Shame and Late Victorian Gothic: The Picture of Dorian Gray, The Beetle, and The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde

Mémoire

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Maître ès arts (M.A.)

Québec, Canada

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Résumé

Suite aux grands changements qui bousculèrent la société, la fin du dix-neuvième siècle fut une période de grande instabilité pour l’Angleterre. Les anxiétés créées par ces bouleversements se reflétèrent dans une prolifération de la littérature Gothique. Bien que le genre soit généralement étudié en relation avec la peur, ce mémoire soutient que le gothique tire son essence d’un large éventail d’émotions — et, tout particulièrement, de la honte. Étroitement liée à la notion de moralité, la honte est profondément ancrée dans les codes sociaux et les conventions. Dans une société aussi conservatrice et rigoureusement structurée que celle de la fin de la période victorienne, la honte révèle les conflits auxquels les individus faisaient face, ainsi que leur manière de les gérer. Pour comprendre les dynamiques de ces enjeux et les valeurs à leur fondement, ce mémoire explore trois romans importants de l’époque : *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, de Oscar Wilde, *The Beetle*, de Richard Marsh et *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* de Robert Louis Stevenson. En se concentrant particulièrement sur la figure du monstre gothique, cette étude considère deux types de honte : interne et externe. Tandis que le portrait de *Dorian Gray* illustre le conflit interne du protagoniste, la créature de *The Beetle* offre un exemple de honte externe comme châtiment; enfin, le double dans *Jekyll and Hyde* expose la mécanique de coexistence des hontes externe et interne. Au moyen de cet angle d’analyse, ce mémoire ouvre alors de nouvelles perspectives d’études sur la littérature gothique de la fin du dix-neuvième siècle.
Abstract

The end of the nineteenth century in England was a period of great instability as society experienced significant changes. These disruptions created anxieties, which were manifested in the proliferation of Gothic literature. While the Gothic genre is generally studied through the lens of fear, this thesis argues that it is governed by a range of affects, especially shame. Closely linked with morality, shame is deeply embedded in social codes and conventions. In a rigidly structured, conservative society such as that of late Victorian Britain, shame reveals much about the struggles that people faced and how they handled them. To understand the dynamics of these struggles and the values that underpinned them, this thesis explores three major novels from the fin de siècle period: *The Picture of Dorian Gray* by Oscar Wilde, *The Beetle* by Richard Marsh and *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* by Robert Louis Stevenson. With a particular focus on the figure of the Gothic monster, this study considers two different types of shame, internal and external. The portrait in *Dorian Gray* illustrates the internal conflict of the protagonist, while the creature in *The Beetle* offers an example of external shame as punishment. Meanwhile, the double in *Jekyll and Hyde* provides an opportunity to understand how internal and external shame coexist. In so doing, this thesis provides new insights into Gothic literature of the fin de siècle.
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“Since childhood, I’ve been faithful to monsters. I have been saved and absolved by them, because monsters, I believe, are patron saints of our blissful imperfection, and they allow and embody the possibility of failing.”

– Guillermo del Toro
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Introduction

The Fin de Siècle

The end of the nineteenth century in England was a period of great change and tumult. The very concept of the fin de siècle encompasses an ending, and in the case of the Victorian era, this finality created a multitude of anxieties. Almost everything that had constituted the sociocultural landscape was being challenged: gender roles, sexuality, class, race, religion, and science, to name a few. The end of century thus marked an increasing ambiguity and fluidity in what had previously been certain. Reflecting this context, Michael Patrick Gillespie argues that the literature of the fin de siècle has “no fixed image,” but is rather marked by a plurality of characters and readings (59). However, this diversity challenged a stable sense of Victorian identity.

Indeed, the question of self became a marker of fear and uncertainty. As Julian Wolfreys observes, the “multi-faceted anxieties of the period” were mostly concerned “with the erosion of self” (30). Seeing their identities and social roles threatened, many Victorians expressed the struggles they faced through art. In the Cambridge Companion to the Fin de Siècle, Gail Marshall notes that “in the 1890s then we see a period in which art and politics, culture and science are profoundly, symbiotically interconnected, a period which sees a vitality of language, an exuberance of creativity generated by the end of the century which belies the very concept of endings” (11). This need to create manifested itself in literature, notably in the proliferation of Gothic literature.

The late Victorian period is known for the publication of numerous Gothic novels, many of which are now firmly entrenched in the canon. As the population grew anxious, the Gothic genre proved to be the ideal way to relieve the distress. With its monstrosities
and hauntings, Gothic fiction had long been a site of projections for societal anxieties. Jerrold E. Hogle remarks that “the longevity and power of Gothic fiction unquestionably stem from the way it helps us address and disguise some of the most important desires, quandaries, and sources of anxiety, from the most internal and mental to the widely social and cultural, throughout the history of western culture since the eighteenth century” (4). Not only does the Gothic help soothe inward agitation; it also allows cultural struggles to be cautiously confronted.

With its supernatural elements, the Gothic enables an escape from reality and the transformation of concrete anxieties into forms that can only belong in an “unreal” world. As Fred Botting notes, the Gothic is “part of an internalised world of guilt, anxiety, despair, a world of individual transgression interrogating the uncertain bounds of imaginative freedom and human knowledge” (10). The Gothic is about excess and intemperance and transgresses the boundaries of reality and convention. Because of that, it offers one the occasion to express anxieties that are otherwise too difficult to articulate. Nicholas Ruddick notes that a “desire might be culturally ‘unspeakable’ as a result of social taboos; but it can still be articulated in fiction via symbolic motifs and narratives unfolding according to the logic of dreams” (190). The supernatural, for instance, creates distance from the causes of distress exactly because it is not real.

Furthermore, the characters of Gothic narratives reflect the Victorian mindset. Fred Botting writes, “Gothic subjects [are] alienated, divided from themselves, no longer in control… [they are] divided products of both reason and desire, subjects of obsession, narcissism and self-gratification as much as reasonable, responsible codes of behaviour” (12). Because so much in their environment was shifting, many Victorians reacted by restraining their individuality, which effectively contributed to maintaining the status quo.
Their desires and needs, if they were even slightly different from the norm, had to be repressed. Otherwise, they were threatened with being deemed deviant or monstrous, and were rejected from the community. The characters in Gothic novels mirror these conflicts. Gothic texts, with their darkness and monsters, became a significant genre in the fin de siècle in the way they addressed topical issues and resonated with those who struggled with their identity.

The Gothic and Affect

The Gothic, as Robert Hume comments, has traditionally been considered to exist for the purpose of “inducing a powerful emotional response in the reader… rather than a moral or intellectual one” (284). That is why fear has most often been the subject of research when it comes to Gothic and affect. Fear is an instinctive reaction in the face of the unknown and the strange, two concepts that are at the heart of Gothic fiction. However, Hume continues, at the end of the nineteenth century, the Gothic began to change: “one of their most prominent concerns, though seldom discussed, might grandiosely be called a psychological interest … a considerable amount of concern for interior mental processes” (283, original emphasis). Gothic narratives, then, did not only exist to shock or induce nightmares, but also to discuss, confront and challenge the inner psychological issues and struggles of their readers. According to Julian Wolfreys, the Gothic “causes feelings of horror and dread in the most familiar places, the places where one should feel the safest” (23). But it also challenges that sense of security, in order to reveal what is hidden and to confront what is repressed. Fear is inevitably an essential aspect of these ideas, but there are other emotions at play that are equally important.
Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, in *The Coherence of Gothic Conventions*, notes that the Gothic is preoccupied with “the poisonous effects of guilt and shame” (9), and, more precisely, “how poisoned and poisonous [Gothic characters] feel because of their guilt and shame” (10). This passage inspired my questioning regarding the place of shame in Gothic narratives of the fin de siècle. How does shame generate or motivate the characters’ conflicts? What is the role of shame in their lives? As I read Gothic texts and better grasped the mechanics of shame, I realized that shame was often a crucial factor in the stories of these Victorian characters. How and why is that so? This is the question that I attempt to answer in my thesis. In order to do so, one must begin by defining the main characteristics of shame.

In her book *Blush: Faces of Shame*, Elspeth Probyn writes that shame “is understood as a ‘sickness of the self’” (3). As the notion of the self was an object of anxiety at the end of the nineteenth century, and since shame is greatly concerned with identity, shame is an integral part of the struggles faced by characters in the novels of the time. But what is shame, exactly? Michael Lewis writes, “Shame can be defined simply as the feeling we have when we evaluate our actions, feelings or behavior, and conclude that we have done wrong. It encompasses the whole of ourselves; it generates a wish to hide, to disappear, or even to die” (qtd. in Pattison 41, original emphasis). Shame is thus about transgression, about betraying an ideal or a convention that one had committed to respect. One is seen in a position of failure, and that is typically when shame erupts.

Silvan Tomkins, a pioneer researcher of shame, argues that for shame to be activated, there has to be a factor of “interest” (Tomkins 143). Probyn mentions that shame “illuminates our intense attachment to the world, our desire to be connected with others, and the knowledge that, as merely human, we will sometimes fail in our attempts to
maintain those connections” (Probyn 14). An individual must then care about what he transgresses or betrays for shame to be experienced. Indeed, shame is “our body’s way of telling us that we are interested and that we will continue to be despite shame’s painful interruption” (63). This idea of pain is crucial in shame, which acts as a wound in one’s psyche. It is a crushing, involuntary and yet conscious response to a perceived failure. It profoundly affects the self, much as the horrors of Gothic fiction do. Botting notes that “Gothic terrors activate a sense of the unknown and project an uncontrollable and overwhelming power which threatens not only the loss of sanity, honour, property or social standing but the very order which supports and is regulated by the coherence of those terms” (7). As this thesis will demonstrate, both shame and the terrors of the Gothic are thus concerned with the mind of the individual and affect social order.

I mentioned that, traditionally, research on Gothic texts has been largely concerned with the affect of fear, not shame. But I argue that fear and shame are not estranged from one another. Probyn observes: “The idea that shame is often connected with fear is instructive. It recognizes that shame and fear strike deep into our bodies” (47). Just like fear, shame is an emotion that influences the deepest corners of the self. It gets under the skin and it provokes frantic, restless reactions. Furthermore, the fear of exposure is at the center of shame. Individuals often conceal their shame – its source and its occurrence – out of a fear of being found out. Fear thus becomes an important factor in shame and how it is experienced. Therefore, shame, just like fear, is at home within Gothic fiction. The genre acts as a “warning of dangers of social and moral transgression by presenting them in their darkest and most threatening form” (Botting 7). Indeed, the word transgression is one of the most crucial to consider when discussing the dynamics between shame and Gothic narratives.
The Monster

The notion of habitus, as defined by Pierre Bourdieu, is helpful to understand the importance of transgression in shame and the Gothic. Probyn explains that an “individual’s habitus is the product of all her past experiences and is structured by class, gender, and ethnicity” (39). Individual and collective histories, with the addition of many more cultural markers, inform the habitus, which dictates what one can and cannot do in a society. It delimits the boundaries of a community’s value system, and its morality as well. Therefore, an “individual’s habitus will determine what is experienced as shameful” (Probyn 55). This set of rules, defined and accepted by the majority, exists to regulate behaviour and to reject deviance. The body that does not belong in the inscribed social space becomes consequential in Gothic fiction.

Indeed, this estranged and deviant body, I argue, is represented in Gothic fiction by the monster. According to Judith Halberstam, the monster is “a machine that, in its Gothic mode, produces meaning and can represent any horrible trait that the reader feeds into the narrative” (21). Most specifically, in the late Victorian Gothic novel, the monster “is the product of and the symbol for the transformation of identity… through the mechanism of failed repression” (9). The Gothic monster thus comes to represent those deep-seated but hidden anxieties with which Victorians struggled. Those fears are projected onto a monstrous body that is inevitably different from them in its grotesqueness. Jerrold E. Hogle states that it is a “half-alive/half-dead, half-organic/half-artificial, and obscurely desirable/obviously repellant spectre/creature” that “locates and focuses our longings and fears as though they are and are not ours” (6). Although the monster exists in a variety of
different forms, it cannot resemble the Victorian subject. It is differentiated through diverse characteristics, from its race, gender, and class to the question of its very humanity.

But however horrible and vile the Gothic monster is, it remains a marker of what is deeply repressed inside the individual’s body. Generated by the anxieties of the time, it inevitably comes to incarnate what Victorians fear about themselves and, more crucially, what they are ashamed of about themselves. Whether it be sexual desires or immoral actions, the Gothic monster, with all of its shameful characteristics, becomes a reflection of society’s very own shame. Individuals, faced with the monster, see their shame exacerbated by its presence because it incarnates it in its worst form. Every repressed anxiety or fear is threatened to be revealed by the presence of the monster, and that is what makes it so terrifying. As Julian Wolfreys notes, “whether externally or internally, the borders of any identity or location are always permeable and always available for haunting in the most uncanny ways imaginable” (15). This question of interiority and exteriority will also be significant in my study, but before going into the core of the thesis, some notions about shame have to be established.

**The Mechanics of Shame**

Michael Lewis, in his article “Self-Conscious Emotions: Embarrassment, Pride, Shame, and Guilt,” states that shame is a “self-evaluative emotion,” meaning that the individual evaluates his or her own behaviour according to three factors: standards, rules, and goals (called SRGs). All are defined by one’s habitus. The evaluation demands an attribution, which is either global or specific. A global attribution, Lewis argues, “refers to an individual propensity to focus on the total self” (627-628, my emphasis). This is what happens in shame, which is described as a “consequence of a failure evaluation relative to
the SRGs when the person makes a global evaluation of the self” (628). This quality of including the whole being in the evaluation is what differentiates shame from guilt. A lot of research has been conducted on the contrast between the two affects. Notably, June P. Tangney and Ronda L. Dearing argue that since shame and guilt erupt after an individual transgresses a rule, they are “both ‘self-conscious’ and ‘moral’ emotions: self-conscious in that they involve the self evaluating the self, and moral in that they presumably play a key role in fostering moral behavior” (2). In guilt, however, there is a specific attribution rather than a global one. One experiences guilt for a specific event or action, for instance for having stolen. In contrast, one feels shame for one’s global identity. In the same example, the individual would be ashamed of being a thief, having transgressed the moral standards of society by committing a crime.

Furthermore, in order for shame to erupt, one has to be caught transgressing a rule or a convention. This notion of being seen is pivotal in shame. According Gabriele Taylor, “only by seeing what he is doing through the other’s eyes does he recognize the nature of his action, and so it is crucial, it seems, that there be some other through whose eyes he can look at his action” (58). It might therefore be assumed that an audience is necessary. However, this audience does not need to be external: “The actual or imagined observer may merely be the means of making the agent look at himself, he is in no way essential. What is essential is the shift in the agent’s viewpoint vis-à-vis himself” (66). It is thus the realization of self-consciousness that generates the shame experience.

After this exposure takes place, several physical reactions accompany shame. Charles Darwin elaborates on these in his book The Expression of Emotions in Man and Animals: “An ashamed person can hardly endure to meet the gaze of those present, so that he almost invariably casts down his eyes” (322). The avoidance of the gaze is one of the
most crucial signs of shame. A slouched posture, blushing, and even a shrinking of the body are also indicators of shame. On a psychological level, the experience of shame produces feelings of weakness and worthlessness, a desire to withdraw and isolate, and profoundly affects self-esteem and one’s relationships with others. While it is essential to note that every shame experience is different, these broad commonalities are to be kept in mind.

**Internal and External Shame**

In my thesis, I will differentiate between two types of shame: internal and external. Paul Gilbert explains the distinction between the two: “Generally, shame seems to focus on either the social world (beliefs about how others see the self), the internal world (how one sees oneself), or both (how one sees oneself as a consequence of how one thinks others see the self)” (17). Shame can thus be experienced as an inward struggle or be generated externally; of course, internal and external shame are very much intertwined with one another, and one generally encompasses the other. However, I will focus on them separately in the two first chapters of this thesis in order to better understand how they appear in Gothic literature. In the third chapter, I will then reunite internal and external shame to study the dynamics of their coexistence. In order to do so, I chose three novels from the end of the nineteenth century that are not only significant to the period, but also reveal a great deal about Victorian society and the place of shame in people’s lives. *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, by Oscar Wilde, *The Beetle*, by Richard Marsh, and *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, by Robert Louis Stevenson, were three immensely popular novels when they were published in the 1880s and 1890s. The three narratives also present characters that struggle with their identity. The anxieties that erupt are represented
by shameful and often shameless monstrous forms. Shame reveals itself to be a crucial factor in the decisions they make and also in the conflicts the monster produces and reveals.

In the first chapter, I will consider Oscar Wilde’s *The Picture of Dorian Gray* in relation to internal shame. The protagonist, who is at first a clean soul, is introduced to shame by his mentor, Lord Henry, who encourages Dorian to engage in an immoral lifestyle. As Dorian sins, he remains pure in appearance – it is a portrait of him that physically decays as his soul becomes tainted by his shameful behaviour. The chapter will trace the birth and evolution of Dorian’s relationship with shame. It will argue that Dorian’s shame is mostly internal because he isolates himself with the shameful monster, which is also himself. Faced with the reflection of his shame, Dorian goes through an inward struggle. His narcissism, created by the fact that he feels protected by the portrait from the consequences of shame, is important in this dynamic. The visual features of the portrait also illustrate the corruptive effects of shame.

The second chapter will look at Richard Marsh’s *The Beetle*. Extremely popular at the time of its publication, the novel introduces a monster that incarnates many of the anxieties of the *fin de siècle*. With its ambiguous gender and race, and its deviant sexual practices, the Beetle will be discussed as a shameful Other. Because it is an entirely external monster, I will show that it is external shame that mostly drives the narrative. Indeed, the Beetle acts out its vengeance by imposing punishments on the characters that create an externally generated shame. The notions of humiliation, reputation, and social status will be considered because they are crucial in how external shame functions.

Lastly, the third chapter will focus on *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*, by Robert Louis Stevenson. Because of its emphasis on the notion of the double and duality, Stevenson’s novella offers an opportunity to analyze how internal and external
shame can coexist, not only within a single narrative, but also within a single individual. In particular, Henry Jekyll’s relationship with shame will be considered through the figure of the Victorian gentleman. In addition, shame will be shown to be a crucial factor in Hyde’s creation and growth. Internal shame will be explored through the notion of moral character and addiction, and external shame in terms of exposure and degeneration. Hyde has both an internal and an external existence, existing within Jekyll’s body and as a separate identity. This consolidates the perverse consequences of shame in the body of Jekyll. The duality of shame will be explored through the setting of the novel and Jekyll’s written confession.

