracula is. However, though they have guns in tow, in truly Western fashion, the protagonists must abide by the superstitious rituals pointed out by Van Helsing and separate the head (aristocracy) and body (the rest of humanity) so the creature “cannot reincarnate” and continue to perpetuate degeneration (Stoker 307). The gruesome, barbaric, and ritualistic decapitation of Dracula draws out the sleeping monster

within the protagonists, which blurs the lines between modern, civilized west and wild, barbaric, and “other” East.

Themes of hybridity and imperialism course throughout Bram Stoker’s *Dracula*, and at times it becomes difficult to discern the real imperial threat. Dracula’s hybridity and ambiguity of form, gender, race, and class clearly locate him as the imperial “other” to be repressed by the protagonists who seek to purify London. However, the Western protagonists—presented as rational, hard-working, ethical, and moral agents in the text—must degenerate to atavistic forms of barbarism and ritualistic killing to rid London and the world of the threat of hybridity. Through the lens of McClintock’s treatment of degeneration at the close of the nineteenth century, it becomes quite clear that racial purification and regeneration of England is the aim of the protagonists. Women were perceived as the crux of racial and cultural purity, which is why Seward, Holmwood, Van Helsing, and Morris must purify the vampiric form of Lucy in a sexually symbolic killing. Moreover, Dracula’s threatening position towards Mina—his turning of her—must likewise be thwarted with a devastating and decapitating swing of a primitive knife by her husband, Jonathan. Paradoxically, the threat and actuality of natural, physical degeneration is met with and countered by social degeneration—religious, ritualistic killing.

## Chapter IV

### THE FALL OF THE FAMILY: HETERONORMATIVITY AND THE ENDLESS NARRATIVE OF LOWER CLASS DEGENERATION IN JOSEPH CONRAD'S *THE SECRET AGENT*

Mr. Verloc's wife, Winnie, is the model par excellence of the domestic angel throughout most of Joseph Conrad's *The Secret Agent* (1907). She exercises extreme loyalty and patience with her husband, Mr. Verloc, who leaves her in the dark concerning his real business of espionage. Moreover, she takes care of her handicapped mother and acts as mother to her own mentally handicapped brother and even "glance[s] at him from time to time with maternal vigilance" (Conrad 8). However domestic Winnie may seem, she nonetheless degenerates as she murders her own husband towards the end of the text. The scientific Ossipon ponders Winnie's degeneration after she murders her husband:

[H]e gazed scientifically at that woman, the sister of a degenerate, a degenerate herself . . . He gazed at her, and invoked Lombroso . . . He gazed at her cheeks, at her nose, at her eyes, at her ears . . . Bad! . . . Fatal! . . . he gazed also at her teeth . . . Not a doubt remained . . . a murdering type. (Conrad 217)

The narrator draws attention to the sense of physical degeneration found during the fin de siècle in that criminal types (degenerates), according to Cesare Lombroso (who was a criminologist and physician during the Victorian period), could be distinguished by

physical attributes. More important, however, is Winnie's transformation from domestic angel to lower class degenerate. Her transformation is only part of the larger degeneration narrative taking place in Conrad's text—a degeneration that is distinctly social. Although Ossipon highlights Winnie's physical attributes as characteristic of degeneration in Joseph Conrad's *The Secret Agent*, the larger narrative of degeneration in the text takes place in the Verloc household, as heteronormativity breaks down, and the diaspora of the public space permeates and degenerates the home.

The degeneration of the family begins with Mr. Verloc, who the narrator describes in an air of anti-Victorian laziness: “He breakfasted in bed, and remained wallowing there with an air of quiet enjoyment till noon every day—and sometimes even to a later hour” (Conrad 5). Even further, Adolf Verloc's “real” business is his service as a spy for a foreign embassy. Upon meeting with Mr. Vladimir, Mr. Verloc's superior in the spy group, Mr. Verloc's laziness is again revealed as Vladimir laughingly tells him, “You give yourself for an ‘agent provocateur.’ The business of an ‘agent provocateur’ is to provoke. As far as I can judge from your record kept here, you have done nothing to earn your money for the last three years” (Conrad 19). Verloc's anti-Victorian laziness presents him as a failure as the patriarch, the supporter, and the protector of the family.

