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Degeneration in Turn of the Century British Prose

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ZÁSADY PRO VYPRACOVÁNÍ:

The aim of the thesis is to analyse the theme of degeneration in four novels written at the end of the nineteenth century, namely The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde by Robert Louis Stevenson, The Picture of Dorian Gray by Oscar Wilde and H. G. Wells' The Invisible Man and The Time Machine. The theoretical part provides a thorough insight into the cultural and historical background of the second half of the Victorian era with respect to degeneration theory. It also briefly discusses how degeneration influenced the lives of the above mentioned authors. The theme of degeneration in the selected works of literature is analysed in the practical part of the paper. The whole thesis is based on a sufficient number of primary as well as secondary sources.

SEZNAM DOPORUČENÉ LITERATURY:

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Prohlašuji, že jsem tuto diplomovou práci na téma "Degeneration in Turn of the Century British Prose" vypracovala samostatně pod odborným dohledem vedoucího práce a uvedla jsem všechny použité podklady a literaturu.

V Olomouci dne ..... Podpis: .....

Heltová

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1 INTRODUCTION

Under the reign of Queen Victoria, which lasted almost seventy years, the whole British Empire underwent a number of industrial, economic as well as social changes and therefore this period became the symbol of human progress. The scientific development in the second half of the nineteenth century had profound psychological consequences and this large number of momentous changes led to concerns about the stability of otherwise orderly society. To be more specific, new discoveries, predominantly in the biological sphere, brought not only enthusiasm for further advancement but fear of regression as well.

In addition, the nineteenth century was not an easy period to live in due to lack of tolerance and mutual understanding. People were deprived of the right to choose what they wanted to do in their free time and were supposed to obey strict moral rules. Those who publically deviated from the norms risked becoming the object of scorn. The initial optimism was thus gradually replaced by trepidation and anxiety. As a result, many researchers and thinkers came up with a so-called theory of degeneration. The Victorian era is often presented as a period of strong moral values and good manners but as various studies of degeneration showed, this image differs from reality considerably. Degeneration theory consisted in the assumption that mankind had always faced, though not aware of it, the threat of reversion to savagery and primitiveness.

Therefore, the aim of this thesis is to analyze how the theme of degeneration is depicted in two Victorian novels, namely Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1891) and *The Invisible Man* (1897) by Herbert George Wells, and two novellas written in the same period, *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (1886) by Robert Louis Stevenson and Wells' *The Time Machine* (1895). I decided to compare these four works of literature because they are all set in the latter part of the nineteenth century. The only exception is *The Time Machine* which partly takes place in the distant future. Speaking of H. G. Wells, another remarkable novel by this English author dealing with the issue of degeneration is entitled *The Island of Dr Moreau* (1896). Nevertheless, its plot as well as themes are very similar to those of *The Time Machine* and therefore I did not include this novel in the analysis.

As far as the structure of the thesis is concerned, in the theoretical part I deal with the origins of degeneration theory, discussing several different definitions of this

new ‘disease’. In addition, I focus on the cultural and historical context of the *fin de siècle*, with an emphasis on criminality in Victorian London and sexual scandals connected with the dual nature of the city. One of the chapters also briefly sums up the key information concerning the authors’ lives with respect to degeneration and its symptoms. I examine the possible reasons which led them to the preoccupation with the theme of degeneration in their works. Both R. L. Stevenson, Oscar Wilde and H. G. Wells were to some extent inspired and influenced by their own life experience and the mood as well as the burning issues of the late-Victorian era. As for Stevenson, degeneration manifested itself in his double life, whereas Wilde was treated as a degenerate due to his homosexual affairs. Wells, on the other hand, dealt with degeneration rather theoretically since he himself was an outspoken critic of the contemporary society.

The practical part is divided thematically into three separate chapters based on the facts presented in the first part of the thesis. I pay attention to what impact the process of degeneration has on the physical appearance of the degenerate characters and to how the deformity of their body mirrors their moral corruption. In the last chapter I analyse the connection between degeneration and late nineteenth-century London. Individual novels, or novellas, are analysed together according to the specific themes in order to emphasize the similarities and differences among them. The most important points are again summarized in the conclusion.

2 DEGENERATION IN THE FIN DE SIÈCLE

2.1 Degeneration Theory

> *"Fin-de-siècle is a name covering both what is characteristic of many modern phenomena, and also the underlying mood which in them finds expression."*[1]

The primary impulse which gave rise to the theory of degeneration was the publication of Charles Darwin's *On the Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection, or the Preservation of Favoured Races in the Struggle for Life* (1859). His groundbreaking theory that all species of life have common ancestors shocked the whole society. He "described the natural order as a disorder, within which species identity was characterized by admixture and flux rather than integrity and fixity."[2] As a result, Darwinism was rejected by a huge number of ordinary people and even some scientists were not completely convinced about this new discovery. Keith A. Francis mentions two geologists who were rather sceptical about the process of natural selection, namely Charles Lyell and Richard Owen. He says that Lyell, Darwin's mentor, accepted his friend's theory only one year after *The Origin of Species* was published and Owen criticized it in one of his reviews in *The Edinburgh Review*.[3]

Darwin explained life in terms of science and evolution, which seriously undermined the religious faith of many Victorians who considered God to be the creator of all living creatures, humans included. Maureen Moran points out that religion played a key role in determining Victorian morals and set the rules in the majority of households. It also had an immense impact on what people read and did in their leisure time.[4] Obviously, the Victorians were a deeply religious nation who regarded the Bible as the only source of information about the origin of the world. Nevertheless, the publication of *On the Origin of Species* called the plausibility of the Bible into question. Moran comments on this as follows:

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[1] Max Nordau, *Degeneration* (London: William Heinemann, [1892]), 1, accessed June 10, 2015, https://archive.org/details/degeneration035137mbp.

[2] Kelly Hurley, *The Gothic Body: Sexuality, Materialism, and Degeneration at the Fin de Siècle* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996) 10.

[3] Keith A. Francis, *Charles Darwin and the Origin of Species* (Westport: Greenwood Publishing Group, Inc., 2007), 9.

[4] Maureen Moran, *Victorian Literature and Culture* (London: Continuum, 2006), 24.

> Prehistory seemed a time of monsters and chaos, not the orderly creation of all species in six days. Darwin's theories of adaptation and evolution suggested species developed gradually through chance and mechanistic natural laws, not by instantaneous Divine action.[5]

Religion consequently lost its authority and doubt became deeply and permanently rooted in the spirituality of many Victorians. This ever-present uncertainty consisting in Darwin's scientific approach and the unexpected results of his research strongly influenced contemporary literature. Linda Dryden observes that both realists and naturalists replaced Christianity with atheism, agnosticism and a godless world. Moreover, new realists believed in education and science as opposed to earlier writers who put their faith in moral and religious ideals.[6]

The consequences of the evolution theory, however, were even more far-reaching. E. Ray Lankester, a British zoologist and biologist, describes indirectly how the above mentioned sudden changes in Victorians' lives transformed into a form of degeneration: "Any new set of conditions occurring to an animal which render its food and safety very easily attained, seem to lead as a rule to Degeneration; just as an active healthy man sometimes degenerates when he becomes suddenly possessed of a fortune."[7] Andrew Smith interprets this quotation as an indication that degeneration occurs when society loses its crave for self-development.[8] Darwin discovered the connection between the life of humans and the world of animals, revealing the possibility that modern civilization could revert to its primitive origins.[9] The widespread belief in progress was thus replaced by a horror of reverse evolution. Such a vision was petrifying and absolutely unacceptable for the Victorians who prided themselves on their civilized manners.

Hurley suggests that society was as vulnerable to degenerative disease as individuals. She compares it to a "vicious circle of causes and effects" where a

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[5] Moran, 31.

[6] Linda Dryden, *The Modern Gothic and Literary Doubles: Stevenson, Wilde, and Wells* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 11-12.

[7] Edwin Ray Lankester, *Degeneration: A Chapter in Darwinism* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1880), 33, accessed June 11, 2015, https://archive.org/details/degenerationchap00lank.

[8] Andrew Smith, *Victorian Demons: Medicine, Masculinity, and the Gothic at the Fin-de-siècle* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004), 24.

[9] See Steven McLean, "The Golden Fly: Darwinism and Degeneration in Emile Zola's Nana," *College Literature* 39.3 (2012): 62, accessed June 10, 2015, http://connection.ebscohost.com/c/literary-criticism/79270522/golden-fly-darwinism-degeneration-in-mile-zolas-nana.

degenerate society poisoned the individual, the individual infected its offspring, and the newly degenerate offspring passed the infection back to society.[10] The theory crossed social boundaries and became a threat to the whole nation. This fuelled speculations and fears that the disease might be hereditary and thus the human race could be in danger of extinction.[11] As Hurley points out, the transformation from a savage animal to a modern human was a gradual process over a long period of time while degeneration was fast and devastating. It could lead to the extinction of a family line in four generations, and the whole society, too, could decay and disappear almost as quickly.[12]

Not only did degeneration rank among the most burning issues of the day, but it almost immediately became the subject of researches across a number of humanistic as well as scientific disciplines. Stephen Arata observes that a lot of technical books, especially in the connection with biology, psychiatry and criminology, were published at the beginning of the second half of the nineteenth century. Still, there was no fixed or specific definition of the term 'degeneration' and its meaning often changed according to what kind of research was conducted. Even researchers within the same disciplines found themselves unable to agree on how degeneration should be defined and studied.[13] McLean agrees with Arata that Degeneration was never a single or cohesive theory, but rather a concept applied across a variety of disciplines to a range of phenomena, including sexual deviance, criminality, lunacy, and the adverse effects of modern life.[14]

The first generally accepted formulation defining degeneration was introduced by Bénédict Augustin Morel, a French specialist in clinical psychiatry and the study of cretinism, whose work later influenced considerably other specialists in psychology and criminology. As Arata explains, almost everyone embraced his idea that degeneration was a morbid deviation from set norms and standards of behaviour, or more specifically from an original type. Even his definition, however, posed a number of serious questions: "How did one define a type? What constituted deviation? How are morbid changes distinguished from healthy?"[15] Nevertheless, no one managed to provide the

[10] Hurley, 69.
[11] See Dryden, 10.
[12] Hurley, 66.
[13] Stephen Arata, *Fictions of Loss in the Victorian Fin de Siècle: Identity and Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 14-15.
[14] McLean, 62.
[15] Arata, 15.

answers which would made Morel's formulation less confusing and more specific. Thus, practically anybody could be termed a degenerate.

Alan Felthouse and Hanning Sass summarize all the characteristics of degeneration as stated by this French psychiatrist. Firstly, abnormal pathological deviations were seen as symptoms of degeneration. Secondly, degeneration, rooted deeply in the biology of men, was considered hereditary and progressive in nature. Morel described it as a continuing process passing on from generation to generation and also believed the pathological deviation to be very likely to become worse within one's lifetime. And last but not least, degeneration may be both quantitative since the same symptoms may deteriorate, and qualitative, resulting in entirely new unknown diseases.[16]

Naturally, working as a doctor at a mental asylum enabled Morel to get into a direct contact with patients suffering from various mental illnesses. "[H]is nosology of mental diseases," say Felthouse and Hanning, was consequently "no longer symptom-based but was grounded in his hypothetical etiology of disorders."[17] Morel paid special attention to what he called 'hereditary madnesses' and divided these into several different categories according to the severity of degeneration. He started with individuals who showed little or no serious problems with cognitive functions but were distinguished from other patients by their eccentricity, unreliability, disrespect for rules and lack or complete absence of emotional stability as well as sense of duty. Morel diagnosed these degenerates as suffering from 'moral insanity'. After 1850s, his "conception of progressive and polymorphic degeneration was generally accepted as the source of most mental illnesses."[18] Arata adds that Morel wanted to establish criteria "by which to identify the degenerate subject, but he placed this endeavour within a wider concern for the fate of the nation."[19] Degeneracy affected individuals but its causes (such as poverty, crime, pollution) and effects (insanity, suicide, imbecility, etc.) afflicted to a large extent the collective life of the Victorians as well. The biological model of a degenerate person gave rise to theories of a decaying society.[20]

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[16] Alan Felthous and Henning Sass, *The International Handbook of Psychopathic Disorders and the Law* (Chichester: John Wiley & Sons Ltd, 2007), 12.
[17] Ibid., 12.
[18] Ibid., 12.
[19] Arata, 2-3.
[20] Ibid., 3.

Morel's ideas of social decay and degeneracy were extended in the work of E. Ray Lankester and Max Nordau, a staunch advocate of degeneration theory and a vociferous opponent of modern culture. As McLean remarks, in his *Entartung* (1892), translated into English as *Degeneration*, Nordau claims that the rapid progress and development during the Victorian era brought the whole civilization to exhaustion and subsequently degeneration. He concludes that modernity itself was the main cause of degeneration.[21] Similarly, "Lankester suggests that the presence of degeneration is already to be witnessed in the signs of superstition, irrationality and moral perversity that, for him, characterise modern Britain."[22] This Victorian biologist further defines degeneration "as a gradual change of the structure in which the organism becomes adapted to less varied and less complex conditions of life."[23] Lankester indicates that the Victorian fear of atavism was fully justified:

> In accordance with a tacit assumption of universal progress—an unreasoning optimism—we are accustomed to regard ourselves as necessarily progressing, as necessarily having arrived at a higher and more elaborated condition than that which our ancestors reached, and as destined to progress still further. On the other hand, it is well to remember that we are subject to the general laws of evolution, and are as likely to degenerate as to progress.[24]

He concludes that people, unlike more primitive animal species, may secure higher development and avert degeneration thanks to their ability to examine and "know the causes of things."[25] This claim kept alive the hope that the process of degeneration may be stopped and atavism avoided.

Unlike Lankester, Nordau did not focus on Darwin's "assertion that mankind are the modified descendants of ape-like ancestors."[26] What makes his contribution to degeneration theory so significant is the fact that he introduced it to the general public. In Smith's words, the first records of degeneration were written by experts while by the end of the Victorian era "the debate had taken on a wider cultural dimension. [The theory] crossed national and scientific boundaries; culminating in the 1890s with Max

[21] McLean, 62.
[22] Smith, 25.
[23] Lankester, 32.
[24] Ibid., 59-60.
[25] Ibid., 61.
[26] Ibid., 11.

Nordau's attack on *fin de siècle* decadence written for a general, popular audience."[27] Smith clarifies that, in Nordau's view, "degeneration was revealed through 'diseased' art; such art indicated the presence of corruption, and was itself potentially corrupting."[28] His work was predominantly levelled at contemporary artists whom he saw as degenerates:

> [They], in Nordau's view, made no attempt to adopt humanity to contemporary life. According to [him], writers like Zola and Ibsen were as degenerate as criminals and prostitutes, and satisfied their unhealthy impulses with pen and pencil rather than with the knife of the assassin.[29]

To put it in another way, *Entartung* was a kind of literary criticism using the writing of other authors as the basis for the investigation. In addition to Zola and Ibsen, Arata also mentions Tolstoy, Swinburne, Baudelaire, Nietzsche and Verlaine, argueing that, according to Nordau, degeneration occurred in every literary style and movement of the nineteenth century.[30] To use Jenny Bourne Taylor's words, Nordau insisted that the work of the above mentioned modern artists displayed "all the symptoms of morbid mental pathology." He perceived them as "both causes and symptoms of contemporary decline" and compared them to criminals and the insane, arguing they should be studied on the basis of the developing disciplines such as psychology, psychiatry and criminology.[31] According to Smith, Nordau believed in "the immunity of the philistine middle classes from the damaging influence of such artistic practice." He claimed that "society could be revitalised" through their prudence, diligence and hard work.[32]

To sum up, degeneration theory became widely discussed mainly because of Darwin's discovery that the ancestors of people were primitive creatures and the world they lived in had developed over millions of years. It weakened the position of the Church and subsequently provoked the fear that "the human race might ultimately retrogress into a sordid animalism rather than progress towards a telos of intellectual and moral perfection."[33] Even though Morel was among the first to study the symptoms

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[27] Smith, 14.
[28] Ibid., 25.
[29] See McLean, 62.
[30] Arata, 27.
[31] Jenny Bourne Taylor, "Psychology at the Fin de Siècle," in *The Cambridge Companion to the Fin de Siècle*, ed. Gail Marshall (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 13.
[32] Smith, 15.
[33] Hurley, 56.

of the disease, it was Nordau who introduced degeneration theory to a wider popular audience. Degeneration also caught the attention of Lankester whose work focused on the possibility of reverse evolution. Atavism, however, was not the only thing the Victorians were scared of. As Botting puts it: "Earlier nineteenth-century concerns about degeneration were intensified [...] in the different threats that emerged from them, threats that were criminal and distinctly sexual in form."[34] Degeneration theory, in fact, subsequently started to be more and more often mentioned in the connection with morality, or more specifically sex and crime in Victorian London.

[34] Fred Botting, *Gothic* (London: Routledge, 2005), 88.

2.2 Sex and Crime in Victorian London

> *"[C]rime is not always the result of degeneration and atavism; and, on the other hand, many persons who are considered perfectly normal are not so in reality."*[35]

London at the end of the nineteenth century played a very important role in the development of the theory of degeneration. On the one hand, London symbolized the technological as well as social progress of Victorian society and the dominance of the British Empire over the rest of the world, but on the other, rapid expansion and consequent overpopulation plunged the inhabitants of this metropolis into chaos. Arata assumes that the term degeneration "started to be frequently mentioned in the debates on the rapid growth of cities, the continued expansion of the English empire and rising criminality."[36] Similarly, Nordau explains how urbanization came to be associated with the spread of degenerative disease:

> At the present time an incomparably larger portion of the whole population is subjected to the destructive influences of large towns than was the case fifty years ago; hence the number of victims is proportionately more striking, and continually becomes more remarkable. Parallel with the growth of large towns is the increase in the number of the degenerate of all kinds—criminals, lunatics.[37]

Subsequently, researches in criminology identified a link between animal instincts and criminal mentality. To use Botting's words: "Categorised forms of deviance and abnormality explained criminal behaviour as a pathological return of animalistic, instinctual habits."[38] Therefore, associating the criminal with atavism was a common phenomenon by the 1880s.

The key text dedicated to the investigation of crime as a form of degeneration is Cesare Lombroso's *L'uomo delinquente* (1876). Some extracts of this work were translated into English by the author's daughter Gina Lombroso Ferrero and published in 1911 under the title *Criminal Man, According to the Classification of Cesare Lombroso*. Taylor comments on this Italian criminologist's research as follows:

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[35] Gina Lombroso Ferrero, *Criminal Man, According to the Classification of Cesare Lombroso* (New York and London: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1911), 48, accessed June 12, 2015, https://archive.org/details/criminalmanaccor00lomb.
[36] Arata, 15.
[37] Nordau, 36.
[38] Botting, 8.