In this study, I intend to clarify some aspects of the dynamics of shame in fin de siècle Gothic texts and show how shame influences the characters’ struggles with their identity. I will explore how the figure of the Gothic monster interacts with shame and explain why shame is so crucial to its influence in the narratives. The famous hidden portrait in the attic of Wilde’s The Picture of Dorian Gray constitutes the first focus of my thesis and opens the discussion on internal shame.
Chapter 1: A Face Without a Heart: *Dorian Gray* and Internal Shame

Introduction

*The Picture of Dorian Gray*, by Oscar Wilde, has been a subject of controversy ever since its publication. Considered immoral, shameful, and distasteful by its first audience, it was notably criticized in *The Daily Chronicle* as a “poisonous book, the atmosphere of which is heavy with the mephitic odours of moral and spiritual putrefaction” (qtd. in Gillespie 52). First published in a magazine in 1890, Wilde had to revise it in order to publish it as a novel in 1891, and even then some booksellers refused to allow *Dorian Gray* on their shelves (Bristow, “Wilde’s Sexual Identities” 211). One distributor even claimed that he “should have been ‘ashamed to circulate’” the novel (Bristow, “Introduction” xix).

For a book that is so concerned with the crippling effects of a shame created by the rigid standards of society, the choice of words is rather apropos.

*Dorian Gray* tells the story of a handsome dandy who commits himself to a lifestyle of decadence and immorality. While Dorian remains young and beautiful, a portrait of him becomes increasingly disfigured as he sins. In the end, Dorian is driven mad by the sight of his portrait—his conscience, he calls it—and he eventually destroys it. However, this only results in his own death, as the portrait contains his very soul. Dominic Manganiello, in his article “Ethics and Aesthetics in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*,” suggests that “Wilde reverses the child-like innocence of the fairy tale game of ‘mirror, mirror on the wall’ to the Gothic horror of an adult seeing himself hideously transformed” (31). In the novel, we witness a transformation that culminates in Dorian becoming the Gothic monster.

Wilde confronts the ideal of the pure young man with his evil double: the monster. I will show that the novel’s tale of the degradation and corruption of one’s soul is related to
the effects of shame. The affect becomes a powerful force as Dorian’s portrait both creates and generates his shame. While it protects him from the consequences of his immoral life, it also taunts him with a vision of his true self. This tension between concealment and exposure is central to the idea of shame. While Dorian’s shame is externalized in the portrait, internal shame drives his devolution. The portrait gives him an opportunity to look at himself, generating an inward struggle between what he strives to be, and what he sees himself to be.

Internal Shame

In his chapter “What is Shame? Some Core Issues and Controversies,” Paul Gilbert makes a distinction between internal and external shame. While external shame is mostly concerned with the social world, internal shame is defined as a “negative self-evaluation” (17). The self is the most important aspect of internal shame, as it chooses and judges what is and is not shameful. In other words, the self judges the self as wrong or flawed (Gilbert 17). Internal shame is thus extremely subjective and particularly severe; after all, many people tend to judge themselves more harshly than others might. This self-evaluation is particularly influenced by one’s own ideals about oneself. As Elspeth Probyn writes in *Blush: Faces of Shame,* “shame reminds us about the promises we keep to ourselves” (x). Indeed, shame most often erupts when one fails to attain an objective or to preserve an image of oneself. In internal shame, it is one’s deepest and sometimes secret desires that are at stake.

Shame is a powerful emotion that appears after exposure. For an exposure to occur, there needs to be an audience, but the latter does not necessarily have to be external. In cases of internal shame, the audience can, in fact, be oneself. Calling shame “the eye turned
inward,” Andrew Morrison notes that shame does not require an external gaze, suggesting, rather, that shame occurs “when the self fails to attain its ideals through unresponsiveness of the… ideal self” (278). In this instance, one suddenly sees oneself as one appears, and evaluates the behaviour internally. If the judgment does not correspond to one’s expectations or ideals, it can be experienced as a failure, affect one’s self-esteem, and then generate shame. The internal world, the self, is vulnerable to one’s own critical stare. As Silvan Tomkins observes, for shame to exist there has to be interest: “We have to care about something or someone to feel ashamed” (Probyn 13). This interest is arguably never stronger than with ourselves and the ideals we strive to attain.

Indeed, the notion of ideal is crucial when considering internal shame. Using Freudian terms, Léon Wurmser suggests that in “its internalized version shame is thus the outcome of a very specific tension between the super-ego and the ego function of self-perception” (76). In other words, the super-ego is one’s ideal, and the ego is one’s self in reality. When one considers that the ideal and the self are incompatible, it can create a sense of worthlessness that precipitates shame. Of course, the self is often complex to define, and some people have unrealistic expectations for themselves. Wurmser writes that the higher the ideal is, “the more painful is the wound about failing” (76). Shame, as a wound, can pervade many aspects of an individual’s life, especially one’s self-esteem. Stephen Pattison observes that shame, as an “unpleasant self-judgment” (70), precipitates feelings of being weak, unlovable, and provokes a real contempt towards the self. Moreover, according to Gilbert, a sentiment of inferiority drives internal shame the most. It crushes, making one feel worthless and useless.

Shame most often prompts a need to hide. It is particularly true of internal shame, as the individual is crushed by a sense of failure. However, isolation only further strengthens
the sense of shame and is particularly harmful as people become unable to see beyond their own harsh self-judgment. These feelings can lead to disastrous effects, like depression and self-harm. Another kind of protective attitude from internal shame is rejection, that is, to deny its effects. This often results in narcissistic personalities, in delusional ideas about the self and in a strong tendency for denial. Anger is also a typical response. All of these attitudes are present in the protagonist of *Dorian Gray*, and will be explored in the chapter.

Essentially, what Dorian experiences is his failure to attain his own ideal and the consequences of the shame generated by this defeat. The portrait acts as a mirror that reveals his true self, disfigured by his shame and his disregard for morality. The portrait reveals the monstrous aspects of shame in its gradual degradation. This chapter will explore these notions in the novel. However, before delving into how shame affects and eventually destroys Dorian, it is important to trace his personal evolution.

**The Birth of Shame**

*Lord Henry’s Influence*

At the beginning of the novel, Dorian is described as a pure soul. He is but an innocent young man, praised for his magnificent beauty. These characteristics inspire Basil Hallward, one of his friends, to paint a portrait of him. This portrait becomes Basil’s masterpiece and contains all of his admiration for Dorian: “All the candour of youth was there, as well as youth’s passionate purity. One felt [Dorian] had kept himself unspotted from the world” (Wilde 17). The portrait, like Dorian, is a representation of purity. It has not been touched by sin or shame, both of which will be described as stains on Dorian’s cleanliness. In his introduction to the Oxford World’s Classics edition, Joseph Bristow notes that, as readers, “we are encouraged to view [Dorian] as the embodiment of artistic
perfection” even before we meet him (xi). When Dorian sees his portrait for the first time, he is extremely pleased by his own beauty that comes to him as a “revelation” (Wilde 24). Like a modern Narcissus, he falls in love with himself while gazing at the portrait. It becomes the object of his idolization.

Christopher Craft, in an article about the figure of the double in *Dorian Gray*, argues that until the creation of the portrait, “Dorian’s self is but a blank canvas awaiting the artist’s touch” (113–114). This artist, one can argue, appears in the character of Lord Henry. The latter is a vicious influence on Dorian as he impacts his ideology but also introduces shame into his life. Dorian and Lord Henry’s meeting is anticipated by Basil, who warns the latter: “Don’t spoil him” (Wilde 16). Indeed, Basil believes that to “influence a person is to give him one’s own soul” (18) and this is what Henry gives Dorian: a selfhood. Their meeting is crucial in Dorian’s life, as Lord Henry causes the young man’s views on life to shift. Lord Henry believes that to sin is essential to a man’s sanity, as he exclaims: “The only way to get rid of a temptation is to yield to it” (Wilde 19). Intrigued and certainly amused by Dorian’s innocence, Lord Henry decides to teach him his philosophy of remorseless and even shameless immorality.

Lord Henry proclaims that resisting one’s desires and repressing impulses is like poison: “We degenerate into hideous puppets, haunted by the memory of the passions of which we were too much afraid” (Wilde 23). He seduces Dorian with “dreamy, languorous eyes” (20), opening him to a world of sin and encouraging him to embrace his passions. After his meeting with Lord Henry, Dorian walks the streets of London: “There was an exquisite poison in the air. I had a passion for sensations” (Wilde 43). This poison, one can argue, is Lord Henry’s influence, under which Dorian transforms into a man who yields to every temptation, regardless of moral standards. Shame is an emotion that bases itself in
morality, and thus in the standards and values of a society. If one adheres to them, transgression results in experiencing shame, either internally or externally. But Dorian, influenced by Henry, becomes essentially shameless in his remorseless egotism. Lewis Poteet notes that “his rejection of moral evaluation of behaviour is complete” (247), meaning that he refuses that morality guides his actions, shamelessly yielding to his every temptation.

Lord Henry becomes a devil on Dorian’s shoulder, tempting him to embrace his deepest desires, especially those he has repressed in the past: “you have had passions that have made you afraid … whose mere memory might stain your cheek with shame” (Wilde 19). This passage presents shameful longings as a stain. If one has self-restraint, and does not indulge in passions, one is proper and “clean.” Dorian, who had previously been pure, is now compromised by the “dirty” temptations evoked by Henry. This first mention of shame illustrates its corruptive effects. Significantly, Lord Henry’s words are uttered as Dorian sits in front of Basil, who is putting the finishing touches on the portrait. Already, the portrait occupies a crucial component of Dorian’s relationship with shame: it is later called “the origin of all his shame” (Wilde 129). Dorian is haunted by an image of himself in his pure, handsome youth. It represents the ideal he will strive to maintain for the rest of his life. Since it is a representation of his inner, private self, it consolidates the shame as internal.

However, Lord Henry does not believe that shame might poison Dorian. The purity displayed by the portrait refutes shame, which is dirty, soiled. But there is a significant difference to consider between Lord Henry and Dorian. As Lewis Poteet notes, “while Lord Henry merely speculates” about living a life of immorality and sin, Dorian acts (246). Dorian’s adherence to Henry’s philosophy transforms his lifestyle. Yielding to every
temptation, Dorian starts to sin and engage in shameful behaviour. He solely relies on his mentor’s teachings, but he misinterprets them and misjudges the effects of shame. Although he acts shamelessly, he will not be able to evade shame entirely.

Aesthetic Ideals

Dorian’s encounter with the portrait marks the end of his innocence. It shows him his own beauty, but it also precipitates his degeneration. Indeed, Dorian’s shame originates in the portrait because the latter gives him self-awareness. This transforms into an internalized fear of aging that is reinforced by the sight of the picture. It represents his ego-ideal, the perfection Dorian sees on the canvas becomes the ideal he wants to maintain. He also realizes that the beauty he possesses will eventually fade. This fearful possibility propels him to sell his soul to the portrait: “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 world I would not give! I would give my soul for that!” (Wilde 25). Choosing to retain the youth of the portrait, Dorian opts for an aesthetic life, modelling his own body into a piece of art and ignoring the possible price of his choice. Poteet argues that “Dorian’s vow preserves his beauty but commits him to the superiority of art over nature, and he cultivates the artificial” (242). In other words, he elevates illusion and disregards reality. This moment sparks the beginning of Dorian’s obsession with beauty and youth, particularly an interest in aestheticism. As the portrait makes him aware of his inevitable aging and decay, beauty and perfection become his ideals.

Aestheticism was a popular movement in the Victorian fin de siècle. Dennis Denisoff defines it as an “interest in perfection” (34), in the elevation of beauty as
something to be simply admired and not necessarily useful as an object. One seeks to maximize “one’s experiences of pleasure” (37), most notably through art. Dorian adheres to this idolization of the artificial and superficial, as his love affair with Sybil Vane shows. When Dorian first meets Sybil, he says to Lord Henry: “Harry! why didn’t you tell me that the only thing worth loving is an actress?” (Wilde 46). Actors incarnate characters, never themselves. Even when they are not on the stage, they symbolize art. Sybil is to Dorian what Denisoff calls “an artificial object designed for aesthetic consumption” (40). She is everything that Dorian wants to love, that is an object of art, a thing of beauty that exists only to be admired. Sybil, as an individual, does not interest him; it is rather her purity as a work of art that seduces him.

However, when Dorian and Sybil’s romance consolidates in a kiss, Sybil’s talent starts to fade. As she has known real love, she can no longer perform it. Christopher Nassaar, in his book Into the Demon Universe: A Literary Exploration of Oscar Wilde, remarks that Sybil “exists in a protective world of art from which she cannot emerge without dying” (47). By feeling love herself, she transforms from an object to a subject, and Dorian loses all interest in her. He never considers her as an artist, as she represents art itself. But she loses that quality when her performances lose their enchantment. As Ellen Scheible argues, “Dorian is only capable of loving an art that is too real, not the life that imitates that art” (146). Sybil, who now has an existence of her own, is unable to be the subject of Dorian’s love.

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1 Wilde himself notably discusses this subject in the prologue to the novel. He is known for embracing dandyism, which placed importance on the senses and aesthetic beauty over conventions. For more, see Stephen Calloway’s chapter “Wilde and the Dandyism of the Senses” in The Cambridge Companion to Oscar Wilde (1997), and also Dennis Denisoff’s chapter “Decadence and Aestheticism” in The Cambridge Companion to the Fin de Siècle (2007).
Lord Henry, witnessing the scene, tells Dorian that Sybil is beautiful: “What more can you want?” (Wilde 73). At this moment, Dorian realizes that he had desired the entirety of what Sybil represented when she was on stage, an art that is alive. But he understands that life comes at the expense of perfect art. He spits at Sybil: “You have killed my love” (Wilde 75). He has placed unattainable ideals upon her, because “real” perfection does not exist. Dorian’s cruel rejection, in which he shames Sybil for not living up to the ideals he had constructed for her, results in her suicide. This instance illustrates the devastating effects of shame, as Sybil is unable to endure the shame to which Dorian subjects her. Her whole self comes to be defined by Dorian’s admiration. When he rejects her, he shames her entire identity. The feeling of worthlessness caused by the shame that erupts within Sybil is too much for her to handle.

This crucial event marks the first change in Dorian’s portrait. When he next looks upon it, he realizes that the “expression looked different. One would have said that there was a touch of cruelty in the mouth” (Wilde 78). Dorian realizes that the portrait has been stained by his shameful act of rejecting Sybil: “the face on the canvas [would] bear the burden of his passions and his sins” (78). Once again, the idea of passion is linked to uncleanliness because it is not controlled and proper. To indulge in sin, and thus to act shamefully, marks the body. While Dorian feels a certain dread at the possibility, he also understands that the portrait will allow him to escape this burden. Choosing to embrace this situation, Dorian surrenders his humanity. As Jerusha McCormack argues, “Dorian himself becomes an artefact, neither alive nor dead” (113). Existing in this in-betweenness, Dorian

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2 The idea of rejection is also strongly related to shame. When an individual is shamed, he is singled out as someone who does not adhere or correspond to the values of a community. Thus, that individual can no longer be a part of it. These notions will be explored further in the second and third chapters of this thesis.
escapes the effects of mortal life and the possible external shame that his acts would otherwise bring upon him.

The internal shame, however, is maintained. Nassaar notes that Lord Henry “exists not only as something external to Dorian but also as a voice within him” (38, my emphasis). This interiority is crucial as Dorian starts to rely solely on his own judgment, influenced by Lord Henry’s teachings. Self-evaluation becomes his only form of assessment, but it is twisted and deformed by the detachment and avoidance instilled by his mentor’s guidance. According to Kenneth Womack, “Lord Henry’s decadent philosophy challenges its subscribers to elevate their desires for aesthetic experience and fulfillment over interpersonal consequences, to achieve a total separation between their ethical obligations to their community and their needs for self-indulgence” (173). These “ethical obligations” evaluate behaviour as moral or immoral but Dorian disregards them to prioritize selfish desires. This self-centeredness is reinforced as Dorian internalizes Lord Henry’s discourse. He becomes the only judge of himself while the portrait, hidden from view, allows him to be protected from the consequences of his choices. But it also renders him entirely alone, and this isolation leads him to completely internalize his shame.

The Portrait

As Dorian embarks on his sinful life, the consequences of his actions are transferred to the portrait, which becomes “the mask of his shame” (Wilde 82). While the idea of the mask speaks to a protection against shame, Dorian does not realize that he has sealed his fate by selling his soul. The soul, relocated in the portrait, becomes an object and also the catalyst for Dorian’s devolution. Kenneth Womack suggests that the soul “functions as the repository for goodness and evil, as well as the essential material that comprises the self”
Shame, by affecting the self, will show itself upon what is now the incarnation of Dorian’s soul: the portrait. Furthermore, the soul usually represents a person’s morality. It “operates as a conflation of sorts between bodily desires and individual value systems, and the harmony between these two elements produces a kind of moral beauty” (Womack 171). Dorian’s value system changes in that he is only guided by his physical impulses. His temptations define every aspect of his life, and his “moral beauty” is stained by the shame of his immoral, decadent lifestyle. This results in the disfiguration of the soul, made visual by the portrait.

While Dorian escapes the effects of external shame—the gaze of others upon him—his internal shame is reinforced by his constant confrontation with the portrait. Helen Merrell Lynd writes that shame is “a wound to one’s self-esteem, a painful feeling or sense of degradation excited by the consciousness of having done something unworthy of one’s previous idea of one’s own excellence” (qtd. in Pattison 53). This insistence on the self speaks to internal shame, and although Dorian embraces his choice, he is aware that it is wrong. That self-consciousness causes the portrait to become shameful. It first showed Dorian his own beauty, but it comes to reflect his soul’s twistedness: “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. They would defile it, and make it shameful” (Wilde 101). The stain of shame, now marked on the portrait, initiates its decay and transforms it into an object that contains and reflects shame. The alteration of the portrait is grotesque and dreadful. It becomes the Gothic monster.