Cristina Mathews further extrapolates this point in “‘The Manner of Exploding’: Joseph Conrad's *The Secret Agent* and *Men at Home*” (2010). Her argument attempts to bridge the gap between two fields of critics, as she claims that national and familial life cannot be separated in the text. Mathews argues that home life in the text reflects the larger national fears of the degeneration of masculinity. Verloc, she claims, “is hardly masculine in the context of his home life” and draws out his nuanced impotence from the

text, as “going to bed with his wife deadens rather than arouses him” (Mathews 23). There is seemingly no attraction between the spouses—more of a marriage of convenience—but Verloc is so domesticated that he is oblivious to Winnie’s reasons for marrying him (Mathews 23).

Juxtaposed to Winnie’s motherly regard for her mentally degenerate brother Stevie, Verloc’s relationship is quite different and draws him even further away from any position as patriarch of the family. In a domestic scene, Stevie is reluctant to wash his hands after being told to do so, but he finally does and looks to Winnie for approval. As the scene unfolds, the narrator describes Verloc’s position in the family using a heteronormative discourse: “Formerly the anger of the father was the supremely effective sanction of these rites, but Mr. Verloc’s placidity in domestic life would have made all mention of anger incredible—even to poor Stevie’s nervousness” (Conrad 28). The narrator establishes that Mr. Verloc is so domesticated—feminine—that he is incapable of embodying the dominant, authoritative role that fathers are “supposed” to fill. In fact, any fatherly anger from Verloc would seem incredible to Stevie. This suggests that the heteronormative roles are so stringently defined and ubiquitously understood that even a mental degenerate could recognize the abnormality. That is, Verloc’s failure to be the patriarch is overtly contrasted with Stevie’s condition to draw out its egregiousness, and his “domestic placidity” is a reflection of his anti-Victorian laziness.

Mr. Verloc’s failure to identify as the patriarch of the family is further highlighted by his failure to perform in his job as a spy. His boss at the embassy, Mr. Vladimir, chides Verloc for his lack of production as a spy and tasks him with detonating

a bomb at the Prime Meridian. Additionally, Mr. Vladimir threatens to stop paying Mr. Verloc if he does not produce results for the anarchist group. The task places great stress on Mr. Verloc, as he cannot figure out how to enact the plan. The weight of pressure placed on him distorts his role as husband. That is, the social invades the private, domestic sphere—even further the bedroom—and threatens Verloc’s masculinity:

Mr. Verloc, getting into bed on his own side, remained prone and mute behind Mrs. Verloc’s back . . . [H]e was within a hair’s breadth of making a clean breast of it all to his wife. The moment seemed propitious . . . And he forbore. Mr. Verloc loved his wife as a wife should be loved—that is, martially, with the regard one has for one’s chief possession . . . He was easily intimidated. And he was also indolent . . . He forbore touching that mystery out of love, timidity, and indolence. (Conrad 32)

This scene depicts Verloc’s reluctance to tell his wife about his struggles to enact the task Mr. Vladimir charges him with. The stresses of his job are so deep that they also pervade his masculinity. His “reluctance” in the bedroom is twofold. Not only does he withhold information from Winnie, but he also withholds sex from her. Just as he is lazy in his work, he is lazy in the bedroom. His job and roles as patriarch, husband, lover, and man in this scene intimidate him to the point of paralysis.