> Lombroso had aimed to transform the early nineteenth-century method of physiognomy, in which characteristics were read primarily through facial features, into a scientific method of measuring and classifying different criminal types according to various 'stigmata' or visible signs in the skull, face and body.[39]

Lombroso assumed that degenerates could be recognized by certain physical characteristics. According to Hurley, such anomalies were not in themselves causative but signified bestial nature that prompted criminal deeds.[40] Lombroso specifies that he discovered the connection between criminology and degeneracy when he was contemplating the skull of a notorious Italian criminal named Villela:

> At the sight of that skull, I seemed to see all of a sudden, lighted up as a vast plain under a flaming sky, the problem of the nature of the criminal—an atavistic being who reproduces in his person the ferocious instincts of primitive humanity and the inferior animals.[41]

Certain deformities of Villela's body reminded Lombroso of the anatomy of inferior creatures such as rodents, birds or apes. He lists for instance "the enormous jaws, high cheek-bones, prominent superciliary arches, solitary lines in the palms, extreme size of the orbits, handle-shaped or sessile ears."[42] Moreover, he also mentions some moral abnormalities due to which a man may resemble a wild animal rather than a civilized human being. These are "insensibility to pain, [...] love of orgies, and the irresistible craving for evil for its own sake, the desire not only to extinguish life in the victim, but to mutilate the corpse, tear its flesh, and drink its blood."[43] Obviously, Lombroso compares a criminal to a brutal savage who acts on the basis of his animal instincts.

In comparison to Lombroso, Nordau describes a degenerate criminal in a less animalistic way:

> That which nearly all degenerates lack is the sense of morality and of right and wrong. For them there exists no law, no decency, no modesty. In order to satisfy any momentary impulse, or inclination, or caprice, they commit crimes and

[39] Taylor, 14.
[40] Hurley, 93.
[41] Cesare Lombroso, introduction to *Criminal Man, According to the Classification of Cesare Lombroso*, by Gina Lombroso Ferrero (New York and London: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1911), xiv-xv, accessed June 12, 2015, https://archive.org/details/criminalmanaccor00lomb.
[42] Ibid., xv.
[43] Ibid., xv.

> trespasses with the greatest calmness and self-complacency, and do not comprehend that other persons take offence thereat. When this phenomenon is present in a high degree, we speak of 'moral insanity'.[44]

Dryden specifies Nordau's description and argues that morality represented physical and mental health. Criminals, on the other hand, were considered morally insane and this insanity manifested itself in physical deformity.[45] Typical examples of these atavistic features were "squint-eyes, hare lips, irregularities in the form and position of the teeth" and other deformities and asymmetries of the face.[46] Unlike Lombroso, however, Nordau holds the view that there are also lower stages in which the degenerate does not behave in a way that would cause him problems with the criminal code. Nonetheless, such a person at least asserts "the theoretical legitimacy of crime" and wants to prove that good and evil or virtue and vice are arbitrary distinctions. Another typical characteristic is a strong tendency to see beauty and find delight in the most hideous things. Degenerates often admire the deeds of cruel fiends and troublemakers, showing interest in and comprehension of bestiality.[47] Such researches on the appearance and behaviour of criminals became extremely important because criminality in London was increasing every year and the capital was slowly getting out of control.

Undoubtedly, the most well-known serial killer terrorizing Victorian London is Jack the Ripper. This infamous degenerate "butchered and mutilated a number of prostitutes in London's East End in 1888, opening the women's bodies and neatly removing the uterus and viscera."[48] Smith observes that it was never clearly stated how many women the Whitechapel murderer killed but there were five definite victims. Marry Ann Nichols, who became a prostitute after the breakdown of her marriage, was murdered on 31 August at the age of forty-three. Annie Chapman, a forty-seven-year-old widow, was found dead a week later. She earned her living as a seller of matches and flowers but supplemented her income by working as a prostitute. The forty-five-year-old Elizabeth Stride, born in Sweden, was murdered on 30 September. The body of Catherine Eddowes, aged forty-six, was found on the same day but her involvement in prostitution was based on conjectures rather than concrete evidence. Mary Jane Kelly

[44] Nordau, 18.
[45] Dryden, 78.
[46] Nordau, 17.
[47] Ibid., 18.
[48] Elaine Showalter, *Sexual Anarchy: Gender and Culture at the Fin de Siècle* (London: Bloomsbury, 1991), 127.

was the youngest victim, murdered on 9 November at the age of twenty-seven.[49] As Smith argues, media speculation that the women were victims of an insane doctor was spread after the police declassified the information about the murderer's modus operandi, suggesting that "the killer possessed a certain surgical expertise."[50] According to Dryden, the newspaper reportage of the Ripper case indicates that a lot of editorial writers regarded the murders "as symptomatic of a more general sense of moral malaise,"[51] or in other words, degeneration.

As a result, this "confirmed the public view of the East End as a place of danger, disease and untold horrors that were a scandal to society at large and terrible evidence of the depths to which humans could sink."[52] To be more specific, even before the murders the West was characterized by wealth, safety and good manners while the East "came to symbolize all that was wrong in the metropolis,"[53] including homelessness and prostitution. Those living in the rich and respectable West End perceived the East End "as a cesspit of crime, vice, drunkenness and poverty, populated by 'savages' who were only one step up the ladder from the beast."[54] Arata points out that The British Parliament's Interdepartmental Committee on Physical Deterioration, which was supposed to investigate the symptoms and causes of Victorian degeneracy in different social classes, came to the conclusion that degeneration had nothing to do with genes and it certainly did not originate in immorality or depravity. In fact, the result of the research implied that this malady was caused by poor living conditions, bad food, air pollution and deficient hygiene.[55] The report of the committee from 1904 thus confirmed the surmise of some Victorians that the nineteenth-century degeneration was directly linked to the extreme ugliness of the poor parts of the capital.

Still, Jack the Ripper's case had a devastating impact on the reputation of the whole London, the West End included, although the upper classes wanted to distance themselves from the terror in Whitechapel: "Murder and violence, dehumanization and atavism, were seen to be characteristic of the London experience and lead to the

[49] Smith, 68-69.
[50] Ibid., 69.
[51] Dryden, 47.
[52] Ibid., 51.
[53] Ibid., 48.
[54] Ibid., 48.
[55] Arata, 17.

perception of the city, for some, as a Gothicized space."[56] Andrew Mearns, a Congregationalist clergyman, for example, depicted the metropolis as morally monstrous in *The Bitter Cry of Outcast London: An Inquiry into the Condition of the Abject Poor* (1883). According to him, the horror was that the borderline between civilisation and barbarism had almost disappeared and this could result in misery, decency and moral corruption.[57] Mearns supported the idea of state intervention as the only possible way to transform the East End, both physically and morally. What was crucial in his account was the warning about the presence of a horrifying urban jungle threatening the basis of civilisation. This hidden threat meant that moral degeneration could spread to other, allegedly more respectable, parts of London. Therefore, he advised those from the West not to be indifferent and encouraged them to take control over the East.[58] Mearns saw the poor as the core of the problem but he did not take into account the possibility that the rich might be afflicted with degeneration as well, which was the major shortcoming of his suggestion.

In contrast, as Smith claims, journalists writing for *Reynolds's Newspaper* and W. T. Stead, the editor of the *Pall Mall Gazette*, popularized the discussion about the close relationship between the wealthy West End and poverty-stricken East End:

> Such journalism attempted to explain the Whitechapel murders as a consequence of class inequalities and typically represented the affluent West preying on the economically deprived East by using Gothic images to represent both the horrors of East and the alleged sexual and financial corruption of the West.[59]

Thus, newspapers were instrumental in revealing the West End's moral degeneration. One of the most famous events dissected by Victorian journalists was the Cleveland Street scandal. Richard A. Kaye explains that the police launched the investigation after a telegraph boy was caught carrying an excessive amount of cash. It turned out that the money came from a male brothel at Cleveland Street in the West End of London. Panic swept through the upper class immediately because it was rumoured that some of the clients were members of the parliament and the Royal family.[60] This case was preceded

[56] Dryden, 46.
[57] See Smith, 73.
[58] Ibid., 73.
[59] Ibid., 69.
[60] Richard A. Kaye, "Sexual Identity at the Fin de Siècle," in *The Cambridge Companion to the Fin de Siècle*, ed. Gail Marshall (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 60.

by the publication of *The Maiden Tribute of Modern Babylon* (1885) in the *Pall Mall Gazette*. The author of this series of newspaper articles dealing with child prostitution was the above mentioned W. T. Stead. He "famously exposed how members of the upper classes regularly 'bought' child virgins for sexual enjoyment."[61] The trade in underage prostitutes was situated in the East but the clients came predominantly from the West.[62] Stead's accusations served as convincing evidence that moral degeneration appeared not only in the East End of London but among the members of the upper classes as well. To use Smith's words, "[t]he fascination that the West had with the East was thus conditioned by a form of male voyeurism, one which transformed the East into a spectacle of depravity that simultaneously attracted and repelled."[63] Wealthy men visited the East to indulge in illicit, often undignified, pleasures because indecent activities were not tolerated in the respectable West End.

Nordau says that degenerates, even though it is not their chief characteristic, can be easily recognized thanks to their excessive emotionalism. Even the blandest experience evokes in them intense emotions. These individuals tend to be egoistic and impulsive, which can be seen in their "inability to resist a sudden impulse to any need."[64] A degenerate is not able to adapt to existing circumstances and therefore "rebels against conditions and views of things which he necessarily feels to be painful, chiefly because they impose upon him the duty of self-control."[65] Nordau refers to those Victorians who did not want to suppress their emotions and refused to obey the strict rules established by Christianity. In order not to be branded as degenerates, they had to hide their rebellion against Victorian values and satisfy their desires in secret.

Like in the case of the scandal on Cleveland Street or *The Maiden Tribute*, these secret desires were usually sexual in form since the Empire was characterized by "new forms of sex, new ways of having sex, new aphrodisiacs and sex toys and, of course, new conceptions of sexuality itself."[66] Alhough the Victorian period is often presented as an era of chastity and sexual repression, it was rather "a perilously risqué epoch in

[61] Dryden, 52.
[62] See Smith, 73.
[63] Ibid., 76.
[64] Nordau, 18-19.
[65] Ibid., 22.
[66] Ross G. Forman, "Empire," in *The Cambridge Companion to the Fin de Siècle*, ed. Gail Marshall (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 97.

attitudes about sex, sexuality and sexual identity."[67] As Dryden assumes, lack of moral consciousness fuelled fears that these new physical appetites could be signs of the primitive self hidden inside humanity.[68] Those who suffered the consequences of this conjecture most were homosexuals.

In Botting's view, due to the loss of moral and sexual codes associated with the *fin de siècle*, "the spectre of homosexuality, as narcissistic, sensually indulgent and unnaturally perverse, constituted a form of deviance that signalled the irruption of regressive patterns of behaviour."[69] Homosexuals were not accepted by Victorian society and were therefore forced to hide their orientation from others. As Showalter puts it:

> By the 1880s [...] the Victorian homosexual world had evolved into a secret but active subculture, with its own language, styles, practices, and meeting places. For most middle-class inhabitants of this world, homosexuality represented a double life, in which a respectable daytime world often involving marriage and family, existed alongside a night world of homoeroticism.[70]

In consequence, homosexuality "became a medical problem, a pathology, even a disease."[71] Homosexuals were seen as degenerates not only because of their sexual appetites but their secret affairs and dual identity were regarded as symptoms of moral degeneration as well.

Male homosexuality was recriminalized in section 11 of the Criminal Law Amendment Act 1885, generally known as the Labouchere Amendment. It outlawed 'gross indecency' both in public and private but the term itself was never fully specified. In contrast, as Arata appositely points out, the previous statute from 1533 prohibiting sodomy was much more detailed. Buggery "was defined to include as all sexual acts that did not have procreation as their aim. A range of practices was interdicted: masturbation, bestiality, birth control, anal and oral intercourse, male-male intimacies."[72] In the case of the 1885 amendment, however, it was never clearly stated

[67] Kaye, 53.
[68] Dryden, 9.
[69] Botting, 90.
[70] Showalter, 106.
[71] Ibid., 14.
[72] Arata, 56.

what exactly was meant by the 'acts of indecency'.[73] Moreover, Showalter adds that lesbianism was not mentioned in the nineteenth-century amendment. In fact, it was recognized neither in public nor in medical discourse. By the mid-1880s, only four reports on lesbian homosexuality had appeared in European and American specialized medical texts but they were all transvestites.[74] The meaning of the word 'homosexuality' in the *fin de siècle*, therefore, did not include lesbianism and was used only for the sexual intercourse between two men.

Degeneration was initially believed to deform the body physically but the range of symptoms was gradually extended to any behaviour that was in contradiction with Victorian values and virtues, including homosexuality. According to Dryden, mass population entails mass moral corruption[75] and therefore rapid urbanization, growing criminality and sexual scandals led to the perception of London as a place of horrors which enabled its inhabitants, both the rich and the poor, to commit crimes and indulge in forbidden pleasures without being noticed. Therefore, it is not surprising that degeneration theory influenced even the lives of R. L. Stevenson, Oscar Wilde and H. G. Wells.

[73] Arata, 56-57.
[74] Showalter, 23.
[75] Dryden, 83.

3 DEGENERATION IN THE LIVES OF THE AUTHORS

3.1 Robert Louis Stevenson

> *"I had long been trying to write a story on this subject, to find a body, a vehicle, for that strong sense of man's double being which must at times come in upon and overwhelm the mind of every thinking creature."*[76]

Robert Louis Stevenson, who ranks among the most translated authors in the world, was born in 1850 in Edinburgh to Thomas Stevenson, a lighthouse engineer, and his wife Margaret Stevenson. As he was the only son, he was expected to follow in his father's footsteps and become an engineer as well. However, he could not resist his passion for literature and decided to devote his life to writing. Even though he became famous predominantly for his essays and juvenile literature, including the two adventure novels *Treasure Island* (1883) and *Kidnapped* (1886), it was his novella *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* that made a significant contribution to the debate on Victorian degeneration and duality. Arata notes that in the essay "A Chapter on Dreams" (1892) Stevenson "writes that *Jekyll and Hyde*, like many of his tales, originated in a dream which he simply transcribed and elaborated."[77] Nevertheless, this was by no means the only source from which this Scottish author drew his inspiration.

As far as the author's personality is concerned, a lot of scholars agree on the fact that Stevenson had a dual character. According to Roger Luckhurst, for instance, Stevenson was both a workaholic supporting the Tory party and a bohemian artist who scorned morality at the same time.[78] John Kelman, choosing contradictory terms as well, describes this author as follows: "On one side of his nature confident, wayward, and fearlessly sure of himself, yet on another side he was self-conscious, sensitive, and apt to distrust his moods."[79] In addition, Julia Reid states that Stevenson diagnosed himself with various psychological malaises:

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[76] Robert Louis Stevenson, "A Chapter on Dreams," in *The Works of Robert Louis Stevenson - Swanston Edition Vol. 16*, ed. Andrew Lang (London: Chatto & Windus, 1911-12), 188, accessed April 27, 2015, http://www.gutenberg.org/files/30990/30990-h/30990-h.htm.

[77] Arata, 47.

[78] Roger Luckhurst, introduction to *Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde and Other Tales*, by Robert Louis Stevenson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), viii.

[79] John Kelman, *The Faith of Robert Louis Stevenson* (New York; Chicago; Toronto: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1903), 93.

> [H]e described himself as 'melancholy mad', suffering 'attacks of morbid melancholy', of an 'introspective humour', 'wretchedly nervous', 'under the influence of opium', and prone to 'hypochondria'. In the 1880s, he was diagnosed with 'brain exhaustion', and wrote of his 'anaemia and paltriness', having just surfaced from 'three months of black depression'.[80]

This quotation suggests that Stevenson never denied his enduring fascination with the study of the human psyche and psychology. On the contrary, as Michal Peprník observes, he worked as a secretary for an Edinburgh society dealing with the research of unusual psychic phenomena and then became a member of *London Society for Psychical Research*.[81] His great interest in human duality resulted, among other things, from the location of his parents' house. To be more specific, the front door led to one of the main streets in Edinburgh where the emphasis was put on decency and order, whereas the garden gate functioned as the entrance to the Edinburgh underworld associated with dirt, poverty and prostitution.[82] Alhough Stevenson's novella is set in London, it was Edinburgh that he described in one of his essays as a horrifically divided, degenerate city: "Half a capital and half a country town, the whole city leads a double existence; it has long trances of the one and flashes of the other [...] it is half alive and half a monumental marble."[83] This visible duality of his birth town is, for instance, reflected in the dual identity of Dr Jekyll whose edifice is located at the boundary of two different parts of London, one inhabited by people from higher classes and the other occupied by the dregs of society.

This, however, is not the only famous case of duality associated with 1886, the year when the novella was published. Showalter mentions the case of Louis Vivé, a patient at Rochefort Asylum in France, who exhibited symptoms of multiple personality and became the subject of French psychiatrists' experimentation. She explains that Louis V., as an adolescent, underwent a shocking metamorphosis, which marked the beginning of his hysterical attacks. He changed from an inconspicuous, docile and well-behaved boy to an argumentative, grasping and violent heavy drinker and political

[80] Julia Reid, *Robert Louis Stevenson, Science, and the Fin de Siècle* (Basingstoke, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 63.
[81] Michal Peprník, *Metamorfóza jako kulturní metafora: James Hogg, R. L. Stevenson a George Mac Donald* (Olomouc: Univerzita Palackého, 2003), 85.
[82] Ibid., 87.
[83] Robert Louis Stevenson, *Edinburgh: Picturesque Notes* (London: Seely, Jackson & Halliday, 1879), 2, accessed April 27, 2015, https://archive.org/details/edinburghpictur00stev.

radical.[84] It cannot be denied that Louis Vivé's unstable identity resembles the story of the respectable Jekyll and the contemptible, degenerate Hyde. Taylor proves this claim to be true by observing that "Stevenson was fascinated with French debates on double consciousness, and the case of Jekyll and Hyde bears close similarities to that of Louis V."[85] In fact, as Showalter further adds, Stevenson might have been influenced by Louis Vivé's fate because his case had been mentioned earlier in the *Archives de Neurologie*, and Stevenson's wife recalled that her husband had been immensely impressed by a paper published in a French journal on sub-consciousness while he was working on the novella.[86] Apart from Vivé, Peprník mentions Stevenson's interest in the life story of Deacon Brodie, an Edinburgh cabinetmaker who terrorized the Scottish capital in the second half of the eighteenth century.[87] This infamous figure is very likely to have served as the basis for the unsuccessful play entitled *Deacon Brodie, or the Double Life* (1880), written in collaboration with William Ernest Henley. Brodie pretended to be a man of virtue during the day but turned into a dangerous criminal at night. Thus, it is fair to assume that his proneness to degeneration also became an inspiration for the split personality of Dr Jekyll and his brutal counterpart Mr Hyde.