The portrait becomes physically altered so that the effects of shame are plainly obvious to the eye. As Darwin elaborates in his book *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals*, when one is confronted with shame, the first reaction is to hide. Michael
Lewis summarizes the notion: “The physical action accompanying shame is a shrinking of the body” (629). This is reflected in the portrait, as it is transformed from the pure, handsome face of Dorian into the horrifying face of the Gothic monster. It is described as having a “misshapen body,” “failing limbs,” and “hollow or flaccid” cheeks (Wilde 109). The hair “would lose its brightness, the mouth would gape or droop”; “there would be the wrinkled throat, the cold, blue-veined hands, the twisted body” (104–105). The young body shrinks into that of a cadaverous old man, the incarnation of Dorian’s fear of aging. His ideal is his young self; his older body, twisted with shame, is his nightmare. Moreover, the horror of its appearance is characteristic of the Gothic monster, which, according to Judith Halberstam, is a “disciplinary sign, a warning of what may happen if the body is imprisoned by its desires or if the subject is unable to discipline him” (72). Dorian then becomes a warning to the readers that such an immoral life is poisonous to both soul and body.

The shame of Dorian’s sins is depicted as a stain that poisons his perfect beauty: “Through some strange quickening of inner life the leprosies of sin were slowly eating the thing away. The rotting of a corpse in a watery grave was not so fearful” (Wilde 133). This image corresponds with W.I. Miller’s description of shame: “Shame will linger, suffusing one’s whole being with the coldness of despair, the sick feeling that comes with knowing we don’t make it. Things shut down, everything points down. One wants to sink, one looks down, slouches down” (161). As shame crushes, the portrait rots. In both descriptions is an idea of decomposition and decay, in which the spark of life is lost. There is, however, a significant contrast to consider. In shame, as Miller notes, it is usually the eyes that first look down. But Dorian’s portrait looks directly at him, as though watching him: “His own soul was looking out at him from the canvas and calling him to judgment” (Wilde 102).
What seems like an external gaze is actually his own soul staring at him, generating a constant self-evaluation. Dorian becomes his own audience; the poisonous effects of shame are reinforced as they are internalized.

The portrait might appear to act as a source of external shame for Dorian, as it is an external object. However, Dorian is confronted with his shame in isolation, as the portrait is concealed from the world and only exposed to his own eyes. He transforms it into another source of internal shame by making himself the only witness of his soul’s degeneration. He can never escape the portrait, even after he has hidden it behind a curtain in a secret room at the back of his house. This room is a quintessential Gothic setting. Linda Dryden, in *The Modern Gothic and Literary Doubles*, writes, “the very presence of Dorian’s portrait in the attic of his Grosvenor Square home is another example of a modern Gothic ‘haunting’ of the familiar, of the Gothic existing within the framework of the known, identifiable domestic space” (27). Concealment in his own home, a space he knows, as much as he knows himself, shows the tension between exposure and hiding. Dorian can never avoid his portrait, which becomes a part of him, and thus neither can he escape his internal shame.

Though the portrait may be hidden, its existence acts as a constant reminder that Dorian can never maintain his own ideal of perfection. Escape is a typical reaction to shame, June P. Tangney and Ronda L. Dearing argue. However, they note that the “shamed, withdrawn individual is still saddled with a loathsome self” (92). Indeed, the portrait acts as a mirror, showing Dorian his true self. He wants to ignore it, but he cannot. Antonio Sanna observes, “[his] portrait thus re-enacts trauma through its silence and revives shame and guilt in him by clearly depicting them through his aging features and stains of dripping blood” (35). The portrait is an exposure of his inner self that nourishes
his internal shame by making Dorian repeatedly confront himself. This almost perverse revival reinforces the internal struggle because Dorian is its sole object.

As already noted, the notion of audience is crucial in experiences of shame. Michael L. Morgan notes that “the sense of distress or anxiety one feels with shame is somehow related to appearances, to how one looks to others or how one takes oneself to appear to others” (38). In Dorian’s case, it occurs only with himself: “No eye but his would ever see his shame” (Wilde 104). This self-exposure starts the process of shame that will ultimately destroy him. Paul Gilbert suggests that one of the most important factors in shame is inferiority, or rather the fear of inferiority. However, shame cannot “consist of inferiority alone,” but “must include some notion of a place or position that one does not want to be in or an image one does not wish to create” (Gilbert 18). Since Dorian always has his physical self as the idealized model, he constantly compares himself. The portrait allows him to confront the representation of his soul in quite a direct manner. He is able to know himself vividly because his self is depicted in the painting. Furthermore, it makes him aware of his shame, which does not remain abstract, thereby reinforcing its power.

Dorian *knows* his shame, *sees* his shame: “This portrait would be to him the most magical of mirrors. As it had revealed to him his own body, so it would reveal to him his own soul” (Wilde 91). Since his soul is tainted with shame, this mirror creates not only exposure, but also a forced self-evaluation from within that leads to extremely negative effects. This passage shows that the degradation of the portrait is internal: “It was from *within*, apparently, that the foulness and horror had come” (Wilde 133, my emphasis). The process occurs from within Dorian himself, as the portrait acts as a mirror for his soul. The portrait ages and decays over time, “[f]or every sin that he committed, a stain would fleck
and wreck its fairness” (Wilde 79). The sins, which are shameful, mark the body, and the corruption of his soul is made visible through the decaying portrait.

**Dorian’s Defences**

*Narcissism and Denial*

Dorian, however, has protection from the corruptive effects of shame. Since he is the sole viewer of his own corruption, it gives him a defence against his internal shame as he continues to be pure in appearance. Feeling liberated from his soul and thus from his conscience, Dorian engages in a life that disregards morality. Shielded from judgment because of his untainted body, it notably protects him when James Vane, Sybil’s brother, wants to kill him for driving his sister to suicide. Looking at Dorian’s face, which embodies the “unstained purity of youth,” James concludes that Dorian was obviously “not the man who had destroyed Sybil’s life” (Wilde 161). Dorian’s physical perfection allows him to live an immoral life. He comes to represent, in the Gothic imagination, the worst kind of monster, which roams freely among society “because an exterior hides a corrupt self” (Halberstam 74). Dorian’s sinful life of decadence and excess would bring scandal upon him in the rigid culture of Victorian *fin de siècle* society, but his appearance protects him from being discovered.

At first, Dorian draws power from the portrait. While his self-esteem sometimes suffers from seeing his self so degraded in the picture, at other times he mocks it, and believes himself invulnerable: “he would sit in front of the picture, sometimes loathing it and himself, but filled, at other times, with that pride of individualism that is half the fascination of sin, and smiling, with secret pleasure, at the misshapen shadow that had to bear the burden that should have been his own” (Wilde 119). Dorian, through an inflated
self-esteem and vanity created by his physical perfection, develops a narcissistic personality that preserves him from suffering shame. This strange fascination with his soul’s reflection encourages a distorted view of himself.

As Helen Block Lewis argues, the self is central in experiences of shame. The impact on the individual is mainly negative: “it is an ‘implosion’ or a momentary ‘destruction’ of the self in acute self-denigration” (95). In contrast, narcissism is a positive experience of the self, and creates an “inflated idea of the self” (97), thus producing a protection against shame. Dorian falls in love with his own portrait and admires himself for his aesthetic beauty. This relates to the praise of the self and a desire to boast. He hangs the portrait in his home and is extremely proud of it. But the moment it is stained by shame, fear and an obsessive need for concealment appear. One might think that narcissism and shame are incompatible, but Lewis remarks that narcissists are in fact deeply marked by shame, as their fear of it feeds their narcissistic tendencies (97). Narcissism can thus be a form of repressed shame, transformed in order to evade its effects. This repression speaks to a form of denial, which is also a part of Dorian’s defences against shame.

Indeed, as the years pass, Dorian becomes embedded in a cycle of denial, pervaded with a fear of exposure. He repeats that “only expression … gives reality to things” (Wilde 92). He refuses that the portrait has any influence on him. He is “innately self-obsessed” and constantly “exonerating himself from blame,” as Linda Dryden remarks (The Modern Gothic and Literary Doubles 145). Dorian internalizes his shame so well and buries it so deep under narcissistic tendencies that he is able to deny it easily. If sin usually “is a thing that writes itself across a man’s face” (Wilde 126), this is not Dorian’s case. It writes itself on his portrait that he hides and keeps for himself. Because the portrait is external to him, Dorian is able to divorce himself from it: “He had not painted it. What was it to him how
vile and full of shame it looked?” (Wilde 119). He acknowledges that shame is a part of his life, and that its corruption is affecting his soul. His narcissism and denial are defence mechanisms that he embraces to avoid being crushed by the sight of his true self.

But of course, this attempt at disregarding the portrait fails, as “he was afraid” (119). Fear is an important factor in Dorian’s life, as he dreads being found out for what he really is. As Antonio Sanna notes, “Although Dorian is never disgraced by [rumours], his terror of them pervades his life” (25). He comes to be afraid of himself, of what he has become, and of his shame. His exaggerated vanity is only a pretense that eventually fails to protect him from himself. Tangney and Dearing observe that “narcissists typically develop many unrealistic expectations for themselves and others that, in effect, set the stage for experiences of shame” (72). Dorian’s shame originates in a desire for perfection, in a desire to maintain an ideal self purely concerned with appearance. But as his soul becomes corrupted, his pure body becomes only the shell that hides the monstrous. This double life reinforces his shame because he internalizes and denies it.

Projection and Anger

For most of his life, Dorian has no remorse about bringing shame upon others. His own shame is his torment, but he does not care about other people. Numerous rumours circulate, and he is known to generate shame and despair in those with whom he has been intimate. Spreading his influence like Lord Henry, but in a more insidious way, he leaves a trail of bodies in his wake. Basil tells him of a young man who has committed suicide after being intimate with Dorian: “He seemed broken with shame and sorrow” (Wilde 127). Dorian, however, does not care about him, as he contemptuously answers Basil’s concern. His lack of consideration, or his shamelessness, illustrates the depths of his immorality and
the corruption of his soul. Having internalized his shame, he does not grasp its possible external effects. He lives a life of deceit, and by destroying other lives, he feels better about his own: “They have gone down into the depths. You led them there. Yes: you led them there, and yet you can smile, as you are smiling now” (128). Individuals feeling shame can seek to gain a sense of worth through others, especially with internal shame that greatly affects self-esteem (Pattison 111). He compensates for his eroded self-esteem by exerting power over others and bringing them down in order to elevate himself.

Moreover, Dorian accumulates wealth and even starts to consume opium. Joseph Bristow argues that the “fact that his life has led to taking narcotics amplifies his compulsive but ever-dissatisfied need to sustain pleasure, whatever the cost” (“Introduction” xvi). This excess and decadence create a kind of lassitude in Dorian—an emptiness that he can never fill and that is poisonous to others. However, Dorian’s shame eventually catches up with him. Constantly seeing himself in the worst of mirrors—the portrait—the illusion cannot be maintained. His obsession with the portrait only worsens, as it bears the truth of his shame. Jerusha McCormack writes, “Seeking to numb his guilt, Dorian anaesthetises himself with things. … He struggles to retain the numbness of an object; but in a rare moment of unconscious grace, Dorian rediscovers the power to feel—for others as for himself” (113). That moment is his encounter with Basil Hallward, years after the picture has been painted.

During this meeting, Basil questions Dorian about his immoral life, asking him to put an end to the rumours. Dorian decides to tell him the truth and show the portrait, arguably out of a desire to share his burden that has become too much for him. Moreover, Dorian blames Basil for his state. As the painter, he must be the creator of his shame. Pattison suggests that one can resort to attacking others in order to rid themselves of their
shame (111). After seeing the degraded portrait, Dorian rejoices at Basil being “burdened for the rest of his life with the hideous memory of what he had done” (Wilde 129). As Basil is struck with “disgust” and “loathing” (132) at the sight of the picture, Dorian becomes filled with rage.

In *Shame and Guilt*, Tangney and Dearing discuss the links between shame and anger. They draw a contrast between the two emotions: “Anger is an emotion of potency and authority. In contrast, shame is an emotion of the worthless, the paralysed, the ineffective” (93). Anger can arise as a response to shame, in order to repair the wrecked self. If shame crushes, anger allows for the possibility of regaining control of one’s self. It directly contradicts the paralysis and withdrawal of shame by giving back power to the individual. Helen B. Lewis suggests that “there is an intrinsic link between shame and anger” and that “although a shamed individual’s hostility is initially directed inward, toward the self, the experience is so aversive that there is often an inclination to shift that hostility and blame outward” (qtd. in Tangney and Dearing 91). In other words, when internal shame becomes too poisonous and crippling, an individual suffering from it might lose control and need to exteriorize his anguish. This hostility, however, does not transform internal shame into an external one, but only demonstrates the devastating effects of the struggle. According to Stephen Pattison, hostility and violence are not uncommon reactions when shame and anger become interlinked. A person’s sense of failure and self-contempt can lead to outer blame and a sense of rage (118). This is exactly what occurs when Dorian shows Basil the portrait.

Significantly, at the crucial moment, it is the portrait itself that pushes Dorian to commit murder: “suddenly an uncontrollable feeling of hatred for Basil Hallward came over him, as though it had been suggested to him by the image on the canvas, whispered
into his ear by those grinning lips” (Wilde 133). Dorian’s own shame, reflected in the portrait, directly impels him to commit the crime. He then murders the painter, thinking that this will relieve him. This act of anger might succeed in killing the poisonous effects of shame and make it disappear from the portrait. But Basil’s murder is only yet another act of denial, yet another shameful sin. While anger is a typical reaction to a lingering internal shame, it does not make it disappear. It rather worsens it. Dorian does not realize that his shame originates from within him. Because it is exposed outside of him, he can divorce himself from his soul, but both exist within him.

However, after committing the murder, Dorian remains in denial: “It was a thing to be driven out of the mind … to be strangled lest it might strangle one itself” (Wilde 137). But this passage also shows that Dorian is aware that his life could destroy him. Out of fear of letting himself be consumed by his shame, he rejects it, defends himself against it with what he can. These strategies of avoidance are typical of those who experience shame, Pattison suggests. To evade shame, an individual might resort to deception, that is, lying to oneself and others (111). Dorian escapes the truth, but his internal shame still lingers within him, as the “events of the preceding night crept with silent blood-stained feet into his brain” (Wilde 137). Once again, the idea of a stain illustrates the trace of a sin. Dorian might seek to avoid reality at all cost, but it still haunts him.

**Dorian’s Demise**

Dorian begins to realize, as the novel comes to an end, that his physical perfection is but an illusion, a lie. He then becomes ashamed of his own shame, of not being the ideal he fought so hard to achieve and for which he traded his soul. Joseph Adamson and Hilary Clark write, “shame as a chronic affective experience makes the subject feel defective or
flawed, and consequently has a profound impact on self-estimation and self-image. The chronic experience of shame also deeply affects one’s trust in the world” (22-23). It is therefore unsurprising that Dorian becomes extremely solitary and paranoid at the end of the novel: “He was prisoned in thought. Memory, like a horrible malady, was eating his soul away” (Wilde 158). The consumption metaphor depicts how Dorian’s shame is eating at him. Shame is destructive and consumes the body as it lingers. If it is not dealt with, shame starts to affect every aspect of the self, especially with internal shame where one struggles with his own self. This idea is illustrated in the Gothic monster. As the locus of shame in the story, the monster is the “place of corruption” (Halberstam 2). Kelly Hurley describes monsters as “human bodies that have lost their claim to a discrete and integral identity, a fully human existence” (“British Gothic Fiction” 190). Neither dead nor alive, like Dorian, they exist on a threshold. His physical shell is intact, but his soul is lost.

Towards the end, the portrait is consumed by shame and shows Dorian his own degradation. His soul, representing his true self, has become horrifying. As it was established, the self occupies a central place in shame. Andrew Morrison remarks, “failure of the self object to respond to the self’s idealization leads inexorably to the experience of shame” (277). This is especially true in internal shame, where the evaluation of behaviour is entirely internal. Dorian becomes conscious of his own corruption because the portrait, the Gothic monster, stares back at him and reflects who he really is. Nassaar argues: “Having yielded to the evil in himself, he ultimately discovers, to his horror, that he can no longer derive pleasure from it and that the plunge into the demon universe has become an irreversible process” (68). His lassitude is felt towards the end: “His beauty has been to him but a mask, his youth but a mockery” (Wilde 185). His physical perfection taunts him with an ideal he wants to maintain, that allows him to live his life, but that also destroys his soul.
The illusion is finally dissipated at the very end. Dorian recognizes that beauty is not reality: “Ugliness that had once been hateful to him because it made things real, became dear to him now for that very reason” (Wilde 156). He associated perfection with art, as he did with Sybil. The portrait made his shame and his true nature real to him. Then, he claims: “Ugliness was the one reality” (156). His portrait, which is ugly, is thus the truth. Dorian considers confession, feeling he should succumb himself to “suffer public shame and to make public atonement” (186). Dorian thus juggles with the possibility of transforming his internal shame into an external shame, opening his internal struggle to the outside world. This would force him to confront the eyes of the others, and to be judged by the world, not just himself. But Dorian quickly and cowardly dismisses the idea. The internalization of his struggle leads him to believe he can resolve the problem himself. His torment, his internal shame, is enough to lead him to a solution: “[The portrait] had been like conscience to him. Yes, it had been conscience. He would destroy it” (Wilde 187). But to defeat the Gothic monster does not erase the shame. His internal shame is inevitably a part of him, as is the monstrous body of the portrait. Destroying it only results in completing his demise through physical death.

Nassaar argues that, for Dorian, “this is the ultimate evil act, the desire to rid himself of all moral sense” (69). His final stroke at the portrait with the knife reflects his desire to rid himself of his soul and ease his conscience: “It would kill the past, and when that was dead he would be free. It would kill this monstrous soul-life, and without its hideous warnings, he would be at peace” (Wilde 187). He is aware that his soul is the monster, but he is unable to understand that it is within him. As Halberstam writes, the “entanglement of self and other within monstrosity” only shows that “one is always buried in the other” (20). The monster and the self are inseparable in Dorian’s case, and thus his
“murder” equates suicide. When Dorian is discovered dead, the portrait is beautiful and unspoiled once again. The protagonist is horribly old and disfigured and is only recognizable by the rings he wears. The hidden horror within is finally visible on the outside. The conclusion of the novel is not a “shift in moral attitude,” according to Kenneth Womack, but rather motivated by Dorian’s “own vanity, as well as the potential loss of the self that he adores above all others in his community” (178). However, this last attempt at denial and concealment exposes the shameful monster within for all to see. But Dorian, in death, evades the possible external shame this would create.