Verloc’s identity is further confused in his fit of despair over his gratuitous task to bomb the Greenwich Observatory. His stress over the task drives him into contemplating leaving England, as the narrator explains, “Mr. Verloc had been considering the expediency of emigrating. It was not very clear whether he had in his mind France or California” (Conrad 142). He resolves to go to the European continent to work out the

details of the bombing, and in a pivotal scene, Conrad's text offers a glimpse into the mechanical devolution of humanity that Carlyle so fervently warns against. In the midst of their conversation, the shop bell rings and Mrs. Verloc, still wearing her apron, tells Verloc to tend to the customer. "You go," she instructs him, and "Mr. Verloc obeyed woodenly, stony-eyed, and like an automaton whose face had been painted red. And this resemblance to a mechanical figure went so far that he had an automaton's absurd air of being aware of the machinery inside of him" (Conrad 144). This scene highlights issues concerning Verloc's identity. First, his relationship with Winnie, though they are married, is reduced to an interaction between boss and employee. She instructs him to tend to the person entering the store and he obediently does so—mechanically. Second, Verloc's mechanical response to his job points out the larger issue of the mechanization of humans. In contrast to Tamara Ketabgian's "prosthesis" drawn upon in the first chapter in which the connection of human and machine is physical, Verloc's mechanization is internalized. His work in retail is repetitive and mindless—robotic—and it blurs the line between what it means to be human versus machine and to degenerate into an unthinking automaton. Verloc's mechanical degeneration shares a striking resemblance to the atavism of biological degeneration, which is due to devolution and a return to the troglodytic, caveman condition. However, Verloc does not physically resemble this atavistic condition. His degeneration is mental, mechanical, and instinctual in this scene. The difference, then, between mechanical and biological degenerations is that Verloc's established relationship with his wife—that she dominates him in the domestic sphere, which is also their store—is the origin of mechanical degeneration.

Conrad's text weaves a tale of diaspora that implicates the increasingly modernizing urban center—London—as a cause of degeneration. Christina Britzolakis, in "Pathologies of the Imperial Metropolis: Impressionism as Traumatic Afterimage in Conrad and Ford" (2005), teases out the role of the city in Conrad's text. The plot of the text centers on an anarchist agenda to destroy the Greenwich observatory, which "at once signals the space-time compression of modernity and guarantees London's pivotal status as imperial 'world city'" (Britzolakis 7). Coinciding with the mass immigration London experiences during the late nineteenth century, he marks a spatial and cultural diaspora in London, which is distinguished by the sectioning off of London into geographic locations based on social class. "Urban space in the novel," she argues, "is intimately tied with the control of social disorder" (8), and drawing upon historical occurrences of terrorist attacks in London, establishes that the city houses the comingling of classes. This comingling creates a basic threat to the stringently defined identities of the classes. Britzolakis locates degeneration in the city and points to the rise of immigration and class comingling as a cause: "[London] saw a succession of terrorist attacks (by Irish Fenians), the irruption of working class unrest into the wealthy West End, and anxieties about the influx of immigrants to the metropolis" (8). These social fears and ideologies penetrate the home in Conrad's text. As immigrants to London, they are particularly vulnerable to public anxieties and degeneration invading the domestic. For instance, the Verloc household is attached to their pornography shop (pornography and its consumption are sexually degenerate). Commerce resides within the social sphere, but is imminently threatening the domestic for the Verloc's, because their means of commerce is part of their house.

Winnie's degeneration at the end of the text is marked by her transition from being a "master" of "domestic art" to a murderer and cunning self-preserved (Conrad 190). Her marriage to Mr. Verloc was simply to provide a home for Stevie, and once her brother is blown up, she is a "free woman" (191), as she no longer has a reason to be married to Verloc. Moreover, Stevie's death residually ends Winnie's need, and indeed desire, to sacrifice herself for his protection. Just as Stevie's death frees Winnie from her marriage and role as martyr, it also releases the degenerative impulse from within her because her role as mother, protector, and domestic goddess is no longer there. After a long streak of silence towards her husband, Winnie seeks retribution for Verloc's murder of Stevie, and her degenerate, criminal impulse takes over and she takes on, in Lombrosian fashion, the physical characteristics of a degenerate:

[T]he carving knife had vanished without the slightest sound . . . Mrs. Verloc was coming. As if the homeless soul of Stevie had flown for shelter straight to the breast of his sister, guardian and protector, the resemblance of her face with that of her brother grew at every step, even to the droop of the lower lip, even to the slight divergence of the eyes.  
(Conrad 193)