Speaking about this well-known story of two personalities living in one body, G. K. Chesterton claims that this "blood-and-thunder sensational tale is also that which contains [Stevenson's] most intimate and bitter truth."[88] In the previously mentioned "Chapter on Dreams" Stevenson openly expresses his desire to "lead a double life—one of the day, one of the night—one that he had every reason to believe was the true one, another that he had no means of proving to be false."[89] In other words, the novella partly reflects the author's own experience with dual identity.

It was not until his studies at the University of Edinburgh that young Stevenson started to secretly indulge in various forbidden pleasures offered by the huge metropolitan city. Summarizing the key moments of Stevenson's youth, Luckhurst says that the author pretended to be a respectful son by day but secretly visited brothels in slums, becoming a bohemian womanizer by night.[90] To use Stevenson's own words:

[84] Showalter, 105.
[85] Taylor, 28.
[86] Showalter, 105.
[87] Peprník, 87.
[88] G. K. Chesterton, *The Victorian Age in Literature* (London: Oxford University Press, 1946), 149.
[89] Stevenson, "A Chapter on Dreams," 180.
[90] Luckhurst, xx.

"So, in the low dens and high-flying garrets of Edinburgh, people may go back upon dark passages in the town's adventures."[91] He made use of the anonymity provided by the vastness of the metropolis, which enabled him to keep his nocturnal wandering around the streets in secret. As Dryden puts it:

> His youth itself was divided between the respectable life at Heriot Row and the seedier haunts of Edinburgh's Old Town [...]. By day, Stevenson the respectable law student would pursue his studies with the other gentlemen of Edinburgh University's fraternity; by night he would roam the streets of the Old Town drinking in the taverns where he was recognized by his bohemian appearance and his velvet jacket.[92]

Rosaline Masson adds that Stevenson frequently visited the depraved poorer parts of the capital because he found himself unable to get by on the money he regularly received from his father. In the Old Town, connected with what is called 'low society', eccentricity did not have a negative connotation and therefore there was absolutely no necessity for him to spend a fortune on neat and elegant clothes. He could not afford the entertainment of his social equals, which contributed to his predilection to bohemian behaviour.[93] His degeneration, thus, consisted in the rejection to obey the strict Victorian moral codes.

Kelman points out that Stevenson distinguished between two types of a bohemian life, namely 'the imaginary Bohemian' and 'the true Bohemian'. The first one refers to a mere adventurer of whom strange clothes and heavy drinking are characteristic while the latter represents a man who does what he wants regardless of what is generally considered to be right and proper.[94] Kelman does not clarify whether Stevenson preferred to be called the imaginary or the true Bohemian but he explains his attitude to bohemianism and morality in more detail in the following statements: "the bondage of respectability appeared to him the commonest type of idiocy"[95] and "[o]f all conventions, conventional morality appeared to him the most irritating."[96] According to Stevenson, every man can lead a moral life on a certain normal level for any period of

[91] Stevenson, *Edinburgh*, 14.
[92] Dryden, 42.
[93] Rosaline Masson, *The Life of Robert Louis Stevenson* (Edinburgh; London: W. & R. Chambers, [1924]), 78.
[94] Kelman, 98-99.
[95] Ibid., 97.
[96] Ibid., 100.

his life but some finally lose their ideals and sink below that level, condemned to dwell in darkness. Others are, in his view, nothing more than unconscious hypocrites taught by conventional morality to crave bombastic virtues which are completely out of their reach and who fail to live by the ideals they take pride in.[97]

Obviously, it is no coincidence that Showalter calls Stevenson "the fin-de-siècle laureate of the double life."[98] Despite his criticism of hypocrisy and pretence, he kept in touch with people from the lower classes in secret so as not to ruin the reputation of his respectable family. Showalter's claim, thus, has two different interpretations. Firstly, she alludes to the fact that this author wrote probably the most famous work dealing with split personality. Secondly, it refers to Stevenson's own dual identity. Nevertheless, unlike Oscar Wilde, he was never publically humiliated or condemned for his moral degeneration.

[97] See Kelman, 232.
[98] Showalter, 106.

3.2 Oscar Wilde

> *"It is certain that Wilde, although conducting himself more or less like a normal man, lapsed at times into a secondary state of existence."*[99]

Oscar Wilde was born in 1854 in Ireland and his short life (he died at the age of forty-six) was full of scandals and defamation. Similarly like Stevenson, he was highly sceptical about the morality of the Victorians and was tempted by the pleasures and activities the then society perceived as immoral and perverse. However, as this chapter shows, in comparison to the Scottish author, Wilde's eccentricity as well as relentless pursuit of excitement and self-indulgence did not go unnoticed by the public and finally turned out to be fatal instead.

Naturally, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* is the key work which should be mentioned in the connection with degeneration. This controversial novel to a considerable extent reflects the author's attitudes as well as his way of life and its unfortunate consequences. After its publication, readers immediately started to urge Wilde to reveal whether the image and fate of some characters in the novel had its origin in someone the author knew in person. Hesketh Pearson offers an answer to this question by stating that in 1884 Wilde repeatedly visited the studio of the painter Basil Ward, one of whose sitters was an extraordinarily handsome boy. When the artist finished the portrait of this unknown young man, Wilde sighed, 'What a pity that such a glorious creature should ever grow old!' and Ward repeated, 'How delightful it would be if he could remain exactly as he is, while the portrait aged and withered in his stead!'[100] However, Richard Ellmann does not find this story convincing enough because there is no evidence that Basil Ward had painted Wilde as well. Furthermore, a completely different story, which was probably spread by Wilde himself, appeared in the newspaper *St James's Gazette* in 1891. It said that in 1822 Wilde met a Canadian artist Frances Richards who painted the author's portrait five years later, provoking him to say, 'What a tragic thing it is. This portrait will never grow older, and I shall. If it was only the other way.' Ernest Dowson, an English poet, recorded yet another version of the originals of the characters. He overheard Wilde say at Herbert Horne's house in

[99] Robert Thurston Hopkins, *Oscar Wilde: A Study of the Man and His Work* (London: Lynwood and Co., 1913), 147.
[100] Hesketh Pearson, *The Life of Oscar Wilde* (London: Methuen, 1947), 145.

1890 that the inspiration for the character of Basil Hallward was Charles Ricketts,[101] the illustrator of Wilde's work.

Regardless of what or who was the initial impetus for him to write the novel, Robert Thurston Hopkins argues that Wilde's new-found fame poisoned his mind, which resulted in excessive self-indulgence. His fate was sealed from the moment he let pettiness and selfishness overrule his brain and soul.[102] According to Pearson, Wilde put too much emphasis on his own personal notion of how people should or should not behave and sharply criticized those who failed to live up to his high ideals. He believed that social intercourse could not exist without good manners and therefore he considered them to be vital as well as much more important than good morals.[103] In one of his letters, Wilde talks about his emotions and inner feelings in the connection with his hedonistic, sensual life:

> Tired of being on the heights, I deliberately went to the depths in the search of sensations. What the paradox was to me in the sphere of thought, perversity became to me in the sphere of passion. Desire, at the end, was a malady, or a madness, or both. I grew careless of the lives of others. I took pleasure where it pleased me and passed on.[104]

As the Criminal Law Amendment of 1885 made homosexuality illegal, Wilde was wary of showing too much affection for other men. He had to meet his lovers in private in order to avoid being labelled a degenerate: "During 1893 he established a practice of staying at hotels, ostensibly so he could work, actually so he could play as well."[105] All his love affairs, as Ellmann observes, had a common characteristic feature. He treated all the boys with generosity and thoughtfulness and did not intend to corrupt them. Moreover, he always accepted their refusal without becoming vindictive or hateful.[106] Nevertheless, despite his genuine alertness, Wilde was often seen with male companions in public, which raised reasonable doubts about his sexual orientation.

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[101] Richard Ellmann, *Oscar Wilde* (London: Penguin, 1988), 295.
[102] Hopkins, 29.
[103] Pearson, 170.
[104] Oscar Wilde, "Reading: 1895 – 1897," in *Selected Letters of Oscar Wilde*, ed. Rupert Hart-Davis (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), 194.
[105] Ellmann, 367.
[106] Ibid., 368.

Meeting Lord Alfred Douglas, the third son of the Marquess of Queensberry, marked the turning point in Wilde's life. The author's deep affection for young Douglas infuriated Queensberry who insisted that his son stop seeing Wilde immediately and started to "[stamp] round the West End of London vowing vengeance against Wilde, defaming his character, and threading to shoot, trash, assault, fight, ruin, disgrace, or otherwise incommode him."[107] In February 1895, Wilde received a calling card where Queensberry accused him of sodomy and so he decided to take Douglas's father to court for libel. His charges, however, backfired and finally led to the trials which resulted in his imprisonment. Queensberry's lawyer, Edward Carson, was aware of the fact that the only way to clear his client of the libel charge was to prove his accusations against Wilde to be true. Therefore, he used *The Picture of Dorian Gray* as irrefutable proof that Wilde was a perverted sodomite: "He argued that it, like Wilde's demeanour, revealed that its author was guilty of 'a certain tendency' toward homosexual behaviour [and] that the novel constituted a public danger through its 'advocacy' of the unnamed 'vice imputed to Mr. Wilde.'"[108] Not only did the court acquit Queensberry but Wilde's physical relations with young men were revealed. Three eye witnesses, as Ellmann adds, were called to give oral testimony about the author's visits to the Savoy Hotel, the place where he secretly met with his lovers. Antonio Migge, a professional masseur, swore he had seen Wilde dressing while a boy was lying in the bed, and his claim was supported by the chambermaid, Jane Cotter, who also testified to having seen a young man in the hotel room. In addition, Mrs Perkins, a former housekeeper, declared that she had noticed fecal stains on the bed sheets.[109] These testimonies together with some other evidence were too convincing and Wilde did not manage to persuade the court of his innocence. Inevitably, he was found guilty and sentenced to two years' imprisonment with hard labour. Even though he found this punishment unfair and unjustified, he had no choice but to resign himself to the verdict. As he puts it:

> Now I am advised by others to try on my release to forget that I have ever been in a prison at all. [...] To reject one's own experiences is to arrest one's own development. To deny one's own experiences is to put a lie into the lips of one's own life. It is no less than a denial of the Soul. [...] The fact of my having been the common prisoner of a common gaol I must frankly accept, and curious as it may

[107] Pearson, 272.
[108] Arata, 58.
[109] Ellmann, 432.

seem to you, one of the things I shall have to teach myself is not to be ashamed of it.[110]

He was determined not to give up the dreadful memories on the two years he spent in prison. He knew that to deny everything that followed the trials would mean to behave as if Douglas and the other lovers had never existed. Such elaborate pretence, however, was inconsistent with his belief that any new experience somehow enriches one's soul.

It should be also pointed out that, as Joseph Bristow believes, until the imprisonment in Reading, Wilde perceived himself as neither a homosexual nor an invert and "the very idea that he was in any respect 'inverted' came as something of a shock to him."[111] Thomas Merchant Williams remarks that according to one of Wilde's closest friends his deviance appeared after he became a heavy-drinker. In other words, the acts which brought him to the trials at the Old Bailey were committed under the influence of alcohol.[112] In contrast, Ellmann indicates that doing something wrong and unacceptable excited Wilde tremendously and therefore it was an integral part of his sexual gratification.[113] Pearson, expressing a similar opinion, states that Wilde's homosexuality was not the result of the author's desire to fulfil his nature, but of his inability to resist the temptation to behave in a way that was considered scandalous and outrageous. He was attracted to the idea of sexual intercourse between two men because Victorian society regarded it as unnatural, perverse and sinful. Wilde took great delight in being rebellious even though he was fully aware of the danger attached to it.[114]

As the trials marked the end of his writing career, leaving him devastated both financially and spiritually, Wilde is often labelled as the victim of the Victorian strict moral values. In Bristow's words, he was "a gay man who paid a terribly high price in being publicly shamed for his physical intimacy enjoyed in private with other males."[115] In a letter Wilde wrote to his ex-lover Douglas while being imprisoned in Reading, he summarizes his personal views on the acts he was despised for, justifying his behaviour: "I don't regret for a single moment having lived for pleasure. I did it to the full, as one

[110] Wilde, "Reading: 1895 – 1897," 197.
[111] Joseph Bristow, "'A Complex Multiform Creature': Wilde's Sexual Identities," in *The Cambridge Companion to Oscar Wilde*, ed. Peter Raby (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 199.
[112] Thomas Merchant Williams, introduction to *Oscar Wilde: A Study of the Man and His Work*, by Robert Thurston Hopkins (London: Lynwood and Co., 1913), 10.
[113] Ellmann, 368.
[114] Pearson, 264.
[115] Bristow, 196.

should do everything that one does to the full. There was no pleasure I did not experience."[116] However, his wild life paradoxically led to his downfall, both in the social and professional sphere. The homosexual affairs were seen as a sign of Wild's degeneration and his case served as a deterrent example for those who were tempted by similar sexual desires. He lived as an eccentric and homosexual in a period when society was not willing to accept it, which cost him not only good reputation but his self-esteem and human dignity as well.

[116] Wilde, "Reading: 1895 – 1897," 203.

3.3 Herbert George Wells

> *"Much more to me than the desire to live is the desire to taste life. I am not happy until I have done and felt things."*[117]

It is widely known that H. G. Wells, who was born in 1866 in England, was very pessimistic about the technological progress and social development of the future civilization, which influenced his writing a lot. In Moran's words, "[t]he scientific romances of H. G. Wells – the first forays into science fiction – challenged many Victorian attitudes through their distinctive combination of the marvellous, the 'factual' and the speculations about the future."[118] Obviously, Wells' criticism was predominantly aimed at degeneracy caused by new scientific discoveries but he was, as discussed below, interested in moral degeneration as well.

To start with, unlike the two previously discussed authors, there is no evidence that Wells ever had a taste of double life. This does not mean, however, that he avoided the theme of duality in his work. As Dryden observes, the literature of duality is synonymous to a literature about identity, or more specifically lack of identity. She argues that Wells enriched this kind of literature with the new evolutionary scientific theories. For example, the main protagonist in *The Time Machine*, shocked and terrified, watches the Eloi and the Morlocks, his descendants, realizing that these primitive creatures remotely resemble human beings. Similarly, in *The Island of Dr Moreau*, he deals with the fear of an animal identity hidden deep inside the humanity of a civilized society. In both novels, identity becomes inextricably linked with the issue of morality, evolution and degeneration.[119] Even though the protagonists of Wells' novels do not have a dreadful secret in the form of an evil alter ego like Jekyll and Dorian, they are, like Hyde and Dorian's soul in the picture, separated from the rest of society. As Colin Manlove puts it: "[They] are either alone—like the invisible Griffin, the islanded Moreau, or the solitary Time Traveller—or else alien and a threat to society, in the shape of the Martians of *The War of the Worlds*."[120] Moreover, similarly like Stevenson, Wells was to a large extent influenced by the dual nature of Victorian London full of

[117] Herbert George Wells, *First and Last Things* (Leipzig: Bernhard Tauchnitz, 1909), 80.
[118] Moran, 93.
[119] Dryden, 39-40.
[120] Colin Manlove, "Charles Kingsley, H. G. Wells, and the Machine in Victorian Fiction," *Nineteenth-Century Literature* 48.2 (1993): 226, accessed April 29, 2015, http://www.jstor.org/stable/2933891.

degenerate individuals. Dryden, for instance, sees a connection between the nineteenth-century London and the setting of *The Time Machine*:

> In a grim reversal of 'The Maiden Tribute', the Morlocks' forays into this upper world are to satisfy their lust, not for sexual gratification, but for human flesh. The Eloi, in a grotesque kind of reverse parody of the abused and innocent working-class girls of the East End of the nineteenth century are dragged away from their home and cannibalized.[121]

Nicholas Ruddick further remarks that the huge socioeconomic differences between the East and West End of the city finally gave rise to the Morlocks, the descendants of working class people, and the Eloi, the heirs of the rich.[122] This theme is further analysed in the practical part of this thesis.

Considering all these statements, it cannot be denied that Wells took into consideration the problem of Victorian degeneration when he was working on his novels. Hurley suggests that the aim of Wells' speculations about the evolution is always the same, to examine the transience of human existence, imperfection, insignificance, and, most notably, degradation and atavism.[123] In his essays, Wells informs his readers that regression to a simpler form may sometimes be "a more proper response to environmental change than progression to a higher."[124] He believes that neither the permanence of a man nor the ascendancy of the human race is guaranteed: "[T]he presupposition is that before him lies a long future of profound modification, but whether that will be, according to present ideas, upward or downward, no one can forecast."[125] According to Smith, Wells mocks the idea of the superiority of *homo sapiens* in order to challenge the notion of a quasi-Darwinian mode of progression which places human subject at the pinnacle of evolutionary development because, more properly, for Wells, the human subject could be regarded as merely a consequence of an earlier inability to adapt to physical surroundings.[126] The following quote, taken from Wells' essay entitled "Zoological Retrogression", supports Smith's claim: "[I]n an age

[121] Dryden, 67.
[122] Nicholas Ruddick, "The Fantastic Fiction of the Fin de Siècle," in *The Cambridge Companion to the Fin de Siècle*, ed. Gail Marshall (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 199.
[123] Hurley, 58.
[124] Ibid., 64.
[125] Herbert George Wells, "Zoological Retrogression," *The Gentleman's Magazine* 271 (1891): 253, accessed April 28, 2015, https://archive.org/details/gentlemansmagaz76unkngoog.
[126] Smith, 25-26.

of excessive self-admiration, it would be well for man to remember that his family *was* driven from the waters by fishes, who still—in spite of incidental fish-hooks, seines, and dredges—hold that empire triumphantly against him."[127] Wells points to the weaknesses of a man and simultaneously emphasises the strengths of the lower forms of life.