**Social Shame**

*The Monster in Society*

Wilde writes: “The books that the world calls immoral are books that show the world its own shame” (183). Indeed, *Dorian Gray* reflects the society in which Wilde lived. The Victorian era in Britain is particularly known for its rigid structure and standards. It was a world where one had to be moral, pious, and proper, a world where one “agonised over values” (Gagnier 18) and appearances. Any desire that went against the standards had to be hidden. But these desires still flourished, although they were never publicly acknowledged. Internal shame thus becomes frequent as identities are repressed. Dorian laments the hypocrisy of the society in which he lives:

But it appeared to [him] that the true nature of the senses had never been understood, and that they had remained savage and animal merely because the world had sought to starve them into submission or to kill them by pain. … There had been mad wilful rejections, monstrous forms of self-torture and self-denial, whose origin was fear, and whose result was a degradation infinitely more terrible
In this passage, Dorian explains that the repression imposed by society comes from fear and self-denial. To him, this results in a degradation greater than the one society imagines would be created if everyone lived freely. His degeneration is caused by the inevitable shame he feels at the transgression of morals and standards. Regenia Gagnier, in her chapter “Wilde and the Victorians,” writes that “Wilde saw that the ‘self’ was not inevitably indubitable, rational and progressive, but was socially constructed” (20). Dorian is trapped in the society that made him, but he also makes bad choices. Influenced by Lord Henry who despises English society, Dorian believes that complete freedom from shame and morality is possible.

This disregard for societal standards was notably one of the main criticisms made against Wilde. A reviewer from the Scots Observer wrote that “it is not made sufficiently clear that the writer does not prefer a course of unnatural inequity to a life of cleanliness, health and sanity” (qtd in Womack 169). The word “cleanliness” is significant. Placed in opposition to Dorian’s lifestyle, which is shameless and shameful, it once again refers to shame as dirty, stained. Embracing his own desires, Dorian deliberately ignores what the society imposes as standards and completely loses himself in his internal shame. But this entrapment within himself also causes his horrible degradation, eventually leading to self-destruction. In such a reading, the story becomes a cautionary tale.

The decaying, rotting portrait “held the secret of his life, and told his story” (Wilde 79). But it also tells the story of society. The novel, like Dorian’s portrait, reflects. His story reveals the shallowness and hypocrisy of Victorian British society that, like Dorian, is obsessed with purity and beauty. As mentioned, aestheticism was popular at the time, and,
to Ellen Scheible, Dorian’s story “suggests that British aestheticism will self-destruct by way of its dependence on excess and exploitation for the sake of a form of pure or perfect beauty” (137). The novel, which acts as a cautionary tale, shames society by acting as a mirror. In their desperate attempt to avoid the degradation caused by what they consider sins, the rigid standards of society only create a more horrible monster. It generates the birth of an internal monster that is kept in secret, poisons the soul, and prevents freedom of selfhood. It is concealed, just like Dorian’s portrait, but it still prevails. As Judith Halberstam remarks, the Gothic monster as the double is only “evidence of what is buried within us” (71). Dorian’s internal shame is the monster, and it reflects society’s shame due to its insistence on repression and concealment of truth and reality.

Antonio Sanna notes that the Gothic, as a genre, allows “its writers to suggest or implicate controversial issues by means of its non-realistic forms and subjects of representation” (25). It is therefore unsurprising that Wilde used Gothic elements in his story. In English society, where everything is exposed through rumours and scandals, but where everything is also concealed because of fear and shame, Dorian is a logical product. To quote the protagonist: “And what sort of lives do these people, who pose as being moral, lead themselves? My dear fellow, you forget that we are in the native land of the hypocrite” (Wilde 128). The society lives on pretense, but at their core people are rotten, exactly like Dorian and his portrait. Society is wrapped in illusion, while sins are hidden away and remain unnamed.

*Basil’s Internal Shame*

Basil Hallward also suffers from internal shame, but his is different from Dorian. Indeed, his shame is created and generated by the world around him. While felt internally,
and kept secret, it is externally driven. It is rather plain to readers of the novel that the painter is in love with Dorian, as he claims his obsession and idolization of him. However, homosexuality was demonized in the nineteenth century. Joseph Bristow writes that only by 1895, five years after the publication of Dorian Gray, would “researchers of psychology, medicine and social science mak[e] for the first time cardinal distinctions between homosexuals and heterosexuals” (“Wilde’s Sexual Identities” 198). The conversation was only starting, but in common society it was deemed the “unspeakable,” or the famous “love that dares not speak its name,” a phrase coined by Alfred Douglas, Wilde’s lover (196). Therefore, in the novel, Basil has to hide this part of his identity. He says at the outset, “I have grown to love secrecy” (Wilde 7). Since his homosexual identity can never be revealed to society, he lives in perpetual silence. He buries his love for Dorian in the portrait; that is why he is so reluctant to expose it at first. He has put too much of himself in it, as he tells Lord Henry (Wilde 13). By placing it in the public eye, he would reveal something concealed within him that would create scandal. This exposure would bring shame upon him, and, as Léon Wurmser observes, “shame is a fear of disgrace” (66). Basil, contrary to Lord Henry and Dorian, represses his desires and internalizes the societal discourse to the point where he is ashamed of his own desires. This is an instance of internal shame, but it also illustrates that external and internal shame are often intertwined.

Lord Henry observes that “modern morality consists in accepting the standards of one’s age” (Wilde 68). To be moral, and then to keep shame at bay, one has to resign oneself to the standards of the time. As Pattison remarks, a person “will feel shame when

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3 There has been a great deal of research on the homoerotic subtext of the novel. See, for example, Joseph Bristow’s chapter “‘A complex multiformal creature’—Wilde’s sexual identities” in The Cambridge Companion to Oscar Wilde and Andrew Smith’s Victorian Demons: Medicine, Masculinity, and the Gothic at the fin de siècle (2004).
she violates the ideals and expectations of the society or group she lives in” (85). But these standards also create a fear of transgressing them and being held in contempt. Gerhart Piers says that, in turn, this fear, “on an even deeper level of the unconscious, spells fear of abandonment, the death by emotional starvation” (qtd. in Probyn 3, original emphasis). For an artist such as Basil, who values the importance of his emotions in his work, this becomes complicated. But the issue arises when moral codes become generators of shame, as is the case for Basil in *Dorian Gray*. As Niels Clausson observes, “it is the repression of same sex sexuality, and not the sexual acts themselves, that poisons and mutilates the mind and the soul” (348, original emphasis). But the solution does not reside in embracing one’s desires without any moral consideration, as Lord Henry preaches and as Dorian practises. Their way only reinforces shame by creating a life of sin. The issue exists at the level of society.

Basil wants to escape the hostile environment and claims his desire to leave London, to flee the society that represses his very being. He says, “I will not bare my soul to their shallow, prying eyes. My heart shall never be put under their microscope” (Wilde 13). This passage illustrates that Basil also suffers from an external shame that he wants to escape. His destination is Paris, where he thinks he will be able to make art once again, and thus be free to be himself (Wilde 125). But Dorian murders him the night he is supposed to leave. Basil then becomes the victim of Dorian’s shame and he is never freed from his internal shame. This act illustrates the entrapment caused by the hypocrisy of British society at the end of the nineteenth century. The shame created by it poisons and destroys all lives because it is internalized. In the end, internal shame is poisonous because it is experienced in isolation and secrecy.
Conclusion

It is significant that the novel ends in silence. No one will ever know Dorian and Basil’s true story. Marian Masrobian MacCurday argues that “silence perpetuates trauma and the shame and guilt that often accompany it” (qtd in Sanna 34). To deny conversation thus only accentuates the shame. But Dorian’s example can live in the world, as a man that had an ideal image of himself that he could never live up to. This combination results in a psychological torment that becomes the monstrous form of the portrait, exhibiting the crippling sense of shame that Dorian experiences. His demise illustrates the failure of his own ideal.

This chapter explored manifestations of internal shame in Oscar Wilde’s *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. Defining internal shame, it showed how shame is born in the life of the protagonist through his meeting with Lord Henry. Paradoxically, as Dorian adopts a new shameless immorality, shame starts to pervade his life. The transfer of his soul to the portrait precipitates the creation of the Gothic monster as a decayed double who bears the stain of Dorian’s shame. Indeed, the portrait is a visual illustration of the corruptive effects of shame. Dorian attempts to protect himself against the burden of shame with narcissism, denial, and anger. However, these attempts fail as the internalization of his shame eventually destroys him. The novel also contemplates the place of shame in society, especially how social constructs affect individuals. Late Victorian society, with its tendency to repress anxieties, desires and fears, becomes an ideal site for the creation of internal shame. *The Picture of Dorian Gray* shows how the internalization of shame is extremely poisonous for the self. Dorian causes his own demise as he refuses to face the consequences of his shameful behaviour, as well as to confront the shame he experiences.
In *Dorian Gray*, the monstrous form of the portrait reveals an internal shame that destroys Dorian’s soul. But, as seen in the character of Basil, the external shame produced by society is often entwined in internal struggles. The next chapter will show that the Gothic monster can take an external form and impose another kind of punishment.
Chapter 2: Born of Neither God nor Man: *The Beetle* and External Shame

Introduction

While there have been numerous studies of *Dorian Gray*, little is known about Richard Marsh’s *The Beetle*. Published in September 1897, *The Beetle* came out on the shelves just a few months after another canonical novel of the Gothic genre, Bram Stoker’s *Dracula*. Marsh’s strange novel about a vengeful, foreign creature actually outsold Stoker’s now-classic vampire tale. Its popularity is unsurprising, though, when one realizes that *The Beetle* really was a novel of its time. It touches upon a number of topical issues at the *fin de siècle*: questions of gender norms, such as the standards of masculinity and the figure of the New Woman; the anxiety generated by the expansion of the Empire and the presence of the colonies in British life; and the development of science and medicine, combined with a nationwide fascination for such oddities as hypnotism and mesmerism. *The Beetle* tackles these concerns with, at times, disarming frankness and, at other times, intriguing ambiguity.

As seen previously, most Victorians were secretive and unwilling to confront the changes that were operating in society. The Gothic genre offered an ideal method to tackle these anxieties. As Jerrold E. Hogle writes in *The Cambridge Companion to Gothic Fiction*, the monsters of Gothic fiction help “both deal with newly ascendant cultural and psychological contradictions and still provide us with a recurring method for shaping and obscuring our fears and forbidden desires” (6). The Gothic monster became the ideal locus for burying anxieties in a grotesque, foreign body. In *Dorian Gray*, the monster was horrifying because it was so intricately anchored in the protagonist, and thus terrifyingly human. This is not the case in *The Beetle*. In Marsh’s novel, the monster is a real one. It is non-human, grotesque, and loathsome; indeed, the last words of the novel describe it as
“born of neither God nor man” (Marsh 322). The Beetle is the unspeakable, the perfect abomination. It is a true outsider that comes in what Rhys Garnett calls a “terrorist campaign”: “he⁴ seeks revenge through the destabilisation of the centre of British power, by means of the appropriation and destruction of symbols of the moral, spiritual and racial ‘superiority’” (30). The Beetle’s victims are symbols of their time, and they must suffer the consequences of its vengeance. Judith Halberstam, in Skin Shows, writes that “the [Gothic] monster … will find you in the intimacy of your own home; indeed, it will make your home its home … and alter forever the comfort of domestic privacy” (15). This is certainly the case of the Beetle. It is not an isolated, inward struggle the characters face, but rather a battle with an entirely extraneous enemy that seeks to destroy their social identities, to reveal the true faces behind appearances and to disrupt the established order of power. While the self remains an important aspect of the tale, it is the external features that nurture the conflicts of the novel.

Therefore, while the previous chapter was focused on internal shame, this chapter will consider Marsh’s novel in relation to external shame. The concept will be defined in order to contrast it with internal shame, and I will demonstrate how external shame can become a form of punishment. The Beetle, the Gothic monster of the tale, uses shame as a tool of vengeance on the English characters of the novel. The fear and shame of both exposure and failure drive the characters’ actions and amplify their increasingly fragile emotional state.

⁴ The research on The Beetle is not consistent in using “he” or “she” to designate the creature, since its gender is never clear in the tale. To avoid any confusion, I will use the pronoun “it”.
**External Shame**

It was established in previous chapters that, most often, shame erupts from exposure. Sometimes, even the *fear* of being seen can generate shame, as the standards of society are generally embedded in one’s value system. The anticipation itself can result in shame. Whether or not an exposure takes place, the eye of the audience, whatever or whoever this audience is, still confronts one with oneself. External shame, in particular, is concerned with the outward gaze and its impact on the self. Paul Gilbert defines external shame as a “focus on the outside world,” that is, how one is seen in the eyes of others (17). Kenneth Goss and Steven Allan argue that “in external shame, attention is focused outwards, processing information about what is going on *in the minds of others* about the self” (304, my emphases). Although the internal effects remain important, as external shame can never be completely removed from internal shame, what differentiates external shame is its focus on how one socially exists. The social component is especially crucial.

According to W.I. Miller, the earliest occurrences of shame in cultures were concerned with the loss of honour: “one was shamed by one’s own failures to maintain standing in the honor group” (134). This community is composed of individuals who share values and beliefs. Certain standards have to be adhered to in order to assure the affiliation to the group; when one fails, one is rejected through shaming. The group is essential in generating shame, states Miller, as it decides what is considered shameful according to its standards and values (134). These ideas can be extended to the level of society.

In a community, then, one generally desires to be seen in a positive light. Matters of appearance and reputation generate anxieties about living up to certain accepted standards. Miller writes: “Shame is the emotion of a universe that privileges ideas of honor, reputation, and respect, a world in which the public self dwarfs the private self” (134).
Indeed, the image of the self is affected by the eager need to please the community in order to belong to it. One does not want to be the outsider or become the outcast. The self therefore becomes vulnerable to external attacks. Goss and Allan note that in external shame, “the person believes that others see the self as flawed, inadequate, worthless and unattractive” (304). Shame creates not only a fear of rejection but also a fear of contempt, scorn or ridicule. While internally felt, it is the external image of the self that is concerned here. When one can “anticipate how others might judge a behaviour or personal attribute,” or, in other words, when one is socially aware, the slightest deviation from what is considered normal can become a source of shame (Gilbert 21). One has a social ideal or a reputation to attain and maintain, and this ideal becomes a source of anxiety, prompting one to repeatedly compare oneself to others.

In external shame, it is the outside world that feeds the anxieties. For instance, the signals sent by others, from the simplest glare to a mocking laugh, can produce shame. In discussing shame, Gabriele Taylor also refers to the notion of honour, but expands it to include reputation: “Public esteem for the individual, or the lack of it, depends on that individual’s success or failure judged on the basis of some code which embodies that society’s values. Whoever fails to meet the categoric demands engendered by that code ruins his reputation and loses the esteem of the other members of that group. He loses his honour” (54, my emphases). Thus, external shame does not involve the image one has of oneself in that it is not so much about self-worth and self-esteem, although they are inevitably affected. The emphasis is rather placed on the external, the social image of an individual in a judgmental and regulated community.
A final aspect to mention is self-awareness, which, as Taylor notes, is required to feel shame. Taylor remarks that shame is the “emotion of self-protection” (81) and is closely connected to the individual’s values. In internal shame, it is particularly strong. But this idea can be expanded to the public self and linked to external shame. The prospect and the fear of being shamed instills in an individual a need to remain “normal” and to discourage any behaviour that would be considered “deviant.” By praising and embodying normalized values and personas, one is protected. Shame can thus become protective, but it can be harmful if it impairs the free expression of the self. For instance, if it is the communal belief that homosexuality is a sin, an individual feeling homosexual desires will repress this aspect of himself because, otherwise, he risks being shamed. This kind of protection is harmful and is both socially constructed and reinforced.

It can thus be argued that external shame arises out of an external judgment that threatens one’s reputation in the social world. External shame impairs this reputation and, at the same time, injures the public self. It manifests itself by a need to adhere to communal standards and values that regulate an individual’s behaviour. In order to remain a part of society, one has to live up to its expectations. If one does not, one is rejected and shamed for this failure.

In Marsh’s *The Beetle*, external shame mostly functions as a form of external punishment, inflicted on the characters to harm their public persona. Tortured and haunted by a creature, they risk becoming objects of contempt by failing to attain the ideals and conventions they should personify. Although internal shame is present in their struggles, it is mainly external shame that generates the events of the novel. The main characters are all figures of authority in the context of the fin de siècle and, thus, their social image is crucial.
to them. For instance, Paul Lessingham is the stoic, straight politician and Marjorie Lindon is the independent New Woman. They are stereotypical characters when they are encountered at the beginning of the novel, but the arrival of the Beetle in London and its invasion of their lives will precipitate a questioning of the appearances they seek to maintain. It is clear that shame is already a powerful influence in their world, but its effects will be reinforced by the Beetle’s schemes as it acts as an external generator of shame.

However, before examining how the Beetle exerts its vengeance on Lessingham and Marjorie, it is essential to consider the Beetle itself. The creature, which incarnates the Gothic monster in the story, is itself a subject filled with shame. Shameful in many aspects, the Beetle represents the ultimate abomination of the fin de siècle. Julian Wolfreys remarks in his introduction to the novel that the “visible signs render it virtually impossible to apprehend it/him/her as being anything but the most abject and monstrous overdetermined figure of alterity” (17). Indeed, many aspects of the Beetle contribute to its sobriquet, the “Nameless Thing” (Marsh 154). Through the rendition of several of its characteristics, it is clear that the creature is non-human.

The “Abhuman” Body

To begin, the creature possesses the ability to transmute, which allows it to change into various animals or insects, notably a beetle and a cat. Even in its humanoid form, it possesses animalistic features. For instance, it has “a small cranium like an animal,” a large nose resembling “the beak of some bird of prey” and a gaze that is “unfaltering, having the bird-like trick of never blinking” (Marsh 53-54). Moreover, its manner is described as “vulpine” (65) and it is deemed an “awful-looking creature” like a “hideous baboon” (274).

5 In order to retain consistency with the novel and the existing research on The Beetle, Paul Lessingham and Marjorie Lindon will be referred to by his last name and her first name, respectively.
In his article “Liminanimal,” Mario Ortiz-Robles argues that towards the end of the nineteenth century, “the monster comes to occupy that indeterminate zone or border created between the human and the animal” (11). Significantly, Victorians were concerned with the newly posited theories of evolution that proposed that they were descendants of animals.⁶ What is crucial is that this manifestation occurs in an “indeterminate zone” that even science, with all of its recent progress, cannot explain. For instance, at the end of the novel, when the Beetle is believed to have died in a train crash, it leaves behind animal blood and a “deposit of some sort of viscid matter, probably the excretion of some variety of lizard” (Marsh 319). However, the experts on the scene are unable to precisely define what it is. Even more significantly, Sydney Atherton, a well-known scientist and a man with the reputation of a genius, cannot understand or define the creature he encounters (154). The Beetle, with its transmutations and unusual animal-like features, escapes definition.