Just as her role as domestic goddess breaks down, her behavior becomes criminal and degenerate. Her physical attributes become symbolically reflective of those of her dead, degenerate brother Stevie. In this way, the concept of degeneration is intertwined with Winnie's fulfillment of her domestic role. Moreover, in a manner similar to Stoker's *Dracula* and Lucy Westenra's fall from purity, Winnie's purity is compromised once her domestic role is destroyed with Stevie's death. No longer able to identify as a mother and

in “movements [that] were leisurely” (Conrad 192), Winnie plunges the knife into Verloc. The loss of her motherly and domestic identity is the moment in which Winnie becomes “raging mad—murdering mad” (Conrad 192) and thus a mental degenerate. In an even further degenerative description of Winnie, the narrator reveals Winnie’s mental instability at the moment she stabs Verloc in the chest: “Into that plunging blow . . . Mrs. Verloc had put all the inheritance of her immemorial and obscure descent, the simple ferocity of the age of caverns” (Conrad 193). Essentially, Winnie’s mental state at the moment she murders Verloc is atavistic. She reverts to a much more barbaric, brutal, and murderous frame of mind, which invokes Robert Louis Stevenson’s character Mr. Hyde. Her drive to kill the man that killed her brother is instinctual, unthinking, and more importantly, a mechanical reaction, as she leisurely strolls over to Verloc and plunges the knife into his chest with a seeming mechanical fluidity.

The only stable identities within the Verloc household are those of Winnie’s mother, who remains unnamed throughout (she is only referred to as Mrs. Verloc’s mother), and Stevie. However, both of these characters are already degenerate and quickly dispatched of by the narrative. Mrs. Verloc’s mother is elderly, infirm, and crippled—physically degenerated, her legs are abnormally large (Conrad 6). She resolves to live in an almshouse so as to not burden Mr. Verloc, and she deeply respects him because he married Winnie even though Stevie and Winnie are a package deal. Though she is already physically degenerated, she nonetheless shows mental stability in her identity as mother-in-law and respects the man of the house as the narrator tells us, “In Winnie’s mother’s opinion Mr. Verloc was a very nice gentleman” (Conrad 6), and she “would look upon him [Verloc] with deferential regard (Conrad 5). In having already

degenerated and being at the end of her life, Mrs. Verloc's mother is unaffected by the intrusion of the public ideologies into the private sphere, thus she is safely removed from the degenerating household and placed in an almshouse.

Stevie is also a degenerate, but his degeneracy is mental. Though we are never told of how his mind has degenerated—whether by accident or by birth—his already degenerated mental state makes him immune to the degeneration inside of the domestic space. Stevie is removed from the narrative when he trips, prematurely detonates a bomb, and blows himself into tiny pieces. His death, located outside of the Verloc home and in the city, alludes to the degenerative force of London. Though his identity is stable within the domestic sphere—as long as Winnie retains her identity as the domestic goddess—his identity is not safe in the city, which is precisely where his juxtaposed degeneration occurs. Christina Britzolakis highlights Stevie's mental condition and its relationship to the bustling city: "Stevie's 'peculiar' nature manifests itself as an extreme sensitivity to stimuli . . . In particular, he is insufficiently anesthetized to the shocks of the urban" (10). Stevie's proclivity to overstimulation is more than likely the chief cause of his mishap with the bomb. Additionally, since his mind is already degenerated the city cannot impose its degenerative force upon it. However, it can impose its degenerative force upon his body to distort his identity.

A constable reports to his superior, Chief Inspector Heat, of the grotesque distortion of Stevie's identity which points to the degeneration of his body. "He's all there. Every bit of him" (Conrad 64), the constable reports to Heat, who is disgusted that they "used a shovel" to clean up Stevie's fragmented body (Conrad 65). We subsequently receive insight into Heat's feelings over the grotesque explosion as the narrator says,

“The shattering violence of destruction which had made of that body a heap of nameless fragments affected his [Heat’s] feeling with a sense of ruthless cruelty” (Conrad 65).