Apart from degeneration caused by atavistic tendencies, Wells also dealt with the problem of moral degeneration. According to him, a generally accepted description of an ideal citizen of the Victorian era would be as follows:

> The commonest pattern [...] is a clean and able-bodied person, truthful to the extent that he does not tell lies, temperate so far as abstinence is concerned, honest without pedantry, and active in his own affairs, steadfastly law-abiding and respectful to custom and usage, though aloof from the tumult of politics, brave but not adventurous, punctual in some form of religious exercise, devoted to his wife and children, and kind without extravagance to all men.[128]

All the Victorians who managed to meet these stringent criteria gained respect and admiration in the eyes of their fellow citizens. Nevertheless, some of them realized that to live up to such expectations is not what they truly wanted. Wells himself admits that this description is wholly insufficient and something more and different is needed.[129] As he says, to abstain from anything you like or enjoy means to refuse delight and new experience. Abstinence is, therefore, wrong and evil.[130] Wells was convinced that people should by no means repress any part of their personality and should not be ashamed of their opinions and desires:

> To draw up harsh laws, to practise exclusions against everyone who does not seem fit to duplicate one's own blameless home life, is to waste a number of courageous and exceptional persons in every generation, to drive many of them into a forced alliance with real crime and embittered rebellion against custom and the law.[131]

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[127] Wells, "Zoological Retrogression," 253.
[128] Herbert George Wells, *An Englishman Looks at the World* (London: Cassell and Company, Ltd, 1914), 336.
[129] Wells, *An Englishman*, 336.
[130] Wells, *First and Last*, 14.
[131] Ibid., 250.

He sees the Victorian innate conservatism and self-restraint as the cause of criminal behaviour. For example, his criticism can be applied on homosexuals who were treated as criminals because of their different sexual orientation.

Despite the fact that he does not address the issue of homosexuality directly, he presents himself as a supporter of polygamy in his work *First and Last Things* (1909). As he explains, even though he respects the institution of marriage, he believed that people disapproving of traditional values should not be despised and punished for their rebellion: "I do not see why we should either forbid or treat with bitterness or hostility a grouping we may consider so inadvisable or so unworkable as never to adopted, if three people of their own free will desire it."[132] As for his own physical appetites, Wells admits he does not know whether to describe himself as a sensualist or an ascetic: "If an ascetic is one who suppresses to a minimum all deference to these impulses, then certainly I am not an ascetic; if a sensualist is one who gives himself to heedless gratification, then certainly I am not a sensualist."[133] This makes him different from Wilde whose life philosophy was to seek pleasure at any cost.

Nevertheless, what connects Wells with Stevenson and Wilde is his sympathy for tolerance and rejection of conservative prejudices. To use his words: "[W]e are born impure, we die impure."[134] Even the ancestry of the most decent and fragile girl may be full of sinners, including murderers, prostitutes, cheats and liars.[135] Wells did not like the fact that people whose behaviour, desires or attitudes were extraordinary or somehow different from the generally accepted norms were usually branded as degenerates.

[132] Wells, *First and Last*, 247.
[133] Ibid., 78.
[134] Ibid., 211.
[135] See Wells., *An Englishman*, 337.

4 DEGENERATION IN TURN OF THE CENTURY BRITISH PROSE

4.1 Degeneration and the Human Body

"The rotting of a corpse in a watery grave was not so fearful."[136]

As mentioned before, *fin de siècle* experts believed that symptoms of degeneration cannot be hidden because the disease to a large extent deforms or changes the degenerate's body. Therefore, physical appearance played a very important role in determining who had a genetic predisposition to degeneration and who did not. This chapter examines specific visible anomalies indicating that some of the characters suffer from degeneration.

To start with, the unnamed protagonist of *The Time Machine*, only referred to as the Time Traveller, is a zealous Victorian scientist fascinated by the study of the fourth dimension. After years of research, he makes use of his wide technical knowledge to construct a machine enabling him to move through time. He travels from the end of the nineteenth century to the year 802,701 AD, longing to meet people on a higher intellectual as well as technological level than the Victorians. Nevertheless, all his hopes are dashed the moment he finds out that all life had vanished and the only future descendants of men are the Eloi. He describes one of these childlike people as follows:

> He was a slight creature – perhaps four feet high – clad in a purple tunic, girdled at the waist with a leather belt. [...] 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.[137]

It is clear at first sight that the Eloi are very different from the Victorians. According to the Time Traveller, they are lovely little creatures but he initially does not realize their stature and other unusual physical characteristics might, in fact, be a sign of a slow process of degeneration. As Lombroso Ferrero observes, criminals, like all degenerates, are usually short and only rarely exceed medium height.[138] In addition, the Eloi have

[136] Oscar Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (Penguin Classics: London, 2007), 181.
[137] Herbert George Wells, *The Time Machine* (Penguin Classics: London, 2005), 23.
[138] Lombroso Ferrero, 236.

'uniformly curly' hair which is, according to Lombroso Ferrero, a distinctive feature of swindlers.[139] As far as their facial characteristics are concerned, "their ears were singularly minute. The mouths were small, with bright red, rather thin lips, and the little chins ran to a point."[140] In comparison, the ears of criminals may be smaller than those of normal individuals, their lips are thin and straight, and the chin tends to be either small and receding or excessively long.[141] Therefore, even though the Eloi give the impression of extremely beautiful descendants of the human race, their fragility and biological immaturity unmasks their degeneration.

Another characteristic proving that the Eloi have underwent physical degeneration is the striking resemblance between males and females: "In costume, and in all the differences of texture and bearing that now mark off the sexes from each other, these people of the future were alike."[142] The great diversity of modern civilization has been replaced by monotony and sameness. As the Time Traveller believes, "the strength of a man and the softness of a woman, the institution of the family, and the differentiation of occupations are mere militant necessities of an age of physical force."[143] Obviously, the birth rate dramatically decreased long before the Time Traveller's arrival, which had an immense impact on the traditional feminine and masculine roles. As for women, due to less frequent childbearing, female Eloi mature very slowly and thus children look like "the miniatures of their parents."[144] In this future world, hard work, one of the most important Victorian values, does not exist and contagious diseases caused by poor living conditions had been eradicated. Under such conditions, "the specialization of the sexes with reference to their children's needs disappears."[145] The necessity of a strong constitution became totally irrelevant to the lives of the Eloi and therefore men lost their masculinity and their skeletal structure began to change, slowly getting the shape of a female body.

Moreover, as it later turns out, the child-like Eloi are not the only degenerate inhabitants of the Earth in the year 802,701 AD. The Time Traveller finds out "that Man

[139] Lombroso Ferrero, 18.
[140] Wells, *Time Machine*, 25.
[141] See Lombroso Ferrero, 14-17.
[142] Wells, *Time Machine*, 29.
[143] Ibid., 29-30.
[144] Ibid., 29.
[145] Ibid., 30.

had not remained one species, but had differentiated into two distinct animals."[146] The Eloi live side by side with the Morlocks, monstrous subterranean creatures with "pale, chinless faces and great, lidless, pinkish-grey eyes."[147] Contemplating these strange beings, the Time Traveller remarks that they share certain features with a number of animals he is familiar with, such as owls, cats and fish. Unlike the Eloi, who are physically very close to humans, the Morlocks remind him of apes because they are unable to raise their body to an upright position. He admits "there was an altogether new element in the sickening quality of the Morlocks – a something inhuman and malign. Instinctively [he] loathed them."[148] As he is a man of high moral standards, it is not easy for him to admit that the cultivated late-Victorian society could transform to these malformed, wild beasts. He cannot stand the Morlocks because they symbolize the embodiment of degeneration. They are the direct opposite of the respectable, civilized society of the *fin de siècle*. On the contrary, the Morlocks are bestial, inhuman and physically repulsive. The description of their appearance vindicates the nineteenth-century theories that degeneration may be recognized through physical deformities. In other words, these revolting creatures represent the Victorians' fear of atavism. Their existence proves that reversion to a lower state of being is not only a theory but a real threat.

The Time Traveller perceives the existence of degeneration and understands it is not a problem of individuals but of the whole humankind. He leaves the year 802,701 AD and stops in a far more distant future where the dominant species are large crab-like creatures with big claws. Alarmed and agitated, he then travels another thirty million years only to find out that the last evidence of life is an unidentifiable object hopping fitfully about on the shore of a blood-red sea. The nightmare scenario of the mass extinction of the human race becomes reality. Humans are deposed from the very top of the food chain and transform to the most rudimentary forms of life.

It should be pointed out that Wells' Morlocks have much in common with Edward Hyde, the villain of Stevenson's novella. Hyde is the infernal alter ego of Dr Henry Jekyll, a decent Victorian gentleman respected and admired for his good manners. Jekyll shares the Time Traveller's consuming passion for science, which

[146] Wells, *Time Machine*, 46.
[147] Ibid., 55.
[148] Ibid., 57.

finally brings him to a fatal experiment. As he realizes "that man is not truly one, but truly two,"[149] he craves to separate the civilized part of his self from the more primitive one. This attempt, nevertheless, ends in failure because instead of a complete detachment, Jekyll metamorphoses into the dwarfish, ape-like Hyde.

Unlike *The Time Machine* where the reader has to rely on the plausibility as well as accuracy of the Time Traveller's descriptions, Stevenson lets more than one character comment on Hyde's appearance. For example, Dr Lanyon, one of Jekyll's oldest friends, points to Hyde's "remarkable combination of great muscular activity and great apparent debility of constitution."[150] Mr Utterson, the attentive lawyer of Dr Jekyll, describes Hyde as "something troglodytic" and adds that he reads "Satan's signature upon [his] face."[151] Besides certain simian features, Hyde emits strange sounds very similar to the snake's hiss and his voice resembles a hoarse whisper. He is the evidence that degeneration leaves a permanent mark on the body. Everyone who gets in direct contact with him is immediately filled with unspeakable horror and revulsion but Dr Jekyll says he feels "younger, lighter and happier"[152] when he turns into Hyde. Like the Time Traveller who fails to see the Eloi's degeneration, Jekyll does not recognize his counterpart's malformation as a visible sign of atavism. He is "conscious of no repugnance, rather of a leap of welcome."[153] The Time Traveller sympathizes with the Eloi because they remind him of children and thus seem to be more human than the Morlocks. Similarly, Jekyll regards Hyde as a natural part of his humanity and therefore refuses to disown him.

Even though Jekyll's friends agree there is something animal-like about Hyde, none of them can identify the cause of the uncanny disfigurement. For instance, Mr Utterson cannot find the right words which would aptly express the "unknown disgust, loathing and fear"[154] he felt the moment he met Edward Hyde for the first time. Mr Enfield, Utterson's cousin, also admits he hated Hyde at first sight but he fails to explain what, in his opinion, makes the man so hideous:

[149] Robert Louis Stevenson, *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (Penguin Classics: London, 2007), 70.
[150] Ibid., 65.
[151] Ibid., 23.
[152] Ibid., 72.
[153] Ibid., 73.
[154] Ibid., 23.

> He is not easy to describe. There is something wrong with his appearance; something displeasing, something downright detestable. I never saw a man I so disliked, and yet scarce know why. He must be deformed somewhere; he gives a strong feeling of deformity, although I couldn't specify the point. He's an extraordinary-looking man, and yet I really can name nothing out of the way.[155]

He recalls every detail of Hyde's appearance but yet he is unable to be more specific. Moreover, Enfield meets an unbiased, unemotional apothecary who reacts in the same way to the presence of Hyde like Utterson. As soon as the man notices Hyde, he turns "sick and white with the desire to kill him."[156] He subconsciously senses that Jekyll's alter ego is somehow dangerous to society even though he knows nothing about his personality. In fact, this incident is very similar to a scene from Wells' novella where the Time Traveller longs "very much to kill a Morlock or so" because it is "impossible, somehow, to feel any humanity in the things."[157] Like the Morlocks, Hyde represents the inborn atavism of the Victorians and their tendency towards degeneration. Thus, they threaten the Victorians' hard-won image of a highly civilized society. Hyde looks weak and less developed because the doctor has strived to repress the atavistic part of his identity for the whole life. However, Jekyll does not tell anyone about the potion which changes him into a degenerate man. Nobody has the slightest idea that the honourable doctor shares his body with a beast. Therefore, no one understands their intense hatred is a natural reaction to Hyde's degeneration which manifests itself through his strange appearance.

Similarly like Stevenson's novella, Wells' novel also has an evil anti-hero whose physical appearance evokes the feelings of dread and disgust. This character is shrouded in mystery from the very beginning of the story since the author provides only little information about the stranger's personality. Nevertheless, he pays much attention to the description of what the man looks like. Unlike the dwarfish Morlocks and Hyde, Griffin is a tall, able-bodied man but he looks "more like a divin' helmet than a human man."[158] Only later it transpires that the mysterious man is, in fact, a scientist who knows how to make himself invisible. Like in the case of Dr Jekyll, Griffin's degeneration is a result of an experiment transforming the structure of his body:

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[155] Stevenson, *Dr Jekyll*, 15.
[156] Ibid., 12.
[157] Wells, *Time Machine*, 67.
[158] Herbert George Wells, *The Invisible Man* (Penguin Classics: London, 2009), 8.

> I shall never forget that dawn, and the strange horror of seeing that my hands had become as clouded glass, and watching them grow clearer and thinner as the day went by, until at last I could see the sickly disorder of my room through them, though I closed my transparent eyelids. My limbs became glassy, the bones and arteries faded, vanished, and the little white nerves went last. I gritted my teeth and stayed there to the end. At last only the dead tips of the fingernails remained, pallid and white, and the brown stain of some acid upon my fingers.[159]

As the process of such a momentous physical transformation goes against the laws of nature, Griffin experiences a "night of racking anguish, sickness and fainting."[160] Unlike the Morlocks whose continuing degradation has been a matter of hundreds of thousands of years, Griffin follows Jekyll's example and willingly experiences the process of degeneration in the glorious Victorian era.

Griffin has to cover every inch of his body so that no one reveals his secret. He believes clothing helps to hide his invisibility, the evidence of his degeneration. Nevertheless, it makes him look ridiculous and paradoxically raises suspicions: "It was inevitable that a person of so remarkable an appearance and bearing should form a frequent topic in such a village as Iping."[161] Mrs. Hall, the owner of a local inn, describes Griffin as follows: "His forehead above his blue glasses was covered by a white bandage, and that another covered his ears, leaving not a scrap of his face exposed excepting only his pink, peaked nose."[162] Griffin's bandaged face initially arouses curiosity rather than horror or fear. The village people naively believe the stranger was mutilated in an accident or an abortive operation. They even speculate that Griffin might be a disguised lunatic or a criminal on the run. However, despite a lot of various speculations and hearsay, no explanation seems to be logical and convincing enough. The villagers start to be nervous about how little they now about the stranger and curiosity is, slowly but surely, replaced by public disquiet. His unusual appearance makes him very unpopular: "Such children as saw him at nightfall dreamt of bogies, and it seemed doubtful whether he disliked boys more than they disliked him, or the reverse; but there was certainly a vivid enough dislike on either side."[163] Like Hyde, Griffin

[159] Wells, *Invisible Man*, 100.
[160] Ibid., 100.
[161] Ibid., 22.
[162] Ibid., 7.
[163] Ibid., 22.

terrifies people around, and especially after dark, because nobody is able to explain the cause of his repulsiveness.

Griffin's malformation remains a mystery until his frustrated hostess confronts him. When he takes off the bandages, everybody freezes in terror: "They were prepared for scars, disfigurements, tangible horrors, but nothing!"[164] To make full use of the invisibility, Griffin has to be naked like a wild animal. As nakedness was generally associated with primitiveness, lack of clothes symbolizes Griffin's loss of human status. He is refused by the locals because his invisibility does not allow him to communicate through gestures or facial expressions. For the villagers, he represents something unknown and uncontrollable and thus dangerous and unwanted. The Invisible Man is not accepted as a member of the community and immediately becomes a public enemy.

When Griffin dies and the villagers see his face for the first time, they find out he is "almost an albino, six feet high, and broad, with a pink and white face and red eyes."[165] Even though he finally looks like a human being, he remains a social outcast. His uncommonly white skin is another sign of otherness which fills the onlookers with dread: '"Cover his face!" said a man. "For Gawd's sake, cover that face!"'[166] His body is immediately covered with a sheet and carried into a gloomy room. Griffin is treated as a degenerate even after his invisibility disappears.

Unlike the Morlocks, Hyde and Griffin, the main protagonist of Wilde's novel is neither hideous nor physically deformed. On the contrary, Dorian Gray, "with his finely-curved scarlet lips, his frank blue eyes, his crisp gold hair,"[167] is the complete opposite of Lombroso's degenerate criminal. He is a charming young man whose beauty enchants people around. Nevertheless, everything changes when Lord Henry Wotton, a brilliant talker well-known for his sharp wit and "wrong, fascinating, poisonous, delightful theories,"[168] implants very strange attitudes in Dorian. In other words, meeting this gentleman represents the turning point in Dorian's life. Lord Henry poisons his mind with the belief that youth and beauty are irreplaceable:

> You have a wonderfully beautiful face [and] Beauty is a form of Genius—is higher, indeed, than Genius, as it needs no explanation. It is of the great facts of

[164] Wells, *Invisible Man*, 37.
[165] Ibid., 79.
[166] Ibid. 148.
[167] Wilde, *Picture*, 23.
[168] Ibid., 91.

> the world, like sunlight, or spring-time, or the reflection in dark waters of that silver shell we call the moon. It cannot be questioned. [...] To me, Beauty is the wonder of wonders. It is only shallow people who do not judge by appearances. The true mystery of the world is the visible, not the invisible....[169]

Dorian, blinded by Lord Henry's exaggerated compliments, starts to display traits of narcissism. He is filled with a sudden longing for eternal youth the moment he sees his own portrait painted by Basil Hallward, a good-hearted, talented artist. As a result, Dorian utters a fatal wish to remain young and beautiful forever:

> How sad it is! I shall grow old, and horrible, and dreadful. But this picture will remain always young. It will never be older than this particular day of June.... If it were only the other way! If it were I who was to be always young, and the picture that was to grow old! For that—for that—I would give everything! Yes, there is nothing in the whole word I would not give! I would give my soul for that![170]

Not considering the possible consequences of this yearning, Dorian unconsciously finds a way to escape the symptoms of degeneration. He turns into a piece of art and his portrait, on the other hand, becomes a human being susceptible to degenerative disease. As Dorian says: "What the worm was to the corpse, his sins would be to the painted image on the canvas. They would mar its beauty and eat away its grace."[171] He does not need to worry that ageing or degeneration will disfigure his pretty face. Like Griffin, who uses clothing to mask his invisibility, Dorian can mislead other people about his true appearance thanks to the picture.