In many ways, the Beetle incarnates Kelly Hurley’s concept of the “abhuman.” According to Hurley, in Gothic fiction the abhuman is “some unimaginable ‘thing’ incorporating, mimicking, or taking on a human form, thereby constituting another kind of threat to the integrity of human identity” (“British Gothic Fiction” 190). By taking on a humanoid form in the presence of others, the Beetle bridges the gap between monstrous and human, blurring lines that should be clearly distinguished. As Ortiz-Robles notes, “monsters are monstrous only to the extent that they violate the protocols and conventions that sustain the mimetic logic of the literary ecology they inhabit” (11). However, the Beetle does not transgress conventions only by its animalistic features. It also crosses borders that make it an object of shame. Indeed, due to its unknown gender and its

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⁶ A more thorough discussion of the theories of evolution, notably made popular by Charles Darwin, and how they affected the physicality of Gothic monsters in late Victorian literature, will be made in the third chapter of this thesis.
exoticism, the Beetle’s body is a site of projection for fin de siècle anxieties and is thus transformed into the perfect scapegoat for shaming.

The Beetle’s Gender

First, there is the puzzling ambiguity of the Beetle’s gender identity. Throughout the novel, the characters are unsure whether the creature is male or female. It is only deemed masculine because, as Holt says, “it was impossible such a creature could be feminine” (Marsh 53). He furthermore remarks that if it was feminine, it would be “some ghoulish example of her sex, who had so yielded to her depraved instincts as to have become nothing but a ghastly reminiscence of womanhood” (61). This quote inevitably reminds one of Dorian Gray—the decay of the body produced by the corruption of the sin. The shame of having yielded to temptations is described here as a poison that deprives the feminine body of its attractive attributes. Although this observation might arise from Victorian feminine standards, that is, the need for a woman to be feminine, the question of the Beetle’s biology remains a mystery. The truth seems to erupt when Sydney Atherton sees the naked body of the Beetle: “My visitor was not a man, but a woman, and, judging from the brief glimpse which I had of her body, by no means old or ill-shaped either” (Marsh 152). Therefore, the Beetle is biologically female.

However, the ambiguity is maintained for the rest of the tale. The Beetle, with his male voice and female biology, spreads confusion as to its identity. Generally, people seem to agree that it is a male, calling him a “chap” or a “fellow”; it is a creature with the voice and the face of a man, but the body of a woman (Marsh 181). Moreover, Lessingham first encountered the Beetle in a feminine body, as a prostitute that lured him into its den many years ago. Its feminine attributes are thus undeniable, but the characters have difficulty
accepting them because they are incompatible with its assumed masculine identity. The uncertainty remains as the Beetle lingers in an in-betweenness, wobbling not only between human and animal, but also between male and female.

The Beetle’s hermaphrodite body is an abomination in late Victorian society. The *fin de siècle* was a period of great instability with regard to standard gender roles and identities. Traditionally, masculinity was defined by the figure of the gentleman, who needed to show absolute self-restraint and unfaltering moral character.7 Women, in contrast, were relegated to the domestic sphere, seen as passive yet emotional beings. However, these ideas were challenged by the failure of men to live up to the ideals of masculinity and the independence that women started to demand. The New Woman, which will be discussed in a later part of the chapter, was especially seen as dangerous. Julian Wolfrey’s notes that she transgressed “both the boundaries of her own supposedly ‘proper’ gendered identity and that of a certain self-defining Victorian masculinity” (29).

Conventions were also questioned because of the appearance of debates surrounding sexuality. Richard A. Kaye calls the late nineteenth century a “sexual anarchy” (53), where there was a real “disturbance in the smooth-running certainties of the Victorian epoch” (54). The many controversies and scandals that concerned sexual identity resulted in “ideologies that sought to reassert social control over more public expressions of sexual mischief, ideologies that found sustenance in the complex, dark images, archetypes and narratives of sexuality pervasive at the fin de siècle” (Kaye 56). The Beetle can be seen as one of those “dark images” that were outed as the deviant. The creature becomes a

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7 These ideas, which are crucial in the context of the *fin de siècle*, will be further discussed in the third chapter of the thesis.
representation of the “abnormal” that was dreaded by the Victorians who sought to maintain previous standards of gender and sexuality.

The Beetle, according to Wolfreys, “gives face to everything that is unstable in late imperial culture.” Its body “is grotesque because it is unstable, excessive, ambiguously traced by so many fragments of identity” (19). While being so monstrous, the Beetle thus becomes the incarnation of the anxieties Victorians faced with their own identities. The Gothic monster allows them to transpose their concerns onto an abhuman body. As Judith Halberstam remarks, “monsters have to be everything the human is not” (22). The Beetle’s gender identity is uncertain, mixed and ambivalent; it is the worst nightmare of a man or woman who seeks to adhere to strict gender roles to maintain the status quo. Thus, the monster is shameful because it fails to live up to the communal expectations of gender. Its sexual practices, it will be shown, also speak to its transgressive nature.

The Racial Other
Second, the Beetle is monstrous because it is foreign. Coming from Egypt, which was an English colony at the time, the creature is exotic. In its most humanoid form, it is described as “Oriental to the finger tips,”8 thus coming from outside Great Britain (Marsh 141). It is also described as wearing a “queer colored garment” (57) and a “costume” that is “reminiscent of the ‘Algerians’ whom one finds all over France, and who are the most persistent, insolent and amusing of pedlars” (103). In this passage, Atherton speaks to the cultural contempt of the stranger, and his words, according to Wolfreys, are not only

8 The term refers to the notion of Orientalism. “Oriental” was used to describe aspects of foreign cultures coming from the “Middle East,” of which the English population was unfamiliar. In 1978, Edward Said published Orientalism, in which he explains that Great Britain developed a whole discourse around these cultures as archaic and undeveloped to elevate English society as its opposite. For an in-length discussion of Orientalism and The Beetle, see Harris and Vernooy’s “Orgies of Nameless Horrors: Gender, Orientalism, and the Queering of Violence in Richard Marsh’s The Beetle” and Kelly Hurley’s “The Inner Chambers of All Nameless Sin: The Beetle, Gothic Female Sexuality and Oriental Barbarism.”
derogatory but also racist (103n). The Beetle, even in its humanoid form, is rejected and shamed as an outsider. Its race is never clearly identified, as it is simply named “the Oriental” or the “Arab bloke” (Marsh 263). W.C. Harris and Dawn Vernooy remark in their article about *The Beetle* that the descriptions of it are very “general.” Just as its gender is fluid, it is “impossible to determine with accuracy” the race of the Beetle (376). This speaks to the idea that everything “exotic” was defined as opposite to the “civilised” and needed no further precision. Significantly, Sydney mocks the Beetle’s manners, telling him, “This is London, not a dog-hole in the desert” (106). The reference to “dog-hole” illustrates the belief that what is “Oriental” is barbaric and disgraceful in comparison to London, which is elegant and respectable. It is also animalistic, that is, less evolved than human beings. Because of its foreign origins that do not correspond to the standards of English society, the Beetle is automatically a stranger, an outcast, no matter his specific origins, which contributes to its depiction as an invader of the homeland.

Moreover, its demeanour is that of the “most fanatical of Orientals” (Marsh 107), and it is described in ways that relate its actions to religious madness. When Lessingham describes his first encounter with the Beetle in Egypt, twenty years before the events of the novel, he is wandering alone in the “unsavoury quarters,” in a narrow street, “a dirty one, ill-lit” (239). He is hypnotized by the Beetle, which possesses a mesmeric quality. Lessingham witnesses “orgies of nameless horrors” (243) in the cave the creature inhabits, a “den” that constitutes a temple to the goddess Isis. The Beetle is, in short, uncivilized. By making the monster a creature of the “Eastern world,” it “populates these strange worlds

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9 Another much-discussed aspect of *The Beetle* is its discussion of mesmerism and hypnotism, which were in vogue in late Victorian society. This chapter will not consider it in length; see Roger Lockhurst’s “Trance Gothic” in *Victorian Gothic: Literary and Cultural Manifestations in the Nineteenth Century*.
external to Europe with its own desires and demons projected outward” (Harris and Vernooy 374). Whatever defines these foreign countries is nothing like the civilized society of Britain. It is the “foreign, the filthy, the backward, the irrational and the bestial” (375), while Britain is refined, educated and evolved. This idea is clearly a form of external shame: the judgment of the external gaze—British society—unto the Other—the colonies—shames them into the margins. The outsider is kept at bay through a shaming ritual. As W.I. Miller states, these rituals “only hold the opportunity for reintegration at a new status lower than previously held, if they will allow reintegration at all” (164). English society’s shaming of the “Oriental” other is thus a way to assert and assure their continuous power and domination over the colonized subject.

But interestingly, while the Beetle is externally shamed for its identity and body, it escapes the effects of shame. The monster is an outsider that is, on the one hand, not familiar with English values and conventions, and, on the other hand, does not possess ideals that correspond to the latter. John Braithwaite claims that shame is driven by a fear that “will evoke some respect or status loss among acquaintances or in the community as a whole” (qtd. in Probyn 88). The Beetle does not possess status in society, and neither does it want one. This disregard enables it to evade shame and be, essentially, shameless. Gail Weiss defines shamelessness as a “refusal to internalize shame, and therefore a rejection of its pathologizing terms” (544). By keeping the shame external and denying its effects, the Beetle is effectively immune to it.

**Shame, Humiliation and Punishment**

So far, it has been established that the Beetle is a shameful yet shameless monster that incarnates various deviances dreaded by the fin de siècle Victorians. It is an outsider
that has no place in English society. But the Beetle is not in London seeking status or belonging; it is rather in search of vengeance. As stated above, in *The Beetle*, shame erupts mostly as a form of punishment. However, it could be argued that what the characters suffer at the hands of the Beetle are forms of humiliation. Yet there are contrasts to consider.

Indeed, it is necessary to establish the difference between shame and humiliation. Both are forms of punishment that have an effect on self-esteem and social image, as they place the individual in a position where he is exposed and judged. In *Shame, Affect, Writing*, Joseph Adamson and Hilary Clark argue that they are “the quintessential reaction to the sense of helplessness in the face of the experience of self-object failure” (21). They create a fear of ridicule, of rejection and the loss of identity. However, it can be argued that the effects are different in the way the individual is affected. As already noted, when a person is shamed, he loses his honour. To have honour means to be respected for upholding the conventions of a community. Thus, when a person betrays his social commitment, he is shamed and loses his status. In the case of a humiliation, however, the person is not necessarily rejected so much as singled out. W.I. Miller, in his book *Humiliation*, develops the distinction. Humiliation, according to him, is not a change in status but rather a “deflation of pretension” (137). Social pretension is defined by your community and “determines the social position to which you justifiably belong” (142). This notion is thus strongly related to ideas of class, hierarchy and authority. While external shame transforms an individual into an object of rejection and contempt, humiliation seeks to re-establish a social order. Miller argues it is “the emotional experience of being caught inappropriately crossing group boundaries into territory one has no business being in” (145). Therefore, one is humiliated when one is found trying to be who or what one is not. In external shame, an
individual transgresses communal standards and conventions and thus fails to respect his commitment as a member of society.

Moreover, humiliation is an immediate punishment. It places itself in the body, in which the “center of feeling is the gut” (Miller 160). Only when it persists and pervades the entire body does it become shame. As with shame, it is the community or the society that generates the punishment, but Miller distinguishes the “shamer” from the humiliator. The latter is an enemy, while the shamer is an authority (158). Considering this argument, it would be logical to categorize the Beetle, the foreign invader, as the enemy, and thus the humiliator. But I would argue that while the Beetle is a humiliator, his actions prompt his victims to become their own authority and thus create instances of shame. As Gabriele Taylor notes, “[t]he final self-directed adverse judgment in shame is always the same: that he is a lesser person that he should be” (77). The feeling of shame is thus internal, but its creation and reinforcement come from the exterior. Finally, Miller notes that humiliation is often used to describe “intensely felt moments of shame” (149), inferring that the process of shaming is in itself a humiliation.

The Beetle invades London looking for retribution: “On [Lessingham’s] hands is the blood of my kin. It cries aloud for vengeance” (Marsh 147). In its quest, the creature invades the characters’ homes and thus transforms them from the known and comfortable into locations of anxiety and fear. Furthermore, the Beetle acts through shaming rituals. These aim to degrade the social status of the characters so that they lose not only their reputation but their identity in their community. When Sydney talks with the Beetle about

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10 This idea, however, still speaks to the fact that internal and external shame often overlap. The third chapter of the thesis will discuss this notion more thoroughly.

11 In this passage, the Beetle refers to Lessingham’s previous imprisonment in its den, many years ago. These events will be considered in a later part of the chapter, but here, the Beetle alludes to the fact that Lessingham, in his escape from the den, strangled the creature and “trampled” over his people (Marsh 245).
denouncing Lessingham for his past actions, the Beetle rejoices at the idea of shame, asking: “He would be shamed? … Before all men?” When Sydney agrees, the Beetle’s “hideous face was lighted up by a sort of diabolic exultation” (Marsh 147). Shame is thus deemed as an adequate form of punishment by the creature. Its venture to and even its mere presence in London will succeed in instilling shame in the characters, mainly Robert Holt, Marjorie Lindon, and Paul Lessingham. The second part of this chapter will examine how these ideas are illustrated and manifested in *The Beetle*.

**Sexual Performances**

The Beetle is a most nightmarish kind of monster. Not only is it grotesque and wicked, but it is also called the “ancient sinner” (Marsh 69), described by Paul Lessingham as possessing “inhuman longings” (244). As mentioned earlier, the Beetle yields to temptations, and its sins are especially shameful because they are embraced quite shamelessly. However, they are shameful in the eyes of the community that judges the creature. While the Beetle is not affected by this shame, it does bring shame upon others. That is done most evidently through the creature’s performance of sexuality. As Jarlath Killeen remarks in *History of the Gothic*, the Beetle is “both human and animal, animal and insect, male and female, and perhaps, most shockingly of all, heterosexual and homosexual” (102). This makes it a threat to “the integrity of the rational English body” (102). Its sexual orientation is an aspect to consider, but another is how all erotic or sexual contacts that occur with the characters in the novel are non-consensual and aggressive.

One of the supernatural abilities of the Beetle is hypnotic power. With only a glance and a few words, the Beetle renders people passive and obedient. While their conscience
remains, they are physically helpless.\footnote{It is, however, interesting that Sydney Atherton is the only character that seems to resist the Beetle’s mesmeric powers, to a certain point. It can be argued that his role as the scientist opposes him to the supernatural abilities of the creature. This is especially significant as the Beetle seems to be afraid of electricity and fascinated by Atherton’s skills. Their own kind of ‘magic’ nullifies the other’s. Atherton’s laboratory is called a “wizard’s cave” (154), and Marjorie describes it as “uncanny” (164). Also, Sydney is hinted to have a sort of mesmeric power over others (194, 210). Another explanation comes from the fact that the Beetle has nothing against Atherton and thus decides not to hypnotize him. After all, it wants to make Atherton its ally on their first meeting: “Those who hate are kin” (143). It is a question that could be worth exploring in another instance.} For instance, when the creature first meets Holt, in the complete dark, the man cannot distinguish what faces him and he finds himself unable to move. Then, the Beetle “ascends” his body as his legs are “glued and unglued” on his clothes and skin. At one point, Holt says, “It had gained my loins. … The helplessness with which I suffered its invasion was not the least part of my agony,—it was the helplessness which we know in dreadful dreams” (Marsh 51). The words used by Holt are crucial. While not explicit, his repeated “helplessness” in the face of the creature’s “invasion” evokes sexual assault. The Beetle later asks Holt to undress: “Fingers prodded me then and there” (57). Once again, this assault of the body occurs without consent as Holt is rendered passive by the Beetle’s mesmeric powers.

Then, the creature “enveloped [his] face” and “embraced [him] with its myriad legs” (Marsh 52). This strange kind of kiss is experienced once again, as “the blubber lips were pressed to [his]” (57). There are other characters in the novel who experience similar assaults. When Lessingham describes his time in the creature’s den in Egypt, he insists on the “nauseous” kisses he endured, and that he could offer no resistance to its “caresses” (243). While sexual contact is never explicitly mentioned, it seems clear that during his time there, Lessingham suffered numerous invasions. He was arguably raped under the mesmeric control of the Beetle: “She did with me as she should, and in dumb agony I endured” (Marsh 243). The Beetle also assaults Marjorie when it comes to her house. When she describes her fear in her room at night because of an unknown presence, she tears off
her gown and goes to bed. Lying there naked, she says, “I heard it crawl along the sheets, till it found a way between them, and then it crawled towards me. And I felt it—against my face” (Marsh 167). Marjorie, at this instant, describes herself as “dominated” by something “hideous” and “powerful” (207). When she is later taken by the creature, it seems plausible that she endures sexual assaults as well. The aggressions always involve the hypnotism of the characters. They are robbed of their free will and rendered helpless against the assault of their body. Victoria Margree argues, “To be subject to the will of another … is to suffer a humiliating loss of the right to self-determination and self-governance” (68-9). Moreover, it can be argued that this humiliation instills a sense of shame, as the Beetle’s hypnotism displaces Holt by taking control of his body. As for Lessingham and Marjorie, it forces them to commit acts that do not correspond to their personal values. Their helplessness provokes a sense of shame of having committed sinful acts. Although they were unable to struggle, the acts are still inscribed onto their body.

The Beetle’s assaults are additionally shameful in that they exist in an area of undefined sexuality. In her chapter “The Beetle, Gothic Female Sexuality, and Oriental Barbarism,” Kelly Hurley discusses the lack of clarity of sexual contacts in the novel. She argues that Marsh uses “textual euphemism, elision, or indirection in representing and naming sensational, ‘perverse’ sexualities” (193). Because these acts are shameful, they must be kept, to some extent, concealed. The fact that they are never clearly or fully described adds to their horror and shameful quality because it renders the assaults unspeakable. The Beetle’s hermaphrodite body, the “locus of all perversions” (Hurley 194), makes its sexual performance inevitably bisexual in nature, as they occur with both men and women. Moreover, the Beetle’s foreign identity reinforces the idea of immoral sexuality, as its body, according to Harris and Vernooy, is a “site of deviant female-male
sexual practices, bestiality, and homosexuality” (353). They argue that “Oriental sexuality, from such a viewpoint, is inherently violating” (354). By hinting at homosexual encounters with the creature, the novel renders them as something foreign, insulating them from the “normal” sexual practices of Britain, which vilified homosexuality as sinful and immoral. Furthermore, sexuality only exists through the creature in the novel, and thus, Hurley argues, “rewritten as a hideous, gothic perversion, which then becomes the one thing that one cannot name, that one cannot speak of” (“The Inner Chambers” 209). Located in a hermaphrodite, exotic body, sexuality in itself becomes a sin.