Stevie’s accidental suicide situates him as the locus of anarchy itself, and Joseph Valente’s in depth study of the connections of autism and Conrad’s *The Secret Agent*, in his article “The Accidental Autist: Neurosensory Disorder in *The Secret Agent*” (2014), extrapolates Stevie’s position as anarchist in the text:

Conrad delineates Stevie’s primary symptomology—his hyperesthesia, bodily agitation, sensory disintegration, and emotional meltdown[s]—as what we might call the subjective correlative of anarchist provocation. Stevie’s sometimes violent bodily discomposure enciphers the specter of the anarchistic eruption which, in the end, violently decomposes his body (30).

That is, he argues that Conrad injects into Stevie’s condition the anarchic attitudes pervading London towards the end of the nineteenth century. Moreover, Stevie’s fragmentation portrayed through Valente’s lens more explicitly reflects the sense of a decaying social order at the end of the century. If Stevie’s is the embodiment of anarchic principles, then his accidental explosion metaphorically suggests the view that the political philosophy is self-destructive.

In a much broader scope of the text, Stevie’s symbolically anarchic death suggests that no space is safe from degeneration, the degenerative social invades the private and degeneration begins to occur—as shown in the case of Verloc and Winnie—in the home. Moreover, during the Victorian period, The Fabian Society pushed for the control of marriage. In accordance with positive eugenics, and as Soloway points out, they believed

marital partners should be determined by how genetically “fit” or “unfit” the partners were. That is, The Fabians believed that marriage should be between two genetically “fit” partners in order to increase the population of “fit” children. In the wake of a declining birthrate, which contributed to the national milieu of racial and social degeneration, “fit” partners were sought to procreate and repopulate the country with “fit” children (Soloway 62). However, in the Verloc household, impotence, hereditary degeneration, and a failing heteronormativity contribute to the complete degeneration of the Verloc family and marriage, which The Fabian Society would have deemed irrevocably unfit.

Joseph Conrad’s *The Secret Agent* expresses a move in perceptions of degeneration as a mingling between scientific and physical degeneration to a more explicitly cultural degeneration propagated by urban centers. Moreover, the social degeneration found in the urban centers leaves no respite from degeneration as it pervades the home. Adolf Verloc and Winnie Verloc, though at separate moments in the text, fail to live up to heteronormative prescriptions of marriage. Verloc fails to fulfill the role of patriarch, is complicit with his wife treating him like an employee in his own store, and is ultimately impotent in his spy work and in bed (he coerces Stevie to do his job for the embassy and he has a sexless marriage, which expedites the total destruction of his family). Furthermore, he marries into a degenerate “breed” as The Fabians would point out, which predisposes Mr. Verloc to degenerate; on a more social and explicit level, however, the marriage between genetic mismatches—Winnie and Verloc—dooms the Verloc marriage, as positive eugenicists argue. Mrs. Verloc, similarly and seemingly on cue because of her heredity, mentally degenerates into a criminal after Stevie’s death; once he is gone, she can no longer fulfill her role as mother and domestic goddess.

Stevie, on the other hand, is immune to the domestic degeneration as he is already degenerate. However, in the ever-intrusive public space, Stevie is not safe and blows himself up in an accidental suicide, which reveals how deeply the city permeates identities. The city offers so many stimuli for Stevie that it triggers his hypersensitivity, and he is blown to pieces that must be shoveled off of the street. He fragments to such a degree that he is completely unrecognizable.

## Chapter V

### CONCLUSION

The concept of degeneration at the fin de siècle is significantly weighted in English society at the turn of the nineteenth century, and is tied to the struggle to preserve English identity during a time of increased immigration, a rise of other imperial forces, and anxieties about the decline of masculinity. Critical debates surrounding degeneration literature create a diaspora between scientific and social degeneration. However, I have argued that degeneration is not explicitly one or the other. Rather, notions of degeneration shift from a more overtly scientific perspective rooted in Darwinian thought to a social perspective intrinsically tied to the ramifications of imperialism and technology. This shift is traceable through H.G. Wells's *The Time Machine* (1895), Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897), and Joseph Conrad's *The Secret Agent* (1907), and the rise of machinery in the Victorian period is explicitly tied to the fin de siècle. Though Thomas Carlyle's "Signs of the Times" warns the Victorians of the ramifications of an overly mechanized society, we find at the end of the century that technology and machinery are firmly woven into the fabric of Victorian lives. Moreover, the rising technocratic culture at the fin de siècle permeates views of what it means to be human and that the machine of culture creates automaton-like, robotic citizens.