He, or more specifically the portrait, becomes a deterrent example of what degeneration can do with the human body. Dorian makes the same mistake like Jekyll and lets his corrupt, bestial self dominate his pure soul. The more corrupt he is, the more loathsome the portrait becomes. Its breathtaking beauty disappears and is gradually replaced by the signs of decay: "[I]n the eyes there was a look of cunning, and in the mouth the curved wrinkle of the hypocrite. [...] The scarlet dew that spotted the hand seemed brighter, and more like blood newly spilt."[172] It slowly changes before Dorian's eyes but it does not irritate him. Not only does he indulge in his own beauty, he also

[169] Wilde, *Picture*, 29-30.
[170] Ibid., 34.
[171] Ibid., 138.
[172] Ibid., 253-254.

admires his portrait because it creates a vivid image of how degeneration can deform one's body:

> He grew more and more enamoured of his own beauty, more and more interested in the corruption of his own soul. He would examine with minute care, and sometimes with a monstrous and terrible delight, the hideous lines that seared the wrinkling forehead or crawled around the heavy sensual mouth, wondering sometimes which were the more horrible, the signs of sin or the signs of age.[173]

Dorian's obsession with the picture resembles the scientists' unhealthy fascination with their experiments. Neither Jekyll nor Griffin perceives his scientific exploration as deleterious, and Dorian ignores the fact that his delight in the symptoms of his own degeneration is deliberately perverse.

He becomes the centre of attention anywhere he appears and he likes it. Nonetheless, while the Invisible Man's and Jekyll counterpart's degeneration is evident from the first sight, he arouses no suspicion. Basil is even convinced that Dorian's youthful appearance must be evidence of his goodness and purity:

> Sin is a thing that writes itself across a man's face. It cannot be concealed. People talk of secret vices. There are no such things as secret vices. If a wretched man has a vice, it shows itself in the lines of his mouth, the droop of his eyelids, the moulding of his hands even.[174]

Basil labours under the misapprehension that degeneration cannot be hidden. His presumption is obviously based on the claims of the nineteenth-century researchers. Only when Dorian shows him the detestable, decaying picture, Basil realizes how blind and naive he has been. The picture is so different from the one he painted years ago that he initially does not recognize his own work: "An exclamation of horror broke from the painter's lips as he saw in the dim light the hideous face on the canvas grinning at him. There was something in its expression that filled him with disgust and loathing."[175] Like the Time Traveller and people around Hyde as well as Griffin, Basil is disgusted by Dorian's physical degeneration and feels only dread and revulsion.

[173] Wilde, *Picture*, 148.
[174] Ibid., 172.
[175] Ibid., 179.

Dorian has managed to outwit the process of degeneration for many years but the truth about his youthful appearance is, like in the case of Griffin, revealed after his death. The picture is freed from the process of degeneration and Dorian ends up old and ugly. He is so "withered, wrinkled, and loathsome of visage,"[176] that his own servants do not recognize him at first sight. They find "hanging upon the wall a splendid portrait of their master as they had last seen him, in all the wonder of his exquisite youth and beauty"[177] and identify the dead man as Dorian only on the basis of his rings. Naturally, in comparison with Hyde and the Morlocks, Dorian's degeneration is of a different kind. He neither resembles a troglodyte nor reminds people of their simian past. Like in Griffin's case, Dorian's body does not give the impression of malformation but this does not change the fact that his repulsiveness undoubtedly proves he is a degenerate individual.

Wells, Stevenson and Wilde prove the *fin de siècle* theory that degeneration leaves a permanent imprint on one's body. All characters react in the same way when they are exposed to the mysterious deformity or unusual appearance of the degenerates. They are either frightened or at least disconcerted. The ultimate biological degradation followed by the extinction of humans is depicted only in *The Time Machine* but the rest of the analysed works serve as the herald of what degeneration might cause if its visible symptoms are ignored or not taken seriously enough.

[176] Wilde, *Picture*, 256.
[177] Ibid., 256.

4.2 Crime and Moral Degeneration

"There had been a madness of murder in the air."[178]

Although the previous chapter predominantly deals with physical degeneration, the disease does not afflict only the body. It has a devastating impact on the human mind as well. It changes people's personalities and brings out the worst in them. All the degenerates in the analysed works of literature finally restore to violence which escalates into a brutal murder. To put it in another way, physical disfigurement of the characters reflects their moral degeneration. Therefore, this chapter is to a large extent based on the following statement: "The physical type of the criminal is completed and intensified by his moral and intellectual physiognomy, which furnishes a further proof of his relationship to the savage."[179] In general, due to lack of emotions, degenerates have a tendency to behave like inhuman criminals, which might be seen as another evidence of atavism.

Both Griffin, Hyde, Dorian and the Morlocks demonstrate their moral degeneration by the brutish, heinous deeds they perpetrate. As Hyde's name indicates, he represents the aspect of human nature the Victorians did not want to be uncovered, and that is not only physical but moral degeneration as well. As Arata puts it: "In Edward Hyde, Stevenson's first readers could easily discern the lineaments of Lombroso's atavistic criminal."[180] For example, Hyde knocks down a little girl and then ruthlessly tramples over her body, ignoring her desperate scream. Griffin acts in the same way when he intentionally attacks an innocent child: "A little child playing near Kemp's gateway was violently caught up and thrown aside, so that its ankle was broken."[181] Neither of them stops to make sure their victim is not seriously hurt and both seem to be totally indifferent. Lombroso Fererro comments on this pattern of behaviour as follows: "We hear a great deal about the remorse of criminals, but those who come into contact with these degenerates realise that they are rarely, if ever, tormented by such feelings."[182] This quote explains the coldness and carelessness of the attackers.

[178] Wilde, *Picture*, 184.
[179] Lombroso Ferrero, 27.
[180] Arata, 33.
[181] Wells, *Invisible Man*, 129.
[182] Lombroso Ferrero, 29.

The above mentioned incidents are, however, only the beginning of their criminal career. Jekyll turns into Hyde too often, making his malicious alter ego stronger and stronger. Eventually, he finds himself unable to control his degeneration and let Hyde brutally murder Sir Danvers, an elder Victorian gentleman:

> Mr Hyde broke out of all bounds and clubbed him to the earth. And next moment, with ape-like fury, he was trampling his victim under foot and hailing down a storm of blows, under which the bones were audibly shattered and the body jumped upon the roadway.[183]

Hyde behaves like an uncontrollable animal playing with its prey. He then furiously flees the crime scene and selfishly drinks the potion, leaving Jekyll to the mercy of guilty conscience. Unlike Hyde, who feels no remorse, the warm-hearted doctor is tormented by the thoughts of Hyde's sins. His initial sympathy for Hyde disappears and he starts to loath his corrupt counterpart. Nevertheless, he refuses to take responsibility for his evil deeds, claiming that he has nothing to do with them: "It was Hyde, after all, and Hyde alone, that was guilty."[184] Jekyll misses the fact that it was him, though physically transformed, who clubbed Carew to death. It was his hand that clutched the murder weapon and yet he did nothing to save the man's life.

To be more specific, that Hyde is perverted and suffers from moral degeneration does not mean that Jekyll is decent and sane. The doctor's initial fascination and insatiable curiosity about the results of his twisted experiment turns into unhealthy obsession. The drug in the form of the potion is no longer pleasure and becomes necessity instead. Jekyll fails to get rid of his immoral atavistic self and Hyde remains a part of his identity. As the doctor does not manage to create two independent individuals, he considers the experiment unsuccessful. He does not realize degeneration is deeply rooted in his humanity and therefore the separation is not possible. Jekyll and Hyde are heavily dependent on each other and one cannot exist without the other because they share the same body and mind. It is not clear whether Hyde commits suicide to avoid life imprisonment or whether Jekyll prefers to kill himself rather than remain trapped in Hyde forever. Nevertheless, it is indisputable the doctor misses the point that Hyde is an integral part of his personality. Until the very end, he is convinced

[183] Stevenson, *Dr Jekyll*, 30.
[184] Ibid., 76.

that a complete separation is possible. He never reconciles himself with the fact that one part of his self will always be morally degenerate and corrupt.

Hyde's inexplicable fit of rage bears the hallmarks of Griffin's murder of Mr Wicksteed, a middle-aged peaceable man:

> Everything points to a desperate struggle, – the trampled ground, the numerous wounds Mr. Wicksteed received, his splintered walking-stick; but why the attack was made – save in a murderous frenzy – it is impossible to imagine. Indeed the theory of madness is almost unavoidable.[185]

As the narrator assumes, Griffin is a morally degenerate individual, which contributes to his tendency towards criminal behaviour. He is egocentric and ruthlessly defies Victorian moral values in pursuit of his personal desires. As Lombroso Ferrero claims: "The ability to discriminate between right and wrong, which is the highest attribute of civilised humanity, is notably lacking in physically and psychically stunted organisms. Many criminals do not realise the immorality of their actions."[186] Neither Hyde nor Griffin has a logical motive for these atrocious acts of brutality. Their victims are defenceless men who are no threat to the two degenerate criminals. Both Hyde and Griffin are wild and impulsive, following the basic animal instinct to survive. They selfishly care only about themselves and their needs regardless of the suffering it causes to others.

The first victim of Dorian's cruelty and moral corruption is Sibyl Vane, an actress "hardly seventeen years of age, with a little flower-like face, a small Greek head with plaited coils of dark-brown hair, eyes that were violet wells of passion, lips that were like the petals of a rose."[187] He meets the girl for the first time when he decides to "go out in search of some adventure,"[188] consumed with intense passion for sensations. He is immediately captivated by her genuine beauty and outstanding talent for acting. Although he raves about how much he loves her, Sibyl is nothing more than another way of amusement. He says "the man who could wrong her would be a beast, a beast without a heart"[189] but, paradoxically, Dorian himself becomes the monster ruining the fragile girl's life. When Sibyl experiences real love, she realizes the artificiality of the

[185] Wells, *Invisible Man*, 131.
[186] Lombroso Ferrero, 28.
[187] Wilde, *Picture*, 61.
[188] Ibid., 59.
[189] Ibid., 91.

feelings in the plays: "I saw through the hollowness, the sham, the silliness of the empty pageant in which I had always played."[190] She fails as an actress, which makes Dorian furious and bitterly disappointed: "You are shallow and stupid. My God! how mad I was to love you! What a fool I have been! You are nothing to me now. I will never see you again. I will never think of you. I will never mention your name."[191] Sibyl kills herself because she is deeply hurt by his sharp reaction to the lacklustre performance but Dorian does not feel responsible. As he says: "It was the girl's fault, not his."[192] He does not see her suicide as a tragic event but as a touching end of a brilliant play. Dorian is as emotionless as Griffin who makes his father look like a thief when he robs him of money that does not belong to him. The old man cannot stand such humiliation and shoots himself but Griffin remains indifferent, showing disrespect for his own family: "I went to bury my father. My mind was still on this research, and I did not lift a finger to save his character. [...] I did not feel a bit sorry for [him]. He seemed to me to be the victim of his own foolish sentimentality."[193] Griffin scorns all traditional Victorian values, including high respect for morality and ethics. He is responsible for his father's misery and Dorian drives Sibyl to suicide. Neither of them, however, is willing to face the consequences of their selfishness and merciless treatment of the loved ones.

Dorian's moral degeneration also leads to a heinous crime like in the case of Hyde and Griffin. Unlike them, however, he does not kill an unfortunate passer-by but a loyal friend who would sacrifice anything for their friendship, Basil Hallward. To be more specific, it is not a coincidence that Basil's muse is Dorian Gray. He is attracted to Dorian from the first moment they meet: "When our eyes met, I felt that I was growing pale. A curious sensation of terror came over me."[194] Basil knows that such physical attraction is against the Victorian moral norms, which explains his sudden fear. Despite this, he plucks up the courage to talk about the true nature of his feelings for the young man:

> Dorian, from the moment I met you, your personality had the most extraordinary influence over me. I was dominated, soul, brain, and power, by you. [...] I

[190] Wilde, *Picture*, 101.
[191] Ibid., 102.
[192] Ibid., 106.
[193] Ibid., 94-95.
[194] Ibid., 13.

> worshipped you. I grew jealous of every one to whom you spoke. I wanted to have you all to myself. I was only happy when I was with you.[195]

It cannot be denied that Basil's confession has a homoerotic undertone. Although he does not say it literally, he seems to be in love with his sitter. Lord Henry tries to persuade Basil to send the portrait to the Grosvenor Gallery but the artist refuses regardless of the fame and admiration it would bring him: "The reason I will not exhibit this picture is that I am afraid that I have shown in it the secret of my own soul."[196] Basil seems to be afraid that his masterpiece might reveal the truth about his homosexual tendencies. Like Jekyll who is ashamed for his secret desires, Basil does not want to be regarded as a degenerate and therefore pretends that Dorian is nothing more to him than a good friend and an important source of inspiration for his art.

Dorian, however, does not reciprocate Basil's deep feelings and loses his nerves when the painter confronts him with his bad reputation. He does not want to pray for redemption and, overwhelmed by "the mad passions of a hunted animal,"[197] succumbs to degeneration, stabbing Basil to death:

> He rushed at him, and dug the knife into the great vein that is behind the ear, crushing the man's head down on the table, and stabbing again and again. There was a stifled groan, and the horrible sound of someone choking with blood. Three times the outstretched arms shot up convulsively, waving grotesque stiff-fingered hands in the air. He stabbed him twice more, but the man did not move.[198]

Dorian deceives himself when he claims that the "uncontrollable feeling of hatred for Basil Hallward [has] been suggested to him by the image on the canvas, whispered into his ear by those grinning lips."[199] He is fully aware of the fact that the picture represents his own soul and yet he accuses it of Basil's murder. He calls the portrait "a diary of my life"[200] but at the same time blames it for the consequences of his own actions, protesting his innocence.

Basil's murder is not the only example of Dorian's inability to bear responsibility for his deeds. He repeatedly puts the blame on the victims of his moral

[195] Wilde, *Picture*, 132.
[196] Ibid., 12.
[197] Ibid., 182.
[198] Ibid., 182
[199] Ibid., 182.
[200] Ibid., 176.

degeneration: "Basil had painted the portrait that had marred his life. He could not forgive him that. It was the portrait that had done everything. [...] As for Alan Campbell, his suicide had been his own act. He had chosen to do it. It was nothing to him."[201] Dorian blackmails his ex-friend Alan Campbell, a highly intelligent young scientist, and then forces him to change the dead body of Basil "into a handful of ashes."[202] Alan, though unwillingly, follows the orders and helps Dorian to destroy all the evidence that might prove him guilty. Dorian is happy to find out that Alan is dead because now there is no one who could reveal his terrible secret. Similarly, when Sibyl's vengeful brother is accidently killed during a shooting party, Dorian does not grieve and instead cries "for he knew he was safe."[203] Like Hyde and the Invisible Man, he is self-centred and narcissistic, caring only about his own safety and satisfaction.

In contrast, the Eloi are pure and meek and have absolutely no tendency towards cruelty or immoral behaviour. Their degeneration consists in their low intelligence. Lombroso Ferrero argues that "imbeciles and idiots are remarkably undersized."[204] This explains how the stature of the Eloi is connected with their simplicity. As the Time Traveller concludes: "The too-perfect security of the Upperworlders had led them to a slow movement of degeneration, to a general dwindling in size, strength, and intelligence."[205] Eloi's lack of intellect is seen in the scene where Weena, an Eloi girl, gets cramp while bathing and is swept away by the stream: "It will give you an idea, therefore, of the strange deficiency in these creatures, when I tell you that none made the slightest attempt to rescue the weakly crying little thing which was drowning before their eyes."[206] They do not understand that Weena is in danger and therefore completely ignore her desperate call for help. Their apathy is a form of degeneration which prevents them from saving the girl. Moreover, Weena subsequently becomes entirely reliant on her rescuer. She obediently follows the Time Traveller as he explores the surroundings and gets frantic every time he leaves her alone. She is absolutely devoted to him and behaves like an animal companion rather than a human adult being.

Lankester argues that humankind has changed neither physically nor mentally since the Ancient Greeks. According to him, the intellect of the modern civilization

[201] Wilde, *Picture*, 253.
[202] Ibid., 193.
[203] Ibid., 239.
[204] Lombroso Ferrero, 237.
[205] Wells, *Time Machine*, 49.
[206] Ibid., 42.

does not stand out in comparison with that of the men from ancient times.[207] People "reject the good gift of reason with which every child is born" and subsequently "degenerate into a contented life of material enjoyment accompanied by ignorance and superstition."[208] Similarly, the Time Traveller believes that "[t]here is no intelligence where there is no change and no need of change. Only those animals partake of intelligence that have to meet a huge variety of needs and dangers."[209] He further adds:

> What, unless biological science is a mass of errors, is the cause of human intelligence and vigour? Hardship and freedom: conditions under which the active, strong, and subtle survive and the weaker go to the wall; conditions that put a premium upon the loyal alliance of capable men, upon self-restraint patience, and decision.[210]

The Eloi had lived in peace and comfort for too long and therefore gradually lost their capacity to progress. Lack of problems whose solutions require strength, shrewdness and life experience is the cause of the Eloi's naivety and ignorance. They are doomed to stagnate and finally regress to more primitive beings.

The Eloi's frivolity and life of ease have become their downfall. They are, though not aware of it, wholly dependent on the Morlocks who provide them with clothing and footwear. In addition, the Morlocks keep the Eloi alive because the Upper-worlders are their only source of food: "These Eloi were mere fatted cattle, which the ant-like Morlocks preserved and preyed upon – probably saw to the breeding of."[211] The Eloi childishly fear the dark, not realizing their real enemy are the Morlocks lurking in the subterranean shafts. Their intellectual degradation prevents them from fighting the carnivorous creatures from the underground. They passively accept the role of a prey and leave themselves to the mercy of the predators.

Apart from moral degeneration itself, the authors of the analysed works also focus on what deviating from the norm entails. To put it in another way, they show how a degenerate can experience frustration caused by sense of loneliness. All the protagonists suffer from alienation because their degeneration frightens other people. They have to live in pretence and lead double lives. Jekyll, Griffin and Dorian manage

[207] Lankester, 60.
[208] Ibid., 61.
[209] Wells, *Time Machine*, 79.
[210] Ibid., 32.
[211] Ibid., 62.

to conceal their dual identity from the society and the Time Traveller does not tell anyone about his travel to future until he comes back. When their burden of isolation becomes unbearable, they share their secret with those who are closest to them. Nevertheless, they encounter a total lack of comprehension. Anyone who is exposed to moral corruption face to face turns their back on the degenerate or refuses to believe that the theory of degeneration might be true.