Loss of Identity: Robert Holt

Robert Holt is not one of the main protagonists in the novel, but his devolution is one of the most striking, especially for how it is marked by shame. His encounter with the Beetle generates the loss of his manhood and identity. Holt writes, “I was no longer a man, my manhood was merged in his” (Marsh 54). In “Victorian Gothic and Gender,” Carol Margaret Davidson writes that in late Victorian culture, “white Britain finds itself repeatedly threatened with emasculation and degeneration by the dreaded, queer, hyper-sexualised, ‘dark’ or Orientalising agents of the Empire” (138). Indeed, Holt suffers from multiple shame experiences in the novel, but he is especially affected by a loss of identity through his emasculation.

At the beginning of the novel, Holt suffers from poverty and is afflicted with shame. In their article “Poverty in Global Perspective: Is Shame a Common Denominator?” Robert Walker et alia discuss how being poor is experienced as a personal failure and thus a significant source of shame (217). Holt describes how he tries everything to have a roof over his head. He acts against his personal principles, for instance, by indulging in
vandalism. He writes that he is “sick at heart depressed in mind and in body, exhausted by hunger and fatigue, to have been compelled to pocket any little pride [he] might have left” (Marsh 41). Although Holt feels his shame internally, it is created by external circumstances. As stated by Walker et al., shame typically erupts in poverty as one is “forced explicitly to sacrifice their sense of inner-worth in order to attain material goods” (222). He is also talked to with “scorn” (42), which adds to his sorrow. Holt then encounters the Beetle, after taking shelter from the rain inside a house he thought empty. The Beetle worsens Holt’s shame, deciding to punish him by forcing him to break into Lessingham’s house. He then further shames him for doing so, calling him a thief: “You will be cold, your feet will be cut and bleeding,—but what better does a thief deserve?” (Marsh 65). Holt is undressed and forced to commit burglary; it is not only humiliating for him, but shameful as it affects his sense of self-worth in society and reinforces his loss of status.

Significantly, Holt names the room in which the Beetle stays as the “chamber of my humiliation and my shame” (Marsh 84). For Holt, the Beetle is an enemy but also a shamer, as it says to him, “Like a thief you went into his house,—did I not tell you that you would? Like a thief he found you,—were you not ashamed?” (85). It leaves Holt broken in both mind and body. Michael L. Morgan writes that “we are ashamed about ourselves but before others” (49). This is especially true of external shame. The Beetle, by insisting on Holt’s failures, exposes him and his defeats. This unrelenting shaming inevitably makes Holt ashamed of himself. Indeed, Morgan observes that “shame begins with others and then is internalized or passes into the self” (47). This instance is thus an example of external shame that is later internalized.
In addition, Walker et al. observe that “men may find that poverty reduces their ability to meet socially constructed norms of masculinity” (217). Because of their situation, men in poverty find themselves unable to embody the figure of the provider, which is typically a masculine role. The lack of resources prevents them from maintaining strength and virility as they feel weak and inadequate. In Victorian culture, norms of masculinity were extremely important to perform and difficult to maintain. As Elspeth Probyn writes, “[s]hame brings the fear of abandonment by society, of being left to starve outside the boundaries of humankind” (3). This reminds one of Holt, who has fallen to the margins of society because of external shame. He has lost his status and continues to be further stripped of his identity by the Beetle. By the end of the novel, he is found and thought dead, his body “as if sucked out,” starved, naked, with “skeleton features” (Marsh 305). He is no longer a man; he is barely alive. Victoria Margree writes that “Holt’s narration repeatedly stresses that his humiliation in status is almost as serious an injury as his hunger and exhaustion” (65). The word “injury” is significant, as shame is often described as a wound, especially to one’s social status and reputation. This is especially the case in *The Beetle*, notably in terms of masculinity and gender roles.

**The New Woman: Marjorie Lindon**

Norms of masculinity were threatened in a number of ways in late-Victorian culture. Not only was there a fear of “deviant” sexual practices such as homosexuality, but there was also the emergence of a symbol of independence from patriarchy: the New Woman. The term, first coined in 1894, designated women who wanted independence from the domestic sphere. Before then, women were relegated to the infamous “angel in the house” role: doing housework, raising children and being a passive companion to their husbands.
According to Carol Senf, it is most often through a professional career that the New Woman chose “financial independence and personal fulfillment as alternatives to marriage and motherhood” (35). As Atherton states in the novel, “This is the age of feminine advancement” (Marsh 129). It was a very topical and controversial subject because the New Woman was quite radical. She was often demonized for her desires and confidence. Kelly Hurley notes that while the “angel” possessed a “childlike innocence,” a “loving tenderness and selflessness” and “a moral purity,” the New Woman was seen as a kind of monster because of her masculine behaviour and rebellious attitudes to established standards (“British Gothic Fiction” 199). Shame thus becomes a relevant factor to consider.

The relation between shame and the New Woman is illustrated in The Beetle through the character of Marjorie Lindon. With her assertiveness and her tendency for rebellion, Marjorie incarnates the modern Gothic heroine defined by Hurley: “independent, proud, self-willed, and contemptuous of social mores” (“British Gothic Fiction” 202). She seems to possess all the qualities of a New Woman. Most notably, she constantly defies her father. Despite his attempts to control his daughter, a control he feels he should have, Marjorie continually escapes him: “papa would have been shocked; but I am always shocking papa” (Marsh 195). Marjorie confronts the most direct authoritative figure in her life, her father, who is the symbol of patriarchy. The latter is scandalized at his daughter’s behaviour, too: “It is monstrous that a parent—a father!—should be subjected to such treatment by his child” (159). The use of the word “monstrous” illustrates the notion that the New Woman was an object of shame. Marjorie is shamed by her father: “tell me what you think of a girl who behaves like that?” (169). But Marjorie refuses to, as “her looks brightened under the sunshine of her father’s displeasure” (Marsh 169). It can be argued, however, that shame is still a determining factor in her life.
Marjorie fights against traditions and shows a desire for emancipation, but her narration is filled with shame. Indeed, shame appears most often in Marjorie’s account of the events. This involves the prejudice that women are more emotional than men. Adamson and Clark note that shame has traditionally been a “feminine characteristic”: “this engagement with others, which is the basis of the deeply social nature of human beings, is primarily of an emotional or affective nature” (5). In this context, that Marjorie is most afflicted with instances of shame is thus arguably due to her being a woman. The word “ashamed” appears consistently, proving itself to be a force in Marjorie’s life. She constantly evaluates her own behaviour: “How long I have made inward confession of my love for him, I should be ashamed to say” (Marsh 187). What seems to link all of these occurrences is Marjorie’s shame at feeling and displaying emotion. Indeed, it becomes most apparent in her first encounter with the Beetle: “I told myself that the whole thing was sheer absurdity, and that I should be thoroughly ashamed of my own conduct” (204). Marjorie is portrayed as extremely proud and judgmental of her own behaviour. It can be argued that it is because she wants to maintain the standards she has for herself, that is to represent the independent, strong, fierce New Woman. But her own SRGs\(^\text{13}\) are perhaps too severe, and thus she finds herself constantly ashamed. She evaluates herself, but she also fears to be judged by others. When she feels terror at her encounter with the Beetle, she thinks about going to her chambermaid: “I should have liked to throw my arms about her neck, and beg her not to leave me; but, the plain truth is, I was ashamed. … I could not bear the notion of playing the craven in my maid’s eyes” (Marsh 203). To show her emotions in front of another person is a kind of exposure Marjorie does not want to experience.

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\(^\text{13}\) Standards, rules and goals, to recuperate Lewis’ notions that were explained in the thesis’ introduction.
At first, Marjorie’s shame is thus mostly internal. The only external shame she is confronted with comes from her father, and she dismisses it completely. Furthermore, when Marjorie realizes after confessing her story to Atherton that her father had been secretly listening, Atherton ends up taking her side. Old Lindon claims, “Atherton, I—I’m ashamed of you!” Marjorie then says mockingly, “You see, Sydney, even papa is ashamed of you” (Marsh 170). While portrayed as a powerful emotion, external shame is dismissed by Marjorie.

But the arrival of the Beetle changes this disregard for shame. The instances of shame previously mentioned, related to Marjorie’s fear, are all induced by external situations. Shame erupts most often in situations where Marjorie feels terror in the Gothic setting of the novel. It is the Beetle, an external subject, which creates the fear that generates the shame: “You ought to be ashamed of yourself, Marjorie Lindon … you who have prided yourself on being so strong-minded! A pretty sort you are to do battle for anyone” (Marsh 229). This passage directly speaks to Marjorie’s desire to represent her sex as strong and fearless and to participate in the emancipation of women. But the Beetle threatens Marjorie’s chances to achieve her goals. External shame is, one needs to recall, a fear of exposure to others. According to Goss and Allan, it creates the anxiety of “leading to social diminishment, devaluation or rejection, and there can be a motivation to conceal unattractive aspects of the self from others” (304). These “unattractive aspects” are accentuated by the shamer, however. The latter, in this case, is the Beetle.

How does the Beetle bring external shame upon Marjorie as a New Woman? To answer that question, it is important to establish Marjorie’s personal goals. Not only does she want to be a strong representative of her sex, she also has specific desires for her own life. For instance, she has decided she wants to marry Lessingham and does not care about
her father’s opinion. She also strives to be an adequate companion for the politician. Indeed, Marjorie enters the political sphere in her quest to conquer Lessingham; she goes to parliament and even makes a speech in a Woman’s Club (Marsh 188). She develops her own voice, of which she is proud. Discussing the development of women’s fiction in the midst of the New Woman’s appearance in social discourse, Gail Marshall writes that the “essence of the new woman’s fiction rests in the possibility that it can act to shift the centre of gravity in contemporary society away from male-led decisions, so that women have at least an equal if not a more prominent role in leading society” (Victorian Fiction 122). This idea is illustrated by Marjorie who leaves the domestic sphere to enter the public sphere through political involvement.

However, as mentioned, the New Woman was often vilified for her desire for freedom. Indeed, her more “masculine” characteristics were equated with a desire to actually become a man. According to Victoria Margree, “detractors of the movement for women’s rights repeatedly characterised her as actually desiring masculinity. If the New Woman sought the right to behave as a man, it was argued, she must in fact wish to be a man” (72). The Beetle, in its vengeance against Marjorie, viciously conjures this idea.

When Marjorie is captured by the Beetle at the end of the novel, the creature forces her to undress and cuts her hair. Then, he dresses her in a man’s rags: “attired in a rotten, dirty pair of boots; a filthy, tattered pair of trousers; a ragged, unwashed apology for a shirt; a greasy, ancient, shapeless coat; and a frowsy peaked cloth cap” (Marsh 285). Through this humiliation, the Beetle shames Marjorie for her desire to be emancipated by laughing at her. Costumed as a poor, filthy man, she becomes a sort of parody that has a mocking quality to it. This comes as a punishment for aspiring to a social role that does not belong to her. Considering Miller’s notions, it is a humiliation she suffers, but this humiliation is so
strong that it makes her lose her credibility as a strong woman. Thus, it becomes a shaming ritual, a “degradation of status” (Miller 147) that is externally imposed. Moreover, Marjorie is unable to struggle against the vengeance of the creature since she is put in a trance.

The cross-dressing also makes her a shameful subject. As Margree remarks, “if Marjorie in men’s clothing is a parody of a man, she is only a poor imitation of a man who is already himself a parody of masculinity” (74). The rags belong to Holt, who has suffered the loss of his manhood and identity. Margree notes this association of Marjorie and Holt illustrates the belief that the “masculinised woman is like the emasculated man” (74). The New Woman was perceived as a threat to standard gender roles, mostly to masculinity. According to Julian Wolfreys, the fear was that the New Woman represented “parodic masculinity” (29). The Beetle dressing Marjorie in men’s clothing and cutting her hair constitutes not only a “violation of Marjorie’s gender identity” but also incarnates the dread of men in regard to their own masculinity (Wolfreys 29). In this way, Marjorie also mirrors the Beetle in its hermaphrodite identity, both male and female.

Throughout the novel, Marjorie is seen to confront men in many ways: “men pride themselves on their sense of honour being so much keener than women’s. I told them some plain truths; and I fancy that I left them both feeling heartily ashamed of themselves” (Marsh 208, my emphasis). Marjorie is threatening to men and to masculinity by refusing a passive role and judging them for their behaviour. Her capture by the Beetle, her punishment, generates shame and ridicules her status as a New Woman. Therefore, she has to return to a more traditional role. At the end of the text, Marjorie goes under treatment for years as a “lunatic,” marries Lessingham, and is confined to her house (Marsh 319). Even her narrative authority is dismissed, as the readers are told she wrote her version of the events while hovering “between the darkness and the light” (321). Her status as a victim of
trauma renders her extremely passive but also an example of the fragile, emotional woman. Shamed by the Beetle, she has lost her place as an active, respected member of society and becomes a recluse.

The Importance of Reputation: Paul Lessingham

It was remarked earlier that shame has traditionally been categorized as a feminine emotion. Generally, all affect was deemed to be womanly. Men, in contrast, were the strong ones who kept their good sense and were unaffected by their emotions. To let oneself be influenced by them was seen as a personal failure. To be seen as emotional and hysterical was even worse, as it had an effect on reputation. Affect, in this way, was thus judged unmasculine, and could become a source of shame. These notions of shame, failure and reputation are seen in The Beetle through Paul Lessingham, the main victim and target of the Beetle.

From the moment readers encounter Lessingham in the novel, it is possible to see how he represents the most respectable gentleman. As a politician, he is the symbol of the “manly man,” described as having an “impenetrability,” an “adroitness” and an “invulnerable presence of mind.” Physically, he has “keen blue eyes,” “broad shoulders” and a “handsome head” (Marsh 75). Lessingham is the epitome of Victorian masculinity but also a man with great authority and a pristine reputation. His work is much admired by society, and he is known for his ability to remain calm: “all the world knows that his coolness remains unruffled” (75). Atherton describes him as “cold as an iceberg” (97) and notes his handsome face as he observes him.

When Holt invades his house under the control of the Beetle, Lessingham considers him like “a bird of prey” in “perfect silence” (Marsh 75). He addresses Holt with “the
utmost suavity and courtesy” (76), illustrating his perfect manners. This passage speaks to the notion that Lessingham is used to being in a position of power. In other words, he is usually the predator. For this reason, becoming the prey, or the target of the Beetle’s revenge, is unsettling for Lessingham, who is seen slowly losing everything that comprises his reputation. Atherton states that Lessingham is a man of “iron nerve” (Marsh 108), but the Beetle’s quest for revenge attacks Lessingham in the deepest corners. It seeks to destroy Lessingham in “body, soul and spirit” (298). Harris and Vernooy remark that the Beetle “repeatedly dominates, probes and penetrates male characters physically and mentally” (340). For Lessingham, this is particularly true for his mind and his character.

Lessingham’s past is a source of shame for him. His encounter with the Beetle, twenty years before the events of the novel, haunts him. As discussed earlier, under the spell of the Beetle, he was rendered powerless and forced to endure torture. However, at one point, he suddenly gained back power over himself. He narrates how he became “master of his honour” once again (Marsh 245). This allowed him to strangle the Beetle and to make his escape. Significantly, then, Lessingham equates the loss of control and free will to a loss of honour. Shame and honour are associated to each other as honour often delimits the values and standards of a group. If one loses his honour, one loses his status inside the group. Lessingham, by enduring the Beetle’s torture, became an object of shame because it forced him to commit horrible, sinful acts. Atherton tells him, “You’ve done something which places you outside the tolerably generous boundaries of civilised society” (Marsh 180). His captivity had broken his entire identity, as he was “but a wreck of [his] former self” (246). His encounter with the Oriental other transformed him, speaking to the fear of the “encounter with the colonized subject” that Hurley discusses: a man “may revert to barbarism with frightening rapidity” in this encounter and then “wear the mark of the beast”
“British Gothic Fiction” 195). The foreign other is sinful and shameful. Lessingham is thus “marked” by it and must repent by gaining back his honour and his status. Becoming a politician and the example of stern manliness has repaired his wounds. But over the years, he has remained in terror that these moments would come back and haunt him, and that he would become again “the wretched thing I was when I fled from that den of all devils” (Marsh 247). The Beetle comes to England to destroy the name Lessingham has built for himself.

The Beetle seeks revenge on Lessingham for what the latter has done in the past, which the politician desperately wants to forget. For him, it was a time “of mirage, of delusion, of disease” (Marsh 79). When Holt breaks into his house and calls the name of the Beetle for the first time, we witness Lessingham’s first breakdown. Holt describes him: “I found that he had retreated to the extremest limits of the room, and was crouching his back against the bookshelves, clutching at them, in the attitude of a man who has received a staggering blow.” On his face, “amazement, fear, and horror seemed struggling for the mastery” (Marsh 76). Lessingham’s coolness is immediately shattered with the mention of the Beetle. It is interesting that his fear makes him retreat and withdraw from view. Darwin, in his book *The Expression of Man and Animals*, discusses the physical manifestations of fear: “The frightened man … crouches down as if instinctively to escape observation” (290). Significantly, a similar phenomenon occurs in shame, where one avoids exposure in order to withdraw and hide. Fear and shame are thus interconnected. Stephen Pattison evokes the “sense of despair” and the “desire to flee” that erupt with shame (81). One can thus argue that Lessingham’s reaction is a mix of both fear and shame, most notably the shame of his past suddenly coming back to haunt him.
When Lessingham regains his composure, after Holt speaks the name of the Beetle for the first time, he “seemed conscious … that his passion was sadly lacking in dignity, and to be ashamed of it” (Marsh 77). Lessingham is seen as being preoccupied by his appearance and reputation. He wants to maintain it, but he fails over and over again. This sparks a sense of shame. Holt himself observes, “He showed himself to be as unlike the statesman I had conceived, and esteemed, as he easily could have done” (80). If Lessingham is described by Atherton as a man who usually has “all his faculties under complete command” (126), he fails when it comes to the Beetle. As a source of external shame, representing his past, the Beetle crushes his countenance and makes him tremble in fear. Holt then tries to bring him back to reality: “Taking him by the shoulder, I shook him with some vigour. My touch had on him the effect of seeming to wake him out of a dream, of restoring him to consciousness as against the nightmare horrors with which he was struggling.” He even shrinks “lower inch by inch till he was actually crouching on his haunches” (Marsh 115). Lessingham’s fear is once again marked by shame and reinforced by the external gaze. The realization of being seen as performing something other than what he aspires to be is crushing for Lessingham. It is not so much what he wants to be, but how he wants to be seen.