Chapter 1 argues that Wells's *The Time Machine* expresses optimism for the Victorians in a decade swathed in fear of racial, national, and imperial decline. The text's

optimism is located in the virile, chronotopic Victorian Time Traveller and his ability to successfully navigate between two forms of degeneracy. Moreover, he is able to regain his masculinity and overcome the hungry Morlocks by restoring his prosthetic and phallic relationship with the machine. Chapter 1 locates degeneration within the field of science, as the text treats degeneration as devolution. This echoes Thomas Carlyle's warning of becoming too dynamic or mechanical and expresses the outcome of the extremity in the Eloi and Morlocks. Towards the end of the text, however, the Traveller equates science and intelligence when he expounds that the force of change—evolution—facilitates intelligence (Wells 79). Degeneration, then, is devolution and the return to a thoughtless and instinctual state. Moreover, degeneration is scientific.

The optimism found in Wells's text quickly turns into an anxious immediacy to purify England of degenerate, hybrid foreign others in Stoker's *Dracula*. The text, with its imperialistic flare, blurs the lines between scientific and social degeneration. The Count represents the genetically defective foreign other that threatens (and actually succeeds with Lucy Westenra) to dilute the English gene pool. However, he also poses a threat to English masculinity as an abjectly feminine, masculine, human, inhuman, and sexual figure. Moreover, as a (re)imperializing other, Dracula turns the imperial gaze back on the West with intentions of capitalizing on London's teeming population.

Conrad's *The Secret Agent* moves degeneration into a more strictly social and cultural realm, and reveals that no space and no one is safe from social degeneration. Chapter 3 argues that Conrad's text exhibits the decline of heteronormativity, as the public space invades the home. It also locates the shift of degeneration from a scientific and social hybrid to a social perspective in the degeneration of heteronormativity in the

Verloc home. Verloc's pornography shop is attached to his home, which intertwines business (the social) with his private life. Moreover, it attaches a degenerate air to his character as he transmits sexual deviance to Londoners. His anti-Victorian laziness distinguishes him (especially as an immigrant spy) from and locates him outside of English national identity. Thus, he is a threat to the nation and his family, as his laziness interferes with his ability to bomb the Greenwich observatory and leads to the death of Stevie. His wife, Winnie, on the other hand, predictably degenerates into murderous madness, as The Fabians and Galton would consider have considered her genetically "unfit" to marry and predisposed to degeneration based on her heredity. Moreover, she loses her role as mother and domestic goddess when her brother dies. The loss of her gender role leads her to madness, and she murders her guilty, degenerate husband. Both characters degenerate into a robotic nature. Verloc is an automaton when his wife commands him to assist a customer, and Winnie robotically stabs Verloc in the chest, and this depiction of robotic behavior again (much like in *The Time Machine*) links it to the decline of intelligence and thought. Once the public invades the home in Conrad's text, as is the case for the Verloc's whose home doubles as a store, traditional Victorian heteronormativity breaks down and leads to degeneration, which is seemingly an unstoppable force.

The technocracy and rise in fears at the close of the nineteenth century bears a haunting resemblance to the close of the twentieth century and its "Y2K" anxieties, in which communities were afraid of computers crashing because binary code could not account for or compute calendars rolling over to the year 2000. The threat of computer failure entailed that many other technologies would fail as well because those

technologies—from military missiles to television—would malfunction. The anxieties aroused by the “Y2K Bug” are directly connected with an almost complete reliance upon computers in daily life, and the fear of a system crash develops from the fear of atavism—that computers and other technologies are woven so deeply into the fabric of daily life, in order to make our lives easier and more comfortable, the threat of degenerating to a state in which computers and various other technologies do not provide these comforts we have come to expect is unspeakable.

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