Whenever Jekyll metamorphoses into the bestial Hyde, he spends much time in seclusion. He does not want to ruin his good reputation while he engages in disgraceful activities. As he says: "Into the details of the infamy at which I thus connived (for even now I can scarce grant that I committed it) I have no design of entering."[212] Jekyll is ashamed of Hyde's nocturnal wanderings and therefore does not mention any specific details about the vices of his alter ego. The only person to whom Jekyll confides his terrible secret is Lanyon. To be more precise, Hyde drinks the potion before the scientist's eyes and drives him to the depths of despair. Lanyon freezes in terror any time he remembers the dreadful experience:

> My life is shaken to its roots; sleep has left me; the deadliest terror sits by me at all hours of the day and night; I feel that my days are numbered, and that I must die; and yet I shall die incredulous. As for the moral turpitude that man unveiled to me, even with tears of penitence, I cannot, even in memory, dwell on it without a start of horror.[213]

He is shocked by Jekyll's transformation so much that it wrecks the long-standing friendship of the two scientists. Jekyll loses a close friend and ends up as lonely and miserable as Hyde. Lanyon is exposed to the process of degeneration, which shatters all his illusions about the glory of Victorian society. Unlike Jekyll, who is enthusiastic about his discovery, Lanyon is convinced that Jekyll's experiment is unnatural and is disappointed by the doctor's foolishness. He is not able to face the possibility that under the surface of his humanity might lurk such a degenerate beast and prefers to die rather than be a part of a world where "a place for sufferings and terrors so unmanning"[214] can exist.

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[212] Stevenson, *Dr Jekyll*, 76.
[213] Ibid., 68.
[214] Ibid., 42.

While Jekyll suffers due to the loss of contact with his friends, Griffin does not want to be a part of society. He locks himself in his room and communicates with others only if necessary. The only one with whom he is willing to talk is a scientist named Kemp who used to study at the same university like Griffin. The Invisible man complains to Kemp that if he had a helper or an accomplice, he would achieve much greater results: "I made a mistake, Kemp, a huge mistake, in carrying this thing through alone. I have wasted strength, time, opportunities. Alone – it is wonderful how little a man can do alone!"[215] Kemp suggests that Griffin provide other scientists with the information about his experiment but the Invisible Man does not share this enthusiasm. He likes the fact that he is one of a kind and therefore seems to miss a subservient flunkey rather than a friend or an adviser. He makes use of his invisibility to make people do what he wants. His aim is not to be a part of any community but to dominate and rule the whole world. Griffin is convinced that Kemp is "a man that can understand"[216] but confiding to this scientist is in fact his fatal mistake. Not only does he tell him about his weaknesses, but he also trusts him. Kemp, on the other hand, immediately realizes how dangerous the Invisible Man is and begins to plan his capture. The only person Griffin has ever initiated into the mysteries of his research betrays him in order to protect the village against degeneration and further violence.

As far as the Time Traveller is concerned, his attitude to his scientific experiment is very different from Griffin's. Unlike the Invisible Man, he is willing to share his knowledge as well as discoveries with other colleagues. The problem is that in the year 802,701 AD, there is no one to whom he could confide or with whom he could discuss his concerns about degeneration. Surrounded by primitive creatures who do not speak his language, the Time Traveller is completely isolated from the world of intellectuals he is used to. The feeling of isolation does not pass even after his return. Despite the fact that he shows his educated friends flowers brought from the future, he does not manage to persuade them he is telling the truth. They refuse to believe that time travel is possible and consider the machine to be a figment of the Time Traveller's imagination. Like Lanyon, they contemptuously dismiss the incredible story because it would mean to reconcile themselves to the melancholy end of the human race. They lack the Time Traveller's scientific imagination and do not understand the significance

[215] Wells, *Invisible Man*, 124.
[216] Ibid., 124.

of his discovery. Ignoring his warning, they condemn themselves to the degenerate future they so much fear. The Time Traveller, though disappointed by his friends' attitudes, does not feel discouraged and decides to travel again in the hope of accumulating a great amount of evidence. He, however, never returns and there is no one else who can testify that degeneration will finally lead to mass extinction.

Like the Time Traveller, Dorian also has to deal with mistrust and derision. Lord Henry's impact on Dorian is enormous and totally devastating. According to him, the only important thing is one's own life but Basil has a contrary opinion: "But, surely, if one lives merely for one's self, Harry, one pays a terrible price for doing so?"[217] As it later turns out, Wotton's theory does not work in practice and Basil's doubts foreshadow Dorian's tragic end. For Dorian, Lord Henry represents a soul mate who would never betray him: "If I ever did a crime, I would come and confess it to you. You would understand me."[218] Nevertheless, Wotton does not live up to Dorian's expectations and totally fails as a friend. To be more specific, Dorian asks him how he would react if he found out that Dorian was the one to have murdered Basil, and Henry replies: "I would say, my dear fellow, that you were posing for a character that doesn't suit you. All crime is vulgar, just as all vulgarity is crime. It is not in you, Dorian, to commit a murder."[219] Dorian tries to confide his secret to Lord Henry but he does not take the confession seriously and therefore Dorian has to bear the burden of his secret alone. He deprives himself of a real friend when he unwisely turns against Basil and loses the only person in the whole London who would do his best to help Dorian resist temptation.

Dorian naively believes the decay of the picture may be reversed: "Perhaps if his life became pure, he would be able to expel every sign of evil passion from the face."[220] He decides not to corrupt a young chaste girl he has been courting for a month. Nevertheless, the fact that he leaves her coldly even though he knows she is deeply in love with him is another proof of his selfishness and egoism. He stops seeing Hetty Merton in the hope of saving his soul from gradual decay, ignoring the hurt feelings of the girl. This feeble attempt to purge his corrupt soul is only an act of moral cowardice. Dorian has completely lost the ability to distinguish between the moral and immoral.

[217] Wilde, *Picture*, 92.
[218] Ibid., 63.
[219] Ibid., 244.
[220] Ibid., 253.

When he finds out "the thing [is] still loathsome—more loathsome, if possible, than before,"[221] he gets into panic. Like Jekyll who starts to hate Hyde, Dorian stops being enthralled by the ugliness of the picture:

> Once it had given him pleasure to watch it changing and growing old. Of late he had felt no such pleasure. It had kept him awake at night. When he had been away, he had been filled with terror lest other eyes should look upon it. It had brought melancholy across his passions. Its mere memory had marred many moments of joy. It had been like conscience to him. Yes, it had been conscience.[222]

Dorian realizes the portrait will always remind him of his sins, making him feel guilty. He seizes the knife with which he killed Basil and stabs it. He tries to destroy it because it is the only evidence against him. Nevertheless, as his soul is living inside the picture, he unconsciously plunges the knife into his own heart and dies. Although Dorian and the picture are physically independent of each other, they are mutually connected and thus cannot be separated. Dorian fails to see this strong connection and, like Dr Jekyll, dies unconscious of the fact that man cannot escape degeneration so easily.

Unlike the Morlocks and the Invisible man who are degenerate from the very beginning of the story, Wilde and Stevenson show the whole process of Dorian's and Jekyll's moral decay. Even though they are introduced as warm-hearted and generous men, they end up as callous and self-centred as Wells' villains. Their moral degeneration eventually costs them their own lives. Not even the adaptable Morlocks manage to survive and become extinct. The Victorians' worst nightmare comes true right in the heart of the metropolis.

[221] Wilde, *Picture*, 254.
[222] Ibid., 255.

4.3 Degeneration in the Heart of the Metropolis

"About London, for instance, perhaps half the prettier country is shut in against intrusion."[223]

Even though each author came from a different country of the United Kingdom, they all set the story in the same city. According to Dryden, they "present conflicting images of the metropolis as a place of pleasure and entertainment, and a place of dark terrors and horrible human transformations."[224] As mentioned before, London in the second half of the nineteenth century had serious problems with overpopulation and its labyrinthine murky alleys became a frequent scene of crimes. "Oppositions like day and night, light and dark, upper worlds and lower worlds, wealth and poverty, beauty and ugliness"[225] defined London as a place of duality as well as moral degeneration.

To start with, since the machine moves in time but not in space, the Time Traveller expects to arrive in the area where the biggest and most industrial city from his century used to be located. Nevertheless, instead of magnificence and prosperity, he finds himself in a tranquil environment only with a few palace-like buildings: "Apparently the single house, and possibly even the household, had vanished. [T]he house and the cottage, which form such characteristic features of our own English landscape, had disappeared."[226] The decrepitude and unexpected serenity of the future world is so shocking for the Time Traveller that he starts to suspect this might be the inevitable consequence of degeneration:

> What might not have happened to men? What if cruelty had grown into a common passion? What if in this interval the race had lost its manliness and had developed into something inhuman, unsympathetic, and overwhelmingly powerful? I might seem some old-world savage animal, only the more dreadful and disgusting for our common likeness – a foul creature to be incontinently slain.[227]

He comes to the conclusion that the existence of the Eloi and the Morlocks resulted from "the gradual widening of the present merely temporary and social difference

[223] Wells, *Time Machine*, 48.
[224] Dryden, 17.
[225] Ibid., 17.
[226] Wells, *Time Machine*, 29.
[227] Ibid., 22.

between the Capitalist and the Labourer."[228] Thus, the Eloi, living on the earth's surface, are the descendants of the upper class, whereas the Morlocks, who inhabited the underground, had evolved from the working class. The border existing between these two worlds represents the social gap between the East and West End of Victorian London. While the rich visited the East whenever they wanted, the poor were forbidden to enter the territory of the West. Similarly, the Eloi, adapted to the life on daylight, can breathe fresh air and enjoy the warmth of the sun. The Morlocks, on the other hand, are deprived of this luxury due to their intolerance to any light. Nevertheless, unlike the Eloi who are absolutely helpless in the dark natural habitat of their masters, the Morlocks may leave the tunnels at least during the night.

Stevenson's depiction of the metropolis is even more horrifying because he does not set the story in the future but focuses on the dual nature of London in the nineteenth century. The wide gap between the evolved, civilized West End and the primitive, degenerate East End is reflected in the qualities of Mr Hyde's and Dr Jekyll's servants. Poole, Jekyll's butler, is presented as a well-dressed, polite elderly man while Hyde's housekeeper is an "ivory-faced and silvery-haired old woman" with "an evil face, smoothed by hypocrisy."[229] When the Inspector of Scotland Yard comes to arrest Hyde, "a flash of odious joy appear[s] on the woman's face."[230] She is not worried by the news and the only thing she is curious about is what crime he got involved in: '"Ah!" said she, "he is in trouble! What has he done?"'[231] Unlike Poole who thinks very highly of Dr Jekyll, she shows lack of respect for Hyde. Poole is a caring, tactful servant devoted to his job whose prime concern is to protect his master. As soon as he begins to suspect that Dr Jekyll might be in danger, he contacts Utterson to ask him for help. He puts emphasis on loyalty and hard work, which stands in total contrast to the degenerate mind of Hyde's housekeeper who perfectly fits into the surroundings of Soho where qualities such as politeness, genuine compassion and solicitude are of little value.

Wilde draws inspiration from Stevenson's novella and connects the personality of the protagonist with the atmosphere of the city. When Dorian Gray is introduced to the reader for the first time, he does not suffer from degeneration. On the contrary, he is described as a chaste, meek boy and a philanthropist: "All the candour of youth was

[228] Wells, *Time Machine*, 48.
[229] Stevenson, *Dr Jekyll*, 32.
[230] Ibid., 32.
[231] Ibid., 32.

there, as well as all youth's passionate purity. One felt that he had kept himself unspotted from the world."[232] Wilde emphasises Dorian's purity by the tranquil environment and positive tone of the novel: "The studio was filled with the rich odour of roses, and when the light summer wind stirred amidst the trees of the garden, there came through the open door the heavy scent of the lilac, or the more delicate perfume of the pink-flowering thorn."[233] Dorian does not know that in London there are places where he can enjoy forbidden pleasures and therefore everything around him seems to be so cheerful and untouched by degeneration. As soon as he starts to behave selfishly and the first symptoms of his degeneration appear, the setting is moved from Basil's lovely garden to the dark alleys of the East End.

After the fierce quarrel with Sibyl, Dorian wanders "through dimly-lit streets, past gaunt black-shadowed archways and evil-looking houses" where he meets "women with hoarse voices and harsh laughter" accompanied by drunkards who "had reeled by cursing, and chattering to themselves like monstrous apes."[234] It is the key moment when the tone as well as the setting of the novel changes rapidly. The darker atmosphere of the surroundings reflects Dorian's degrading treatment of his fiancée. As his moral degeneration escalates, he visits more and more insalubrious parts of London. When Alan Campbell gets rid of Basil's body, Dorian decides to spend the rest of the night in the infamous dockside. He seeks out a hansom cab but the driver refuses to take him: '"It is too far for me," he muttered.'[235] Obviously, the man does not want to ride to the Docks because he knows it is a place of "sordid sinners" and "splendid sins."[236] Dorian has to bribe him in order to get where he wants. As they leave the West End, he watches the slow transition from nobility to depravity and degradation:

> A cold rain began to fall, and the blurred street-lamps looked ghastly in the dripping mist. The public-houses were just closing, and dim men and women were clustering in broken groups round their doors. From some of the bars came the sound of horrible laughter. In others, drunkards brawled and screamed. [...] Dorian Gray watched with listless eyes the sordid shame of the great city.[237]

[232] Wilde, *Picture*, 23.
[233] Ibid., 7.
[234] Ibid., 103-104.
[235] Ibid., 210.
[236] Ibid., 59.
[237] Ibid., 212.

He is an eyewitness of degeneration in *fin de siècle* London but he does not find it alarming. These depraved parts of the metropolis become a place of refuge for Dorian whose actions would be by no means tolerated in the West End. Like Hyde who spends most of his time in the murky streets of Soho, Dorian feels more relaxed in the "opium-dens, where one could buy oblivion, dens of horror where the memory of old sins could be destroyed by the madness of sins that were new."[238] He does not grieve for Basil and instead gets a hankering for distraction in the East End. He wants to be among people who will not judge him for his moral corruption. Hyde drinks the potion and turns into Jekyll to avoid punishment for murdering Sir Danvers and Dorian takes opium to forget the dreadful image of his dead friend.

In spite of his cruelty, Dorian can behave like a real gentleman in the presence of the upper class members, which makes him different from the wild Morlocks and ill-mannered Hyde. Beneath his refined manners and superficial elegance, Dorian is a sinner but his behaviour does not symbolize a reversion to primitiveness. He is a modern Victorian who believes that searching for new sensations is the real essence of life: "Eternal youth, infinite passion, pleasures subtle and secret, wild joys and wilder sins—he was to have all these things."[239] Lord Henry openly admits that moral degeneration is a characteristic feature of the aristocracy rather than the working class: "I should fancy that the real tragedy of the poor is that they can afford nothing but self-denial. Beautiful sins, like beautiful things, are the privilege of the rich."[240] As mentioned before, while Victorian nobles were allowed to visit the poor parts of London whenever they pleased, those from the East End were not welcome among the rich. In other words, a large number of the upper class members took pride in their civilized manners but at the same time secretly led immoral double lives. Jekyll and Dorian are wealthy men who are not satisfied with the pleasures they can enjoy in the West End. They are obviously bored by the monotonous life in luxury and the East End enables them to experience new, and often perverse, sensations.

Hyde, on the other hand, gets into trouble any time he shows up near Dr Jekyll's residence located in "a square of ancient, handsome houses" owned by "map-engravers, architects, shady lawyers and the agents of obscure enterprises."[241] Its hall is "paved

[238] Wilde, *Picture*, 212.
[239] Ibid., 122-123.
[240] Ibid., 92.
[241] Stevenson, *Dr Jekyll*, 23.

with flags, warmed (after the fashion of a country house) by a bright, open fire, and furnished with costly cabinets of oak."[242] Jekyll lives in the wealthy West End while Hyde's house stands on a "dingy street" where one can meet "many ragged children huddled in the doorways, and many women of many different nationalities passing out, key in hand, to have a morning glass."[243] This place evokes in Utterson similar feelings like the presence of Hyde:

> The dismal quarter of Soho seen under these changing glimpses, with its muddy ways, and slatternly passengers, and its lamps, which had never been extinguished or had been kindled afresh to combat this mournful reinvasion of darkness, seemed, in the lawyer's eyes, like a district of some city in a nightmare.[244]

The nineteenth-century Soho was a place of prostitution, filth and contagious diseases. Jekyll purposefully rents a house in this part of London because Hyde is more likely to blend in with the crowd. In the world of Jekyll, Hyde is too conspicuous and attracts too much attention but in Soho his life of immorality does not irritate anybody. The insalubrious surroundings reflect his degeneration and disrespect for moral standards.

In addition, the part of the building where Jekyll's laboratory is located has no windows and there is neither a bell nor a locker at the entrance door. This indicates, as Dryden appositely points out, that "the closed doors of London houses can conceal terrible secrets."[245] The Victorians were familiar with the connection between crime and degeneration but the overpopulation of London complicated the capture of dangerous degenerates. The anonymity of the city enabled them to lead double lives and therefore no one suspects Jekyll of degeneration. He skips from one identity into the other and leaves the house through the secret back door of the dissecting room. As he explains:

> I began to profit by the strange immunities of my position. Men have before hired bravos to transact their crimes, while their own person and reputation sat under shelter. I was the first that ever did so for his pleasures. I was the first that could thus plod in the public eye with a load of genial respectability, and in a moment, like a schoolboy, strip off these lendings and spring headlong into the sea of

[242] Stevenson, *Dr Jekyll*, 24.
[243] Ibid., 32.
[244] Ibid., 31-32.
[245] Dryden, 136.

> liberty. But for me, in my impenetrable mantle, the safety was complete. Think of it – I did not even exist![246]

Jekyll describes his personal experience with a double life as exciting and invaluable. Although he knows the truth about Hyde's identity is unlikely to be revealed, he never metamorphoses into his counterpart during the day. To be more specific, most of the scenes where Hyde's degeneration endangers Londoners take place at dark or foggy nights. Mr Enfield, for example, sees Hyde trampling over the little girl at "about three o'clock of a black winter morning."[247] Moreover, Hyde murders Sir Danvers in a lane "brilliantly lit by the full moon"[248] and the eye witness of this awful crime calls the police at two o'clock in the morning. Jekyll's alter ego is a nocturnal predator who is, like the Morlocks, most dangerous after dark. Therefore, Londoners feel safe during the day when Jekyll does not let the fiend take control over his body. Nevertheless, as Hyde becomes stronger, Jekyll gradually loses the privilege of controlling the process of the metamorphosis. One sunny morning, he wakes up as Hyde even though he fell asleep as Jekyll. Some time after this incident, he turns into his odious self on "a fine, clear January day", sitting "in the sun on a bench." [249] Thus, unlike the Morlocks who are trapped in the darkness of the underground, hunting and killing only at night, Hyde may now move freely between the East and West End of London. Jekyll's experiment gets out of control and degeneration becomes a problem of the whole metropolis.