Joseph Adamson and Hilary Clark argue that “fear is, through socialization, often bound by shame, especially in men, so that one may feel ashamed whenever one experiences fear, even when one is able to hide it from others and from oneself” (15). But Lessingham is unable to hide his panic, which increases his shame. Moreover, Elspeth Probyn argues that when “shame is white-hot it seems to mingle with fear and terror. … Perhaps it is the fear of having to say that we are ashamed” (47). For Lessingham to confess his shame would be to admit that he is not who he pretends to be, and to risk the loss of his
status. As Adamson and Clark note, shame and denial “go hand in hand” (29), thus giving Lessingham an opportunity to bury the past.

It is also significant that the Beetle seeks to impose shame on Lessingham. When it discusses an adequate retribution with Atherton, it revels in the possibility that Lessingham would be shamed publicly “before all men” (Marsh 147). The Beetle knows that external shame will affect Lessingham’s status and reputation. It will not only attack his identity as an individual, but it will most of all strike his identity as a renowned and respected member of society. What occurs is what Victoria Margree calls a “fear of performativity” (71), in this case, Lessingham’s fear that his image will be discovered to be a pretense. The Beetle’s presence and actions endanger his performance as a symbol of masculinity, authority, and virility. Indeed, the man that is supposedly “coolness itself” becomes increasingly emotional and hysterical as the Beetle acts out its vengeance. Kelly Hurley notes that the Gothic monster acts in insidious ways, as “even the ‘normal’ male subject, the man’s man, is prone to breakdown” (“British Gothic Fiction” 203). Lessingham is rendered hysterical and even described as “feminine” in some passages. Towards the end, during the race around London in search of the Beetle and its captive Marjorie, he is depicted as being in the condition of a “hysterical woman” (Marsh 292). This not only speaks to the idea that emotions are stereotypically feminine, but also shows that Lessingham is losing his manhood in the process.

Augustus Champnell, the policeman who accompanies Lessingham and Atherton in the last part of the novel, states, “I confess that you disappoint me, Mr. Lessingham. I have always understood that you were a man of unusual strength; you appear instead, to be a man of extraordinary weakness; with an imagination so ill-governed that its ebullitions remind me of nothing so much as feminine hysteries” (Marsh 294, my emphasis).
Lessingham’s reputation is lost as the external gaze judges him for what he has become. At first, Lessingham incarnates everything a Victorian man should be. Kelly Hurley describes the ideal men of this time as “breadwinners for and protectors of their gratefully submissive women; courageous, masterful, resourceful, and strong” (“British Gothic Fiction” 200). Not only does Lessingham fail to master his own emotions, his courage is absent throughout the novel. He is unable to fight against the Beetle; it is Atherton and the policeman who do most of the work. He is also unable to protect his lover, Marjorie. The latter is taken and tortured by the creature, and Lessingham does not do much to help her. According to ideals, he should have been the perfect hero of the tale, but he is rather shamefully absent and rendered passive by his terror.

Lessingham is shamed and ashamed throughout the novel. He suffers the loss of his reputation and his manhood, having surrendered to his emotions. However, the Beetle’s punishment does not succeed in the end with regard to Lessingham as it does with Marjorie. Despite its efforts to destroy Lessingham, the latter’s position as a male in power allows him to be restored to his role. At the end of the novel, after the Beetle’s presumed death, he has “ceased to be a haunted man” (Marsh 320) and seems to be back on his feet. He has married Marjorie, keeping her love despite his failure to protect her. Rhys Garnett argues that the “only proper response” to a loss of status and manhood “is the recovery and most extreme use of superior and ‘legitimate’ masculine force” (41). Twenty years earlier, Lessingham had used violence to escape the Beetle’s den, and in the events of the novel the creature had to be destroyed for him to gain back his position. This time, the restoration of his manhood occurs through his marriage to Marjorie, which re-establishes him as the man in power, and reinstalls the patriarchal hierarchy.
The Beetle’s Fate

The Beetle is the Other, the Gothic monster; it is everything the British subject is not. The transgression and danger it represents most of all targets those, such as Lessingham, who assure the power and domination of the patriarchal ruling class. Rhys Garnett also observes that “English ‘manhood’ is destroyed or displaced” (31), as it was seen with Holt. The creature also mocks Marjorie for her attempt to gain independence, showing that, in the end, it is only a pretense. The Beetle hates everything that encompasses English society and represents all that it despises. But the monster, which incarnates deep-seated anxieties, shows that some of the fears it should exorcise might not be so foreign after all. Garnett explains how the creature makes evil “discoverable also within even the most ideally and rigorously virtuous of bourgeois psyches, thereby exposing tensions inherent in the text’s authorial projects” (32, original emphasis). For instance, by committing these sexual assaults on the unwilling English body, the Beetle transforms them into creatures of sin. However, because Victorians are so prone to shame, to admit that would be to allow shame to possibly infuse the English body, and to accept the retribution of the inevitable degeneration of individuals and of society.

Ross G. Forman argues that fin de siècle literature represents the “double helix” of the Empire expanding. On the one hand, there is the “promise of continued expansion” and the “success of the civilising mission.” On the other is the “fear of collapse, degeneration and reverse colonisation” (91). Thus raises the idea of punishment by the Oriental subject, that maybe the characters deserve their punishment. Significantly, the Beetle only targets Western subjects. For instance, the human sacrifices are all white women. To Harris and Vernooy, this can be seen as the “revenge of the colonized subject” (351). In order to make society, or the patriarchal social order, suffer, they attack what is most precious to them:
their mothers, wives and daughters. This speaks to a fear of retaliation by the colonies. According to Forman, this idea “works through a sense of guilt, a feeling that Britain is reaping the just rewards for her destructive behaviour overseas” (93). There is a shame at play in considering the expansion of the Empire, but the British deny this in order not to confront their shame. The monster, incarnating external shame, exorcises their own.

In the end, the Beetle’s supposed demise regulates the balance. The foreign creature is essentially destroyed, emphasizing the idea that Britain “will always prevail” and that “Britons never shall be slaves” (Forman 93). For Britain, it is the only possible ending, so that the social order is restored. Harris and Vernooy argue that the Beetle’s death affirms “imperialist and heteronormative ideals rather than their subversion or serious questioning” (344). But still, the readers are left with an elusive ending. Is the Beetle really dead? It is rather difficult to assert. This lack of closure occurs in many Gothic texts. The disappearance of the Gothic monster furthermore allows the denial; the shameful object is cast out, offering an opportunity to be faced with it. The shame, projected outwards, has to be destroyed. But the ambiguity remains with the ending and alludes that shame cannot only disappear because one merely wants it to.

**Conclusion**

In conclusion, it is interesting to consider that the novel is narrated by its main characters. If one seeks to elude their shame, and to bury themselves in denial, why tell the tale? Why not let it fall silent? External shame, defined as the effects of the outward gaze and the judgment of others on the self, is a shame that precipitates a loss of honour or status in a community. Writing their testimonies can be seen as an acceptance to share the object
of their shame. But since the creature has seemingly been destroyed, and the social order restored, the majority of their shame is buried with it.

The Beetle, the Gothic monster in the story, is a creature with animalistic characteristics, a hermaphrodite body, and foreign origins. Overall, it represents a shameful object that becomes the locus of all deviance. Coming to England with a vengeance, it brings shame upon Holt, Marjorie, and Lessingham. Acting out through shaming rituals, the Beetle becomes their terror. First, the occurrence of aggressive and ambivalent sexual assaults precipitates the loss of identity and manhood of Robert Holt. Then, Marjorie Lindon is humiliated and shamed for her desire for emancipation. In the end, her shaming re-establishes her in the position of the passive wife. Lastly, as Paul Lessingham’s shameful past comes back to haunt him, he loses his reputation as a man of strength and power. His social status, however, is recuperated in the end. As the Beetle disappears from England, the novel’s events culminate in the retribution of Britain against the external, foreign monster.

Champnell, Atherton, Holt, and Marjorie all give their voice to the tale. Writing, as a kind of exposure that confesses the sins and the shame, shows a desire for expression and self-affirmation. The characters’ identities are challenged by the invasion of a monster who generates external shame and threatens their social identities. But what occurs when the monster exists within the self? Internal shame becomes inevitably intertwined with the external. These ideas form the core of the next chapter’s argument, which looks at Robert Louis Stevenson’s famous novella *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*.

14 However, it is important to note that their narrative authority is sometimes questioned. Holt’s narration was written according to the memories of Marjorie and Atherton; and Marjorie’s narrative was written by her as she was suffering from trauma. In the end, only Atherton’s and Champnell’s narratives are given serious credit, which speaks to the relegation of Marjorie (a woman) and Holt (a poor man) to the background while the men in power take the front stage.
Chapter 3: Within and Without: *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* and the Mask of Shame

Introduction

At the time of its publication in 1886, Robert Louis Stevenson’s novella *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* was a great commercial success. The tale of terror and paranoia delighted the masses and the critics, who praised Stevenson’s literary style and mastery of suspense. In *The Saturday Review* of January 1886, Andrew Lang wrote that “one is thrilled and possessed by the horror of the central fancy” and that the text was an “excellent and horrific and captivating romance” (Lang 55). Although he had experimented with the Gothic genre in previous works, Stevenson only fully embraced it with *Jekyll and Hyde*, setting his story in a gloomy and morbid atmosphere and dealing with darker themes. Another review from *The Times* discusses Stevenson’s ability to spark fear in his readers: “[Stevenson] has weighed his words and turned his sentences so as to sustain and excite throughout the sense of mystery and of horror” (“Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde”). At the centre of *Jekyll and Hyde* are the complexities of the human mind and the question of the nature of identity. If the first reviews were “uncertain about how to treat Stevenson’s latest work”, states Roger Luckhurst (ix), one argued it possessed a “great moral allegory” (xi). *Jekyll and Hyde* is not only Gothic in its setting and themes, but also in the way it explores the anxieties of the time through the presence of monsters and the mysteries of the human soul.

While Oscar Wilde’s *Dorian Gray* revolves around the protagonist’s internal struggle, and Richard Marsh’s *The Beetle* around an external creature seeking retribution, *Jekyll and Hyde* posits a conflict that occurs both internally and externally. The figure of the double inevitably entails the theme of duality, of one’s identity and emotions, and of one’s status in
society. J. R. Hammond argues that the story “encapsulates as no other nineteenth-century novel does the fundamental dichotomy which lay at the heart of Victorian man: that between outward respectability and inward lust, between a veneer of decorum and a raging inferno of evil” (125). By delving into the question of the ambivalence of identity and the dispute between one’s good and evil natures, Stevenson advances the possibility that the monster can exist both within and without an individual. Notions of culpability and morality are thus rendered more complex as they are questioned.

Written with what biographer Ian Bell calls “feverish activity” (174), *Jekyll and Hyde* resembles a nightmare. Not unlike Wilde’s and Marsh’s novels, the protagonist of Stevenson’s novella is engaged in a moral conflict that is strongly related to the experience of shame. Indeed, shame is a crucial element in Stevenson’s narrative. Not only does it generate the creation of the double, Hyde, but it also nourishes Jekyll’s dual life, allowing him both to embrace and to reject it. The terrible struggle between the crushing weight of his shame and his desire to be free of it is at the centre of his tale. At first sight, *Jekyll and Hyde* is most similar to *Dorian Gray* because it is mainly concerned with Jekyll’s internal shame, that is, his conflict with himself. But one has to recall that Dorian’s monstrous form was only a reflection of himself, while Hyde is able to exist outside of Jekyll and has his own identity and conscience. Hyde also eventually grows independent of Jekyll by developing free will and gaining power over him. This allows for external shame to enter and complicate the struggle. For this reason, Stevenson’s story offers an opportunity to discuss how both internal and external shame can manifest themselves together in a conflict. Shame, generated and experienced on two levels, is reinforced and its corruptive effects are felt even more strongly.
The Coexistence of Internal and External Shame

Although they are generated differently, internal and external shame are not always mutually exclusive. It was seen in previous chapters that internal shame often encompasses external shame, and vice versa. Paul Gilbert, who develops the contrast between both, indeed argues that “internal and external shame are often highly correlated” (20). For instance, internal shame is mainly a solitary process; it occurs when the self judges the self as the evaluation of behaviour that generates shame happens inwardly. It is one’s own expectations about oneself that are at stake. But these ideals often find their source in external influences, as the self is inevitably impacted by one’s social existence. Such is the case of Dorian, in The Picture of Dorian Gray, whose physical presence in the world affects his desire for perfection. In contrast, external shame erupts when an exterior gaze judges the self. This outward evaluation creates a sense of shame in the individual, who is seen by an external audience and judged not to correspond to the standards of a group or society or even to the expectations that an exterior person has for the individual. But while it is created by the judgment of others, external shame inevitably affects the image one has of oneself, or in other words, internalized shame. It also raises questions about one’s identity and belonging in their community, as it happens in The Beetle. External shame, or the fear of it, can create conflicts that one internalizes in order to avoid the public eye. The combination of internal and external shame is thus a common experience.

In a way, it can be said that shame is always external and internal, since both have an impact on an individual’s identity. Furthermore, according to Gilbert, “shame is an involuntary response to an awareness that one has lost status and is devalued” (22). Nobody wants to experience shame, and whether this loss occurs because of oneself or the judgment of others, it is the individual that it affects. In each human being there is the desire to
belong to a social group and to maintain a social status; but there is also the need to uphold our own ideals and ambitions about ourselves. This double-edged struggle reinforces both internal and external shame.

As already discussed, the experiences of shame in the late-Victorian era were exacerbated by extreme social pressure. Deep-rooted anxieties about social status and conventions erupted in the population, as they were torn between long-standing traditions and the many changes that upset them. Roger Luckhurst argues this “culture of uncertainty” explains the proliferation of the literature of the double at the fin de siècle: “[it] became one of the privileged ways of exploring the mysteries of the modern self” (xv). He states that the numerous crises that unsettled the population “made [them] strangers” to themselves, and that the figure of the double became “the emblem of this self-estrangement” (xv). As people began not to recognize themselves in the mirror, the very foundation of their being was questioned, and the double became the perfect symbol for their quest for self-definition.

For instance, in Wilde’s Dorian Gray, the double is represented by the monstrous portrait, Dorian’s own soul, disfigured by his sins and stained by shame. His picture stares back at him like a mirror, but Dorian refuses to believe it is a part of himself. This leads to his self-destruction. Similarly, and yet distinctively, the double in Jekyll and Hyde is embodied by Edward Hyde, who is both a part of Jekyll, as he lives in the same body, and apart from him, as he possesses his own conscience and identity. Hyde is the monster in the story, deformed and depraved, but he is also Jekyll, just as Jekyll is Hyde. This complex duality between the two sides of one’s soul will be explored in this chapter, as well as what role internal and external shame play in this conflict. However, before delving into the coexistence of Jekyll and his evil side Hyde, it is essential to understand how and why
Hyde was created. It will be argued that shame is the central factor in the splitting of Jekyll’s soul. In his confession, Jekyll shows that shame, and particularly internal shame, has always been a heavy burden on his conscience, and that it is his desire to reject it that makes him seek a way to create a new life for himself so he can be free.

**Creating Hyde**

*The Ideal Gentleman*

Shame is a moral emotion, but it is also a social one. In a world that reinforces strict roles, shame erupts when an individual does not adhere to what is considered acceptable. The gentleman was a prominent figure in late-Victorian culture and embodied the idea of propriety. In *The Perfect Gentleman*, Karen Volland Waters suggests that the “figure of the gentleman has long been considered a powerful symbol of patriarchal privilege and authority” (13). If good birth, ownership of land, and material wealth were the principal characteristics of what defined a gentleman, Waters argues that for Victorians, the “foundation of character was morality” (19). The conventional gentleman had to respect and uphold the moral standards of the society he belonged in. For this reason, shame is an important factor. June P. Tangney and Ronda L. Dearing discuss the place of morality in shame in their book *Shame and Guilt*, observing that moral decisions and behaviour are guided by three aspects. Moral standards, that is, norms and conventions; moral reasoning, that is, thinking about the implications of one’s actions; and moral emotion, that is, the evaluation and reinforcement of behaviour (93). One can see, then, how shame exerts its influence on exemplary gentlemen who have to adhere to the conventions of their status. If they diverge from moral standards, both internal and external shame will threaten their place in the social order, first through their own ideal of themselves, and second, through
the judgment of others. Their moral reasoning and moral emotion, which encompass their overall moral character, also have to be respectable and controlled. In general, a gentleman must have an innate sense of morality; if he is perfectly moral, he should not be affected by shame.

Numerous books about conduct told men how to be a respectable gentleman. They listed an incredibly demanding number of qualities of character to possess, as well as a precise manner of dress and a strict etiquette. But most importantly, they “stressed self-control through adherence to rules and discipline” (Waters 19). A real gentleman was able to control himself and repress “ungraceful” desires. Strength of character was therefore essential. But according to Waters, these numerous ideals were impossible to attain, and thus the concept of the perfect gentleman was but “a mask” that hid the authentic identity of these men (98). It can be argued that it also created the ideal conditions for shame. If the expectations for gentlemen were too demanding, those who were striving for them would inevitably be bound by shame when they realized they could not live up to them. The ideal preached by society set people up for failure and instilled shame.

These notions are crucial to *Jekyll and Hyde* because, as Kelly Hurley notes, the novella “depicts an entirely homosocial world” (199). All the main characters are men from the professional upper middle class. They are doctors, lawyers and scientists, and their only society is each other. This close-knit environment reinforces the importance of adhering to its rules and standards, which are notably represented by the ideal of the gentleman. In order to belong, one must respect the conventions. These ideas are important to take into account when considering the character of Henry Jekyll. Jekyll is a prominent member of his society, a respected doctor who is deemed to be of good company and influence. When he starts his confession, Jekyll shows that he has everything so as to be a gentleman: born
in “excellent parts,” “with every guarantee of an honourable and distinguished future” (Stevenson 52). His numerous titles, “M.D., D.C.L., L.L.D., F.R.S., &c.” (11), speak to his status as an esteemed professional. He belongs in his society because he maintains his perfect appearance and respects the conventions.