Similarly, Dorian hides the picture in the attic, always carrying the key to the door on him. He is afraid that someone might reveal his terrible secret and therefore repeatedly goes to the old dusty schoolroom to make sure the picture is still there. "The mere thought" that it should be stolen "made him cold with horror."[250] The evidence of his corruption is hidden in the centre of the West End but, despite his strange behaviour, nobody has the slightest idea that he is haunted by his own degeneration. He commits murder in the West End and his crime goes unpunished although the Victorians strongly criticized such brutality. Even Dorian himself is disgusted by the mutilated dead body in his well kept sumptuous home: "The dead man was still sitting there, too, and in the sunlight now. How horrible that was! Such hideous things were for the darkness, not for

[246] Stevenson, *Dr Jekyll*, 75.
[247] Ibid., 11.
[248] Ibid., 29.
[249] Ibid., 82.
[250] Wilde, *Picture*, 162.

the day."[251] As Dorian's words imply, nocturnal London was generally believed to be very dangerous and its inhabitants felt much safer during the day. No one discovers Basil's body lying in Dorian's luxurious mansion for the whole day, which means they can no longer rely on the protection from daylight. Like Stevenson, Wilde depicts the metropolis as a chaotic place facing the ever-present threat of degeneration.

Unlike the three previous works which are set solely around the area of London, the story of *The Invisible Man* takes place partly in the capital and partly in Iping. Before Griffin moves to this village, he works on his research in "a room in London, a large unfurnished room in a big ill-managed lodging-house in a slum near Great Portland Street."[252] When two observant boys notice the imprint of his foot in the snow, they are not terrified but rather excited. Griffin escapes only thanks to the mayhem caused by the crowd of people. He realizes the anonymity of the city together with his invisibility makes him practically all-powerful. While Jekyll initially wants to use the potion to indulge in perverted but otherwise harmless pleasures, Griffin's intentions are malicious from the very beginning:

> I was invisible, and I was only just beginning to realise the extraordinary advantage my invisibility gave me. My head was already teeming with plans of all the wild and wonderful things I had now impunity to do. [...] My mood, I say, was one of exaltation. I felt as a seeing man might do, with padded feet and noiseless clothes, in a city of the blind. I experienced a wild impulse to jest, to startle people, to clap men on the back, fling people's hats astray, and generally revel in my extraordinary advantage.[253]

He takes delight in the image of himself seizing control of the metropolis. He craves to plunge the whole country into chaos and be the instigator of terror, declaring himself Invisible Man the First. Griffin becomes a public enemy because his invisibility gives him unlimited power. Still, there are some things that make him vulnerable, such as severe weather and lack of food. He can be traced thanks to the footprints left in snow, mud, dust, etc., and the silhouette of his body becomes visible if it is rainy or foggy and anything he eats can be seen in his belly until he digests it. Moreover, to hide ones degeneration in a small village is not as easy as in a huge city crowded with people. In

[251] Wilde, *Picture*, 186.
[252] Wells, *Invisible Man*, 94.
[253] Ibid., 103.

Iping, Griffin loses the advantage of the anonymity of the metropolis and his unusual appearance and strange behaviour do not escape the locals' notice. In London, he would have a chance to avoid punishment for his cruel deeds but in Iping he is stopped before he can put his plans into practice.

Both Wells, Stevenson and Wilde react to the speculations about the heredity of degeneration and show how easily one degenerate may infect others. For example, Lord Henry watches Dorian gradually adopt and develop his personal philosophy that "a new Hedonism [...] is what our century wants."[254] He makes use of the boy's inexperience, trying to persuade him there is nothing shameful about living an immoral life. He refers to Dorian as an "interesting study" or "his own creation" which seems "to promise rich and fruitful results."[255] Lord Henry finds a new sensation in his carefree bohemian life, enjoying the unfathomable power he has over Basil's sitter. He corrupts Dorian who then spreads moral degeneration to other members of the upper class. Practically everyone who becomes friends and spends too much time with Dorian eventually ends up either wretched and condemned by the aristocratic society or dead.

In comparison with Dorian, Hyde is a loner with practically no friends or acquaintances and his negative impact on others is different from Dorian's. As mentioned before, he evokes in people violent emotions typical of degenerate criminals, such as hate and aggression. Women in his presence gets "as wild as harpies"[256] and others have an urge to kill this animal-like man. Similarly, the Time Traveller is so disgusted by the Morlocks who feed on the Eloi that he fails to control his rage. He sets the woods on fire and then calmly watches the Morlocks burn to death. He even admits "killing one and crippling several more."[257] He is totally indifferent to their suffering and revels in "their absolute helplessness and misery in the glare."[258] He loathes the creatures for their bestiality but paradoxically treats them with the same harshness.

Moreover, the Time Traveller concludes that the ancestors of the Morlocks were banished to the underground by the Upper-worlders and were forced to adapt to severe living conditions. They used to serve their oppressors but "thousands of generations ago, man had thrust his brother out of the ease and the sunshine. And now that brother

[254] Wilde, *Picture*, 30.
[255] Ibid., 68-69.
[256] Stevenson, *Dr Jekyll*, 12.
[257] Wells, *Time Machine*, 75.
[258] Ibid., 76.

was coming back – changed!"[259] The Morlocks had run out of food supplies and therefore started to practice cannibalism, rebelling against their masters. In other words, the brutality of the Morlocks has its roots in the cruelty of the Eloi's ancestors. Moral degeneration, thus, used to be a disease of those who are now weak and oppressed.

The theme of degeneration spreading among people appears in *The Invisible Man* as well. Griffin's perverse brutal actions threaten the established rules and peaceful environment of village life. He enjoys to terrorize Iping but his vicious plans backfire and the hunter becomes the one who is hunted. Consumed by vindictiveness and fury, the inhabitants of the small village beat the Invisible Man to death with their bare hands: "Down went the heap of struggling men again and rolled over. There was, I am afraid, some savage kicking. Then suddenly a wild scream of 'Mercy! Mercy!' that died down swiftly to a sound like choking."[260] Griffin's death then reveals the tragic consequence of their violent outburst:

> [T]here lay, naked and pitiful on the ground, the bruised and broken body of a young man about thirty. His hair and beard were white, – not grey with age but white with the whiteness of albinism, and his eyes were like garnets. His hands were clenched, his eyes wide open, and his expression was one of anger and dismay.[261]

Griffin begs the attackers for mercy but they do not listen and continue beating him. It is not clear whether he clenches his fists in order to defend or attack and whether his facial expression is one of rage or horror. Like the rational Time Traveller who, at least for a while, becomes a remorseless monster, the group of friendly villagers turns into a mad, hostile mob. They behave in the same way like the merciless, inhuman Invisible man they so much fear and hate.

Many Victorians prided themselves on their good manners but they managed to prevent neither violence nor immorality. On the one hand, *fin de siècle* London symbolized the centre of religion, technology and Victorian values, but on the other, its reputation suffered when it started to be mentioned in the connection with the theory of degeneration. Moral corruption was generally perceived as a problem of the unsightly East End but degeneration in fact spread far beyond the boundary of the metropolis.

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[259] Wells, *Invisible Man*, 58.
[260] Ibid., 147.
[261] Ibid., 148.

5 CONCLUSION

The aim of this thesis was to analyse the theme of degeneration in turn of the century British prose, namely *The Picture of Dorian Gray* by Oscar Wilde, *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* by Robert Louis Stevenson and Herbert George Wells' *The Invisible Man* and *The Time Machine*. As mentioned before, the key event for the birth of degeneration theory was the introduction of Darwin's scientific theory in *On the origin of Species* in 1859. His theory of evolution was in direct contradiction to the Bible which extolled God as the almighty creator of the world. Naturally, the claim that the existence of the human race is a result of an evolutionary process undermined the religious faith of many Victorians. The biological connection between primitive animal species and modern society fuelled fears of reverse evolution, or more specifically atavism. Degeneration was widely studied by many influential thinkers but it naturally caught the attention of contemporary writers as well. All the analysed works were written and published at the end of the nineteenth century, which is to a large extent reflected in the settings as well as qualities of individual characters.

The appearance of some protagonists, or antagonists, is based on the theory that degeneration has a devastating effect on one's body. Both Hyde and the Morlocks suffer from an unspecified physical deformity which scares and disgusts anybody who gets in direct contact with them. Their unusual body structure fits Lombroso's description of an atavistic criminal and therefore people cannot stand their presence. The Eloi also symbolize the embodiment of the Victorians' fear of reverse evolution but they differ from Hyde and the Morlocks in many aspects. As they are fragile and lovely, they evoke in the Time Traveller feelings of genuine compassion and sympathy. Their child-like appearance, however, paradoxically indicates biological degradation. As far as Griffin and Dorian are concerned, they long to outwit the laws of nature, trying to hide all visible symptoms of their degeneration. Griffin finds a way to make himself invisible and then hides the invisibility under a few layers of bandages. Similarly, Dorian remains young and beautiful because his aging evil face changes only on the canvas.

Apart from their unusual appearance, the degenerates also share a lot of qualities, including selfishness, carelessness and lack of emotions. None of them feel remorse or have guilty conscience. They are determined to do anything to get what they crave, showing disrespect for traditional Victorian values such as decency, chastity and

good manners. Their moral degeneration manifests itself in their brutality and finally leads to a cold-blooded murder. Their victims are innocent people, too weak to defend themselves against such fiends. Moreover, Jekyll and Dorian refuse to take responsibility for their violent behaviour and put the blame on Hyde and the picture, ignoring the fact that they are inseparable from their counterparts. Like Griffin, they both keep their secret for themselves, not realizing their behaviour is immoral and deviant. Nevertheless, their aggression attracts too much attention and they all become social outcasts. There is nobody who would support them and therefore they have no choice but to deal with their degeneration alone. The Time Traveller is the only one to have the chance to see what happens if the theory of degeneration is not taken seriously enough. Nevertheless, society is not willing to believe this catastrophic scenario and fails to heed his warnings.

It also should be pointed out that all four stories are set around the area of London which is depicted as a dangerous place where degeneration got completely out of control. The ruined city in the year 802,701 AD is a result of the humankind's inability to stop the spread of the disease. In the *fin de siècle*, Londoners had to face the threat that practically any seemingly trustworthy and well mannered man could be in fact a dangerous, perverse criminal. This is the case of Jekyll and Dorian who pretend to be respectable gentlemen from the West End but secretly visit the East End to enjoy illicit pleasures. The atmosphere of the city to a large extent mirrors their personalities. The more cruel and degenerate they are, the more horrific the metropolis seems to be. Still, nobody has the slightest idea that they lead double lives. In contrast, Griffin makes a fatal mistake when he moves to a small town where he becomes too conspicuous and his secret is revealed. What makes the stories even more tragic and alarming is the impact of the corrupt characters on others. In their presence, level-headed, cultivated people tend to turn into violent, and sometimes even perverse, degenerates.

To conclude, Stevenson, Wilde and Wells managed to capture the gloomy mood of the *fin de siècle*, presenting the Victorian era as a period of constant fear and anxiety. Each of them deals with the theme of degeneration in a specific way but it cannot be denied that all the analysed works function as criticism of the Victorians in general as well as a warning against the dire consequences of degeneration. These novels and novellas will always serve as convincing evidence of how imperfect the Victorian society was.

RESUMÉ

Tato diplomová práce se věnuje čtyřem stěžejním dílům anglicky psané literatury konce devatenáctého století, a to románům *Obraz Doriana Graye* od Oscara Wilda, *Neviditelný* od Herberta George Wellse, a novelám *Podivný případ doktora Jekylla a pana Hyda* od Roberta Louise Stevensona a *Stroj času* taktéž od H. G. Wellse. Vzhledem k tomu, že v době jejich vydání se v Británii velmi horečně debatovalo o teorii degenerace, je hlavním cílem této práce analýza a porovnání toho, jak jednotliví autoři degeneraci viktoriánské společnosti vyobrazili ve svých literárních dílech.

Prvotním impulsem pro vznik teorie degenerace bylo vydání knihy Charlese Darwina, která nesla název *O vzniku druhů přírodním výběrem neboli uchováním prospěšných plemen v boji o život*. Tento britský přírodovědec přišel v roce 1859 s průkopnickou teorií, že rozmanité živočišné druhy se vyvinuly ze stejných předků. Jeho objevy se však setkaly s vlnou odporu a pochybení. Silně věřící společnost totiž odmítala připustit, že život na Zemi je výsledkem postupného procesu evoluce. Darwinova teorie zcela vyvracela tvrzení Bible, že stvořitelem všeho živého je Bůh. Náboženství navíc hrálo důležitou roli v utváření viktoriánských hodnot a morálních zásad. To, že Charles Darwin dokázal vysvětlit život za pomoci vědy, tak do značné míry podkopalo náboženskou víru tehdejší společnosti. Dopady teorie evoluce byly však mnohem dalekosáhlejší. Když Darwin objevil úzkou spojitost mezi světy lidí a ostatních živočišných druhů, rozšířily se obavy, že by se moderní civilizace mohla vrátit ke svým nechtěným primitivním kořenům. Někteří se dokonce domnívali, že degenerace může být dědičná, což nakonec povede až k úplnému vymření celého lidstva. Taková představa byla naprosto nepřijatelná pro Viktoriány, kteří si zakládali na své vyspělosti a dobrých mravech.

Přestože se problém degenerace stal velmi častým předmětem diskuzí a výzkumů všeho druhu, stále chybělo jasné vymezení či popis této lidem dosud neznámé ‚nemoci'. Ten, jehož definice byla jako první všeobecně považována za přijatelnou, byl Bénédict Augustin Morel, francouzský odborník na klinickou psychiatrii. Morel pracoval jako doktor v jednom z francouzských ústavů pro choromyslné, což mu přirozeně usnadnilo studium degenerace ve spojitosti s duševními poruchami. Věnoval se především studiu pacientů, kteří se vyznačovali vlastnostmi jako nespolehlivost, výstřednost, nerespektování pravidel a emocionální nestabilita. Následně definoval

degeneraci jako chorobné odchýlení od zavedených norem a standardů chování. Mimo jiné došel i k závěru, že degenerace opakovaně přechází z generace na generaci, a tudíž není pochyb o její dědičnosti.

Kromě Morela upjali svou pozornost na hrozbu společenského úpadku i další významné osobnosti v oblasti vědy a sociální kritiky. Jedním z nich byl Max Nordau, jehož kniha *Entartung*, vydaná v roce 1892, se stala stěžejním dílem teorie degenerace. Nordau, jakožto zarytý odpůrce moderní doby, ostře kritizoval mnohé literární texty devatenáctého století a jejich autory označil za zdegenerované jedince. Byl přesvědčen, že překotné změny a rychlý vývoj během viktoriánské doby vyústily právě v degeneraci. Podobný názor zastával i britský zoolog E. Ray Lankester, který tvrdil, že existenci degenerace dokazuje pověrčivost, morální zkaženost a iracionalita charakterizující moderní britskou společnost. Zároveň ale pevně věřil tomu, že na rozdíl od primitivních živočišných druhů má lidstvo naději se i nadále vyvíjet kupředu, a to díky své snaze poznávat a zkoumat příčiny problémů. Dal tak lidem naději, že ač je strach z atavismu zcela oprávněný, dá se jeho následkům vyhnout.

Slovo degenerace bylo stále častěji slýcháno ve spojitosti s morálkou a neovladatelným růstem velkých měst, především pak Londýna. Pokračující urbanizace a následné přelidnění této britské metropole nevyhnutelně vedlo ke zhoršení životních podmínek a zvýšení kriminality. Sklony ke zločineckému chování byly vnímány jako nepopiratelný příznak zdegenerované mysli. Italský kriminolog Cesare Lombroso se věnuje tomuto fenoménu ve své knize *L'uomo delinquente* z roku 1876. Nejdůležitějším poznatkem jeho výzkumu bylo tvrzení, že degenerace se projevuje jakýmsi druhem tělesné deformity, která byla podle něj typická především pro zločince a vrahy. Nejznámějším případem degenerace a brutality se staly vraždy, za nimiž stál sériový vrah známý pod přezdívkou Jack Rozparovač. Jeho oběťmi se staly ženy živící se jako prostitutky v okolí chudé londýnské čtvrti East End. Zohavené mrtvoly s vyříznutými vnitřnostmi vyvolaly spekulace, že Jack Rozparovač by mohl vzhledem ke svým chirurgickým znalostem ve skutečnosti být vyšinutý doktor trpící degenerací. Jelikož se ale policii vraha nepodařilo nikdy dopadnout, tato informace nebyla nakonec potvrzena.

Tato série brutálních vražd ve Whitechapelu však měla velmi negativní vliv na pověst celého East Endu, který se stal v očích ostatních obyvatel Londýna místem hříchu, nebezpečí a nepopsatelných hrůz. Lidé žijící v bohatém a váženém West Endu považovali své chudší spoluobčany za dno společnosti, nebo přesněji za divochy, kteří

jsou jen krůček od návratu ke svým zvířecím kořenům. Věřili, že degenerace je způsobena špatnými životními podmínkami, znečištěním ovzduší a nedostatečnou hygienou. Jak se ale později ukázalo, tato domněnka byla zcela milná. Šéfredaktor novin *Pall Mall Gazette*, W. T. Stead, odkryl široké veřejnosti morální zkaženost majetných Viktoriánů, když roku 1885 publikoval sérii článků pod názvem *The Maiden Tribute of Modern Babylon*. Stead přišel na to, že ačkoliv centrem dětské prostituce byl East End, většina klientů, kteří si kupovali mladé panny pro své sexuální potěšení, byli členové vyšších vrstev. Jelikož byly aktivity takového typu ve West Endu naprosto vyloučeny, jeho obyvatelé museli své skryté touhy uspokojovat v tajnosti, k čemuž sloužil právě neblaze proslulý East End. Podle Nordaua trpěli tací Viktoriáni degenerací. Jejich egoistické chování, neschopnost odolat pokušení a nedostatek sebekontroly označil za typické rysy degenerace.

Dalším šokujícím skandálem, který otřásl reputací celého West Endu a jeho mravních hodnot, bylo odhalení nevěstince na Cleveland Street, kde docházelo k sexuálnímu styku mezi muži. Homosexuálové byli nuceni svou orientaci před okolím skrývat a vést dvojaký život, aby se vyhnuli obvinění z morální degenerace. Dvojí identita a neustálá přetvářka ale paradoxně přispívaly ke vnímání homosexuálů jako duševně narušených jedinců. Ve vyšších vrstvách zavládla panika poté, co vyšlo najevo, že pravidelnými návštěvníky veřejného domu na Cleveland Street byli pravděpodobně i členové parlamentu či královské rodiny. Jelikož byla homosexualita v devatenáctém století nezákonná, nikdo nechápal, jak mohlo k takovým orgiím docházet v samém srdci Londýna, aniž by si toho včas kdokoliv všiml.

Co se týče samotných autorů, ožehavé téma degenerace se neobjevilo pouze v jejich dílech, ale zasáhlo i jejich osobní život. Robert Louis Stevenson se narodil roku 1850 v Edinburghu Thomasu a Margaret Stevensonovým. Tento skotský spisovatel se již od mládí věnoval studiu psychologie, a především pak rozpolcenosti lidské mysli, kterou se podle mnohých literárních vědců sám vyznačoval. Jeho bohémské výstřelky byly v rozporu s morálními hodnotami tehdejší společnosti. Jako student práv na Univerzitě v Edinburghu byl Stevenson údajně častokrát spatřen v chudších čtvrtích ve společnosti prostitutek. Není proto divu, že jeho nejznámější novela *Podivný případ doktora Jekylla a pana Hyda* vypráví příběh právě o dvojakosti člověka. Stevenson se s velkou pravděpodobností nechal inspirovat osudem jednoho z pacientů francouzského ústavu pro duševně choré. Louis Vivé trpěl hysterickými záchvaty, během kterých se

měnil z nenápadného, tichého mladíka v nebezpečného násilníka. Kromě Vivého se Stevenson zajímal i o osobu Deacona Brodieho, jenž vedl život spořádaného Viktoriána a zločince v jednom.

Navzdory svému rebelskému chování nebyl Stevenson nikdy veřejně kritizován nebo snad dokonce souzen. To se však nedá říct o Oscaru Wildovi, narozeném roku 1854 v Irsku, jemuž se stala osudným jeho homosexualita. Navzdory tomu, že se se svými milenci scházel tajně, nedokázal zabránit pomluvám, které se o něm začaly velmi rychle šířit. Ačkoliv si byl vědom, že odlišná sexuální orientace byla vnímána jako úchylka a jasná známka degenerace, navázal velmi blízký vztah se synem markýze z Queensberry, Alfredem Douglasem. Queensberry nesnesl pomyšlení na to, že by jeho vlastní potomek mohl mít homosexuální sklony, a tak z touhy po pomstě Wilda veřejně nařkl ze sodomie. V následném soudním procesu byli předvoláni svědci, jejichž výpovědi vedly k veřejnému odhalení Wildových sexuálních afér. Trest v podobě dvou let nucených prací zruinoval tohoto talentovaného irského spisovatele jak fyzicky, tak psychicky. Nezbylo mu nic jiného než se smířit s pro něj nepochopitelným výrokem soudu, který ho nakonec stál jeho vlastní lidskou důstojnost.

Na rozdíl od dvou předchozích autorů není jméno Herberta George Wellse, který se narodil roku 1866 v Anglii, spojováno s žádným skandálem. To ovšem nic nemění na faktu, že se stejně jako Wilde nebo Stevenson ve své próze teorií degenerace zabýval. Mezi jeho nejznámější díla, ve kterých se věnuje tomuto tématu, patří například *Stroj času* nebo *Ostrov doktora Moreaua*. Kromě hrozby atavismu ho znepokojovala i morální degenerace viktoriánské společnosti. Podle Wellse se na základě tehdejšího ideálu od každého slušného občana očekávala pravdomluvnost, poctivost, abstinence, statečnost bez touhy po dobrodružství a naprostá oddanost rodině. Ne všichni však byli schopni či ochotni naplnit tato velká očekávání. Dokonce i sám Wells přiznává, že život podle takto striktně nastavených měřítek nebyl ani zdaleka jednoduchý. Byl totiž zastáncem názoru, že by se lidé v žádném případě neměli stydět za své touhy a nikdy by neměli záměrně potlačovat jakékoliv rysy své osobnosti.

Jelikož degenerace zasáhla do životů všech tří autorů, není divu, že se rozhodli své zkušenosti a postoje promítnout ve svých literárních dílech. Jak Stevenson, tak i Wilde a Wells vycházeli z předpokladu, že degenerace zanechává viditelné stopy na lidském těle. Krátce poté, co Poutník v čase přicestuje ve svém stroji času do roku 802 701, se setkává s potomky lidí, kteří si říkají Eloiové. Tato krásná, něžná stvoření

připomínají svým vzhledem spíše malé děti než dospělé jedince. Jejich křehkost a biologická nedospělost však může být paradoxně vnímána jako příznak postupného procesu degenerace. Toto tvrzení dokazuje i fakt, že je prakticky nemožné od sebe rozeznat eloiské ženy a muže. Poutník v čase navíc později zjišťuje, že Eloiové nejsou jedinými zdegenerovanými potomky lidí. V roce 802 701 po jejich boku žijí i takzvaní Morlokové, kteří vypadají jako jakési hrůzu nahánějící divoké poloopice. Poutník v čase je jejich fyzickým znetvořením natolik znechucen, že si k těmto podivným stvořením téměř okamžitě vybuduje velmi negativní vztah. Jeho nenávist je poháněna strachem z atavismu, Morlokové totiž symbolizují ztělesnění fyzické degenerace a jejich existence je důkazem, že obavy z návratu k primitivním kořenům jsou zcela oprávněné. Poutník v čase se následně přesunuje dalších třicet milionů let do budoucnosti, kde již není ani stopy po jakékoliv vyspělé civilizaci. Jedinou známkou života je neidentifikovatelný tvor skákající sem a tam na břehu krvavě rudého moře.

Wellsovi Morlokové se v mnoha ohledech podobají ďábelskému alter egu váženého doktora Henryho Jekylla. Po vypití vlastnoručně namíchaného lektvaru se Jekyll mění právě v ohavného Hyda. Stejně jako Morlokové vyvolává Hyde v ostatních jen odpor a pocit opovržení. Na rozdíl od novely *Stroj času*, kde je svědectví Poutníka v čase jediným zdrojem informací, však nechává Stevenson vypovídat hned několik vedlejších postav. Všichni se shodují na tom, že Hyde je od pohledu odporný a nepříjemný člověk, připomínající spíše divokou bestii než lidskou bytost. Podobně jako Poutník v čase, který soucítí s Eloi, protože na rozdíl od troglodytních Morloků vypadají lidsky, se Jekyll odmítá zříci Hyda, jelikož ho považuje za přirozenou součást svého já. Ostatní se v jejich přítomnosti cítí nepříjemně, protože svou degenerací ohrožují dobrou pověst viktoriánské společnosti. Hyde spolu s Morloky jsou důkazem, že teorie degenerace není pouhým výplodem fantazie tehdejších odborníků či myslitelů, ale že skutečně existuje.

Hlavním záporným hrdinou Wellsova druhého románu je mladý vědec jménem Griffin. Ačkoliv se čtenář o jeho osobě dovídá z počátku jen velmi málo, Wells se detailně věnuje popisu jeho fyzického vzhledu. Jeho degenerace je jako v Jekyllově případě výsledkem vědeckého experimentu. Griffin po dlouhém bádání přichází na to, jak se udělat neviditelným. Jak Jekyll, tak on dobrovolně podstupují bolestivý proces degenerace. Přestože je tato přeměna dlouhá a velmi nepříjemná, Griffin s nadšením pozoruje, jak mu jeho vlastní tělo po částech mizí před očima. Aby svou neviditelnost

utajil před okolím, musí se úplně celý zakrývat oblečením. Griffin sice doufá, že mu šatstvo pomůže schovat jeho degeneraci, bohužel ho ale paradoxně dělá ještě nápadnějším. Hlava omotaná obvazy spolu s obřími brýlemi a vyčnívajícím umělým nosem neuniknou pozornosti zvědavých obyvatel vesnice Iping. Griffin se také často potuluje po okolí nahý jako divé zvíře, čímž do značné míry připomíná nezkrotné Morloky. Navíc i po své smrti, kdy se jeho neviditelnost ztrácí, zůstává vyvrhelem. Jeho bledá kůže a červené oči jsou totiž pro vesničany jen další známkou jeho degenerace.

Na rozdíl od Morloků, Hyda a Griffina není hlavní protagonista Wildova románu na pohled ani odporný, ani nijak fyzicky deformovaný. Ba naopak, Dorian je okouzlující mladý muž, jehož výjimečná krása uchvacuje všechny okolo. Vše se nicméně mění v okamžiku, kdy Dorian vyřkne osudové přání, aby jeho portrét namalovaný Basilem Hallwardem stárl místo něho a on tak mohl zůstat navždy mladý. Podobně jako Griffin, který skrývá svou neviditelnost pod oblečením, Dorian mate okolí svou dokonalostí, zatímco jeho degenerace se projevuje pouze na obraze. Začíná být čím dál víc posedlý svou vlastní krásou a dokonce si libuje v pozorování postupného rozkladu portrétu. Jekyll s Griffinem si neuvědomují, že jejich experimenty jsou ve své podstatě zvrhlé a Dorian si odmítá přiznat, že by jeho počínání bylo jakkoliv úchylné. Jeho degenerace je jako v Griffinově případě odhalena až po smrti, kdy obraz získá zpět svou krásu a Dorian se naopak mění v ohavného, scvrklého stařík a.

Kromě toho, že má degenerace zničující vliv na tělo, ovlivňuje i mysl nakaženého. Morální zkaženost se projevuje především naprostou neschopností zdegenerovaných jedinců pociťovat soucit či výčitky svědomí. Hyde i Griffin zraní nevinné malé dítě, aniž by se zamysleli nad svou krutostí. Jekyll navíc ztrácí kontrolu nad svým tělem a v podobě Hyda brutálně zavraždí staršího, bezbranného muže. Poté se snaží přesvědčit sám sebe, že s touto vraždou nemá nic společného, čímž popírá jakoukoliv spojitost mezi ním a jeho bestiálním druhým já. Zcela mu uniká fakt, že degenerace je nedílnou součástí jeho identity, a proto nemůžou být s Hydem trvale odděleni.

Hydovo chování v mnoha ohledech připomíná jednání a uvažování Neviditelného. Jeho morální úpadek také nakonec vyústí v chladnokrevnou vraždu nic netušícího muže, který pro vraha nepředstavuje vůbec žádnou hrozbu. Ani Hyde, ani Griffin nemají pro své hrůzné činy žádné logické opodstatnění. Oba se řídí základním instinktem přežít bez ohledu na to, jaké utrpení tím mohou způsobit ostatním. Například

Griffinův otec zastřelí sám sebe poté, co ho jeho vlastní syn čistě pro své potřeby okrade o peníze, které mu nepatří. Přestože se Neviditelný pohřbu účastní, upírá se myšlenkami pouze a jen ke svému výzkumu. Neprojevuje ani náznak lítosti a o otci mluví jako o pošetilém hlupákovi, který je strůjcem svého tragického osudu.

Dorian Gray se dopouští podobného hříchu, když svou krutostí dovede k zoufalému činu mladičkou Sibyl Vane, která ho zaujme díky svému výjimečnému hereckému talentu. Ačkoliv Dorian tvrdí, že Sibyl miluje, a že by takto něžné bytosti mohl ublížit jen naprostý netvor, je to právě on, kvůli komu Sibyl spáchá sebevraždu. Nicméně, stejně jako u Hyda a Griffina je vrcholem Dorianovy degenerace brutální vražda. Dorian ubodá k smrti svého dlouholetého, oddaného přítele Basila, který ke svému modelu chová velmi silné, avšak neopětované city. Přestože ví, že portrét je ztělesněním jeho duše, odmítá Dorian vzít zodpovědnost za tento odporný čin a hází vinu právě na obraz, aby tak dokázal svou nevinu. Jeho další obětí se stává Alan Campbell, nadějný mladý vědec, kterého Dorian vydíráním donutí pomoct mu zbavit se Basilova těla. Campbell pod tíhou černého svědomí ukončí svůj život stejným způsobem jako Griffinův otec. Jeho utrpení však nechává Doriana naprosto chladným.

Co se týče Eloiů, ti nejsou na rozdíl od většiny hlavních postav ani nemorální, ani jakkoliv krutí. Jejich degenerace spočívá spíše v nízké inteligenci, která je výsledkem toho, že žili až příliš mnoho let v klidu a míru. Touhu po vyspělosti nahradila lenost a pohodlí. Nedostatek problémů, jejichž řešení si vyžaduje zkušenosti a mazanost, tak vyústil v primitivní smýšlení a naivitu Eloiů. Morlokové si je pěstují jako zdroj potravy a poskytují jim oblečení i jídlo. Eloiové sice mají strach ze tmy, ale vůbec netuší, že jejich skutečnými nepřáteli jsou Morlokové číhající z podzemních šachet. Pasivně akceptují svou roli kořisti, aniž by vyvinuli jakékoliv úsilí k odporu.

Kromě morální degenerace jako takové se jednotliví autoři zabývají i tím, co obnášelo vyčnívat z davu a nedodržovat stanovené normy. Každá z hlavních postav bojuje s pocitem osamění a nepochopením ze strany druhých. Jekyll přichází o svého věrného přítele Lanyona v okamžiku, kdy přímo před jeho očima Hyde podstoupí proces metamorfózy. Griffin na rozdíl od Jekylla samotu vítá, ale i přesto své tajemství svěří doktoru Kempovi, který na něj vzápětí připraví lest a přispěje tak k jeho polapení. Poutník v čase zase musí čelit odmítavému postoji svých kolegů, kteří považují jeho vyprávění o pádu lidstva za pouhé báchorky. A pokud jde o Doriana, ten se stává terčem výsměchu, když se lordu Henrymu přizná k Basilově vraždě a ten to bere jako

nepovedený pokus o vtip. Dorian tak zůstává v boji proti své stále se zhoršující degeneraci úplně sám a nezbývá mu nic jiného než doufat, že je možné tento proces zvrátit. Stejně jako Jekyll, který na konci novely Hyda k smrti nenávidí, Dorian neovládne svůj hněv a ve snaze se obrazu zbavit ho probodne nožem. Tím však zabíjí i svou duši a umírá.

Tyto hrůzy zapříčiněné degenerací se ve všech dílech odehrávají přímo v srdci Londýna. Poutník v čase například zastavuje přesně na tom samém místě, kde před statisíci lety leželo hlavní město britského impéria. Přestože je jeho sláva již dávno pryč, dvojakost přetrvává dál. Eloiové, potomci vyšší vrstvy, se zdržují na povrchu, kdežto Morlokové, tedy bývalá dělnická třída, se ukrývají hluboko v podzemí. Hranice mezi těmito dvěma světy symbolizuje propast mezi bohatstvím překypujícím West Endem a chudobou protkaném East Endem.

Jekyllovo sídlo se nachází v luxusní části Londýna, kdežto Hydovým útočištěm je čtvrť Soho, která se v devatenáctém století potýkala mimo jiné i s šířením prostituce a přelidněností. Obrovský rozdíl mezi jednotlivými londýnskými čtvrtěmi je patrný v odlišném chování služebných. Zatímco Jekyllův majordomus je elegantní, dobře vychovaný a oddaný svému povolání, Hydova neloajální hospodyně si svého pána dostatečně neváží a vlastnosti jako dobrosrdečnost či ochota jí jsou naprosto cizí. I Dorianova osobnost se mění spolu s prostředím, ve kterém se nachází. Jeho nezkaženost na začátku příběhu je vyzdvihnuta krásným, klidným okolím Basilova studia. Jakmile se ale na Dorianovi projevují první známky bezcitnosti, nádech románu začíná být čím dál chmurnější a temnější. Jak Jekyll, tak Hyde ukrývají svá strašná tajemství přímo v srdci Londýna, aniž by je někdo odhalil. Dokonce i Griffin provede svůj experiment v pronajatém pokoji uprostřed jednoho z londýnských slumů. Jeho degenerace je však odhalena krátce poté, co se rozhodne skrýt v malé vesničce Iping. Přichází tím o výhodu anonymity davu v metropoli a stává se příliš nápadným.

Další zajímavostí je, že všichni tři autoři ve svých dílech poukazují na možnost, že degenerace se může nekontrolovatelně šířit. Jak už bylo řečeno, jen pouhou přítomností dovádí Hyde ostatní k nenávisti, někdy až k šílenství. Poutník v čase se uchyluje k násilí a zabije několik Morloků, čímž dokazuje, že je schopen stejně odporných činů jako tvorové, kterými tolik opovrhuje. Mírumilovní obyvatelé Ipingu nakonec v brutální vřavě bezcitně umlátí Griffina k smrti a Dorian svádí na scestí své blízké, kteří jsou buď zcela vyloučeni z vyšších kruhů, nebo sami ukončí svůj život.

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The aim of this thesis is to analyze the theme of degeneration in four British novels, or novellas, written at the end of the nineteenth century, namely *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* by Robert Louis Stevenson, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* by Oscar Wilde, *The Invisible Man* and *The Time Machine* by H. G. Wells. The theoretical part provides a thorough insight into the Victorian era, focusing on degeneration theory in the second half of the nineteenth century. The introductory chapter also briefly discusses the individual authors' experience with and attitudes to degeneration as well as their contemporary society in general. The practical part is based on the analysis and comparison of how degeneration is depicted in the selected works of literature.

Keywords: degeneration, the Victorian era, evolution, morality, crime, London

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Předmětem této práce je analýza motivu degenerace ve čtyřech britských románech či novelách, které byly napsány na konci devatenáctého století, a to *Podivný případ doktora Jekylla a pana Hyda* od Roberta Louise Stevensona, *Obraz Doriana Graye* od Oscara Wilda, *Neviditelný* a *Stroj času* od H. G. Wellse. Teoretická část podrobně popisuje viktoriánskou společnost s důrazem na teorii degenerace v druhé polovině devatenáctého století. Úvodní kapitola pak stručně nastiňuje, jaké měli jednotliví autoři zkušenosti s degenerací a postoje k tehdejší společnosti jako takové. Cílem praktické části je analyzovat a porovnat, jakým způsobem je degenerace vyobrazena a zachycena ve vybraných dílech.

Klíčová slova: degenerace, viktoriánská éra, evoluce, moralita, zločin, Londýn