Despite his disposition, Jekyll quickly shows that a life of restraint and self-control, generated by the praised image of the respectable gentleman, only provokes secret desires. However, Jekyll has to repress a part of himself: “Hence it came about that I concealed my pleasures” (Stevenson 52). It is essential for Jekyll to maintain privacy to retain his social status. As Nicholas Ruddick observes, Jekyll “must conceal how he satisfies these desires if he is to conform to Victorian standards of propriety” (191). Moreover, it affirms the place of shame in his struggle exactly because he has to conform to the expectations he has of himself and that others have of him. To preserve his image as a professional, upper middle class gentleman, Jekyll needs to assert his self-control in order not to expose his transgressions, which would inevitably result in external shame and being rejected from society. To conform is to avoid external shame. However, his social existence is but an illusion, and it does not protect Jekyll from internal shame.

*The Mask of Shame*

Benjamin D. O’Dell remarks that for a gentleman such as Jekyll, “maintaining the appearances of affluence would demand persistent control and restraint” (511). But Jekyll’s repression of his desires poisons his entire being as he is also profoundly ashamed of himself for experiencing them. Jekyll writes, “I regarded and hid them with an almost morbid sense of shame” (Stevenson 52). This passage shows that, at the beginning of his story, Jekyll is bound by internal shame. His explicit mention of it illustrates his self-
awareness, which confirms that he evaluates his own behaviour and experiences his shame inwardly. He conceals his pleasures, internalizing them because he is afraid of exposure. Significantly, O’Dell suggests that when gentlemen of the professional class fail to “actively assert their dominance over the cultural landscape,” they “instead turn inward to the isolation” and “the mask of the Victorian gentleman threatens to become the mask of shame” (512, my emphases). This idea refers to the tension between concealment and exposure that is central in shame and emphasizes the internal aspect of Jekyll’s conflict.

The image of the mask is prominent in the novella. Hyde, after all, is Jekyll’s mask. Poole, Jekyll’s servant, speaks to the concept when he tells Utterson: “Sir, if that was my master, why had he a mask upon his face?” (Stevenson 38). In terms of shame, the mask becomes an appropriate symbol. When one suffers from shame, one seeks to hide and to run away, and a mask allows for concealment. The struggle remains internal, as the individual—in this case Jekyll—disguises himself to protect appearances but experiences his shameful pleasures in hiding. Because the transgressions are shielded from external gaze, an inward struggle is generated. Moreover, the fear of external shame and the loss of status that would result from it create a desperate need to conform to standards in appearance and reinforces the overall experience of shame. Ed Cohen suggests that “the novel’s insistent focus on its male characters” speaks about “the failure of masculinity” (181), referring to the idealized masculinity preached by society. Through his secret shame, Jekyll shows that the perfect gentleman does not exist. While he possesses all the necessary qualities for being a gentleman, the symbol of masculinity, he is taunted by

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15 Some studies of the novella also argue that other characters prove this idea. Utterson himself, despite being the main narrative authority in the novella, hints that he also represses himself in many ways. For more discussion on Utterson, see Elaine Showalter’s *Sexual Anarchy: Gender and Culture at the Fin de Siècle* (1990) and J.R. Hammond’s *A Robert Louis Stevenson Companion* (1984).
repression, caused by a nearly obsessive self-restraint. The mask of shame, then, almost becomes inevitable for those who feel they cannot attain social and personal expectations. It consists of the shame of internalizing those aspects of oneself that have to remain private because they are shameful in the eyes of the community.

This conflict between hiding secret desires while upholding a social reputation produces the notion of the double life. Jekyll himself states, even before the creation of Hyde: “I stood committed to a profound duplicity of life” (Stevenson 52). Which is the true self, between the one shown to the rest of the world and the one lurking in the shadows? Once again, there is a tension between secrecy and exposure. This mirrors the double life Jekyll engages in and strengthens the effects of shame. The satisfaction he gets from his secret pleasures motivates the need for concealment as much as it exposes Jekyll to his own shameful thoughts and actions. Indeed, the protagonist states that while he had to keep his desires secret, he still indulged them in private: “I was no more myself when I laid aside restraint and plunged in shame, than when I laboured, in the eye of day, at the furtherance of knowledge or the relief of sorrow and suffering” (Stevenson 52). Because he is ashamed of himself, Jekyll shows that he is aware that what he does is considered shameful by society. But the fact that he does not feel “like himself” even when he indulges in his secret pleasures illustrates that he is unable to ever feel free. Torn between two lives, neither of which he can live in peace, Jekyll is crushed by his shame and sorrow.

Chronic Shame

While internalized, Jekyll’s shame is externally constructed by the conventions of society. It can be argued that Jekyll suffers from chronic shame. According to Stephen Pattison, chronic shame is a condition that erupts when one endures feelings of “social or
individual worthlessness, alienation or abandonment … severe enough, long enough, or repeated enough” (96). Jekyll, bound by his social position as a man of good birth and professional standing, is oppressed by the need to conform to the ideal of the perfect gentleman. But because of his indulgence for secret pleasures and desires, he is constantly ashamed for not living up to them. Furthermore, Joseph Adamson and Hilary Clark write that “excessive and unconscious feelings of shame and guilt, especially feelings of inferiority and unworthiness, and fears of punishment, may prevent one from necessary self-assertion, so that one remains indefinitely in a state of shame, feeling weak and powerless” (27). This, one can argue, is Jekyll’s situation at the beginning of the novella. Incapable of feeling whole, he is constantly crushed by shame, and unable to escape it. Yet Jekyll realizes that his shame was not created by him, but rather by the impossible standards of gentlemanliness that he has internalized because of his social status. To counter this, Jekyll believes he can discard his shame by embracing his secret self and refusing his other nature to be repressed.

One can argue that this epiphany sparks the idea for the creation of Hyde. Jekyll describes his creation as “a grinding in the bones, deadly nausea, and a horror of the spirit that cannot be exceeded at the hour of birth and death” (Stevenson 54). Hyde is the “death” of his oppressed, powerless self; he is also his “birth,” his liberation, the embrace of his authentic self. Yet Hyde remains only a mask, the mask of his shame, behind which he conceals his true identity. Judith Halberstam remarks that “although Hyde hides within Jekyll, Jekyll is hidden behind the mask of Hyde” (67). It gives him a feeling of freedom, because he is hidden from view. However, it does not actually liberate him. Pattison notes that chronic shame “becomes a dominant characteristic, a deeply engrained habitual mode of reacting to self and others” (93). Shame is seen to influence Jekyll’s every thought, even
after Hyde is born. His “evil twin” only reinforces Jekyll’s shame by giving it a double existence. As Hyde incarnates the dual nature of Jekyll, he has both an internal and an external existence, and can thus experience internal and external shame.

The Internal Hyde

Degeneration or Liberation?

Edward Hyde is born out of a scientific experiment. When Jekyll drinks a solution of his own making, his body transforms and his conscience changes. While Hyde is mainly described in his physical manifestation, his presence inside Jekyll is just as crucial. Shame is especially important in Hyde’s internal existence as his influence is greatly exerted on Jekyll’s moral state. Much like Dorian and the Beetle, Hyde is essentially shameless. Léon Wurmser claims that “shame is a fear of disgrace, but shame is also an attitude of awe and respect about the values central to culture and to all human interaction” (66). Certainly, that explains why Jekyll is so bound and oppressed by shame. He has respect for the community in which he exists; Hyde, however, does not. He entirely rejects the moral code of society, living according to his own immoral principles.

The most important aspect of a Victorian gentleman is his morality. Significantly, Henry Jekyll’s devolution starts with a degradation of his moral character. His double life begins as he indulges in his secret desires in private, pleasures that are considered immoral in society. The nature of his “secret pleasures” is never explicitly stated, but since they are

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16 Most studies of the novella interpret these pleasures as sexual, more specifically as Jekyll having homosexual relations. *Jekyll and Hyde* was written the same year as the passage of the Criminal Law Amendment Act, which criminalized same-sex relationships (and notably led to the trials of Oscar Wilde, his imprisonment, and his exile and death in Paris). The double-life Jekyll indulges in speaks to the needed secrecy of homosexual relationships at the time. However, it would restrain the text to assume Stevenson was only talking about homosexuality. According to Stephen Arata, in his chapter “Stevenson and Fin-de-Siècle Gothic,” Stevenson rejected reading Jekyll’s sins as only sexual (66). For an exhaustive study of the homosocial world of *Jekyll and Hyde*, see Elaine Showalter’s *Sexual Anarchy: Gender and Culture at the Fin de Siècle* (1990).
so bound in shame, it is reasonable to assume that they are deviant from conventions. Robert Mighall remarks that “Jekyll quite literally internalizes the prevalent morality of his class” (147). While he sometimes yields to immoral behaviour, Jekyll remains aware that what he is doing is indecent in the eyes of society. He understands the difference between right and wrong, and that is why he still feels shame. In effect, he possesses a moral responsibility that signals that he should be ashamed. Significantly, he states in his confession: “It was on the moral side … that I learned to recognise the thorough and primitive duality of man” (Stevenson 53). His moral sense, torn between convention and pleasure, leads him to understand that all men possess a “bad” alter ego, which would explain his shameful desires. Jekyll realizes that the standards imposed by society repress that side, so that the good will trample the bad. The creation of Hyde comes out of a desire to express this oppressed nature.

With the creation of Hyde, his immoral twin, Jekyll’s moral sense slowly degenerates. According to Melissa J. Ganz, Jekyll starts to experience moral insanity, which she defines alongside James Cowles Prichard’s work: “The disease… typically produces a profound alteration in the temper and habits of a person such that an individual who was esteemed for ‘probity and high respectability’ would suddenly become ‘depraved, reckless, and devoid of all moral principle’” (370).17 This degeneration is possible because every individual possesses both a respectable and a depraved side. Most men decide to repress their immoral nature because this is what society teaches and desires. This results in distress, especially in Jekyll, who feels he has to hide his authentic self. The constant experience of shame affects his self-esteem and he is incapable of asserting his own identity.

17 Prichard was a British physician and ethnologist who was notably interested in psychiatry. He published A Treatise On Insanity and Other Disorders Affecting the Mind in 1835.
and his needs. Henry Maudsley, a pioneer of psychology in the nineteenth century, states that: “the sense of moral relations, or so-called moral feeling … are the first to disappear in mental degeneration … and when they are stripped off the primitive and more stable passions are exposed—naked and not ashamed” (qtd. in Mighall 145). This shamelessness is exactly what Jekyll seeks, and that he finds in Hyde. Indeed, J.R. Hammond remarks that Jekyll “regards the throwing off of moral control as a liberation” (124). He dreams of freedom from the bounds of shame, but the rejection of shame equates a degradation of his moral character. To have shame is to respect the conventions of society, but Hyde’s presence in Jekyll’s mind tramples that respect, because Hyde does not care about the regulations.

Hyde is thus created out of a desire to give Jekyll’s own immoral side an existence and to reject chronic shame. He says that this “second form … bore the stamp, of lower elements in my soul” (Stevenson 54). When Jekyll describes Hyde’s mental state, or how Hyde’s presence affects his own conscience, he especially discusses how Hyde disregards morality to simply surrender to his desires and not resist temptations. Similar to Dorian Gray, Hyde refuses shame to guide his actions as he indulges in an egocentric, sinful lifestyle. But compared to Jekyll, Hyde shows “a livelier image of the spirit” (Stevenson 55), implying that the evil twin is more truthful because he does not have to repress himself. He expresses himself freely, without the fear of shame. Hyde is “a solution of the bonds of obligation, an unknown but not an innocent freedom of the soul” (53). Despite being immoral, he is still a deliverance for Jekyll.

At first, Jekyll is able to maintain control over Hyde and preserve appearances. He tells his friends that Hyde is his protégé. He is, as Stephen Arata suggests, “like a mentor sheltering a promising disciple” (240). Jekyll tells his friends, “The moment I choose, I can
be rid of Mr. Hyde” (Stevenson 19). Still asserting control, Jekyll is able to maintain his
social status while indulging in his double life. His dominance starts to falter, however, as
Hyde grows and gains power. As Ganz notes, the issue particularly degenerates as Jekyll
“repeatedly indulges his passions until he utterly confounds the distinctions between his
nighttime fantasies and his waking actions” (393–394). This intemperance starts to blur the
lines between his two personas, giving Hyde power over the two identities. Soon, it is no
longer Jekyll that prevails over Hyde, but the two sides of him that share his body.

However, as Fred Botting argues, the distinction between Jekyll and Hyde is never
symmetrical: “The unevenness of the splitting displays an inherent instability in notions of
human identity” (141). Jekyll’s fear starts to develop: “I was slowly losing hold of my
original and better self, and becoming slowly incorporated with my second and worse”
(Stevenson 59). The instability only grows with time and complicates the place of shame.
In his desire to be shameless, Jekyll only creates a new shame in himself, the shame of
having given birth to the monstrous Hyde. Michael L. Morgan writes that “to provoke
shame in oneself runs the multiple risks of responses of denial, of increasingly hostile
behavior, or of immobilizing despair or depression” (44). Jekyll’s chronic shame belonged
to him and was inwardly experienced while being generated and nourished both externally
and internally. This new shame, however, escapes his control because it also belongs to
Hyde, who is reckless. While he believes to have externalized and projected it onto
someone else, Jekyll also forgets that Hyde is still a part of him. It is possible to witness a
hostility and paralysis in Jekyll as Hyde grows more and more powerful, which exacerbates
his shame.
The Loneliness of the Addict

In his study of addiction in *Jekyll and Hyde*, Daniel L. Wright states that “Jekyll’s inability fully to renounce and take responsibility for Hyde” shows that “he *loves* being Hyde” (256, original emphasis). Despite the growing instability of the separation of his two identities, Jekyll shows signs of being addicted to his immoral, depraved side. Shamelessness is liberating, because it frees him from the obligation of following the rules and codes of society. Jekyll states that the transformation “delighted [him] like wine” (54), thereby invoking notions of drunkenness and craving. Shame and addiction are often strongly related to one another. Not only can shame result in addiction to toxic substances because of the sense of worthlessness and weakness it creates in the individual,¹⁸ but addiction in itself also generates a lot of shame.

To Wright, Jekyll shows all the symptoms of being an addict. He is “enamored of Hyde,” who represents the liberation from the bonds of society and the shame it generates. But Jekyll also experiences “extended periods of intense remorse, shame, self-pity, and self-hatred” (Wright 258). Indeed, Jekyll abhors his other self as much as he loves him. He is at times “eaten up and emptied by fever, weak both in body and mind, and solely occupied by one thought: the horror of my other self” (Stevenson 64–65). Similar to an alcoholic who sees his self transformed when he drinks, Jekyll is appalled by Hyde’s conduct, watching himself altered into a violent, disfigured monster. Faced with this fact, Jekyll decides to stop drinking the solution and to renounce Hyde. This is typical of the addict, according to Wright: “Distraught and tormented by his captivity to base desires and actions, the addict, in his sobriety and shame, solemnly resolves to forego his perverse

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¹⁸ For a thorough discussion of the links between shame and addiction, see Tangney and Dearing’s *Shame and Guilt*.
pleasures and promises to preserve in abstinence and improved conduct” (258). This especially happens as Jekyll fears his secret will be exposed to the world. He is anxious that Hyde’s actions will be traced back to him, and the dread of external shame reinforces his internal struggle and despair. He tells Utterson, “I bind my honour to you that I am done with him in this world. It is all at an end” (Stevenson 24). Significantly, Jekyll invokes honour in his resolution, showing that he wants to return to respecting the standards of the society to which he belongs. His honour, and thus his morality, are important to him once more.

This rejection of Hyde results in Jekyll coming out of his seclusion. Utterson remarks that “his face seemed to open and brighten, as if with an inward consciousness of service” (Stevenson 28). This passage is particularly related to shame. When one experiences shame, one looks down, withdraws, shrivels. As Michael Lewis notes, the physical action of shame is a retreat, “as though to disappear from the eye of the self or the other” (629). At this moment, Jekyll looks up, opens himself to the world again. He is no longer crushed by shame and is resolved in his desire to become his moral self again.

However, Jekyll eventually relapses in his addiction. He goes back to isolation, as Hyde’s immoral actions relentlessly haunt him: “overcome by shame, anxiety and the dissolution of resolve … the addict withdraws from his accustomed society and recedes into an unhealthy solitude” (Wright 259). This withdrawal is typical for sufferers of shame, who seek to elude the eyes of others. Robert Walker et al. note that “a further strategy to cope with the prospect of shame was a partial and sometimes complete withdrawal from social life” (228). But this isolation only makes Jekyll’s shame worse, as he finds himself alone with it: “You must suffer me to go my own dark way. I have brought on myself a punishment and a danger I cannot name. If I am the chief of sinners, I am the chief of
sufferers also” (Stevenson 29). His shame of Hyde—of being Hyde, despite the mask—leads him to punish himself. His self-esteem is destroyed, and he believes he deserves retribution, but it is a punishment that is still only internal. He refuses to reveal himself to other people because it would bring external shame upon him, and that would be unbearable to him. He is crippled by his shame: “I have had what is far more to the purpose. … I have had a lesson—O God, Utterson, what a lesson I have had!” (26). In this moment, Jekyll covers his face with his hands, a usual physical reaction to shame: “Under a keen sense of shame there is a strong desire for concealment. We turn away the whole body, more especially the face, which we endeavor in some manner to hide” (Darwin 321–322). Jekyll’s isolation speaks to this, pushed to the extreme by his despair.

Just like Dorian Gray hides his portrait in a room of his house, Jekyll isolates himself in his private laboratory, away from any external gaze. Judith Halberstam notes: “The rooms become closets but they also represent the relation between self and other as the relation between house and inhabitant” (70). Jekyll hides himself in his own home, reinforcing the internalization of his struggle. In the end, his shame, just like the solution, poisons his body and his entire identity. Despite Jekyll’s attempts to give up Hyde, the latter constantly comes back in moments of “moral weakness” (60) until there is nothing left but the choice of self-destruction. He kills himself—and Hyde—inside his laboratory. The room, which saw the birth of Hyde, now sees Jekyll’s end.

**Atavism and Scandal: The External Hyde**

**Darwinism and the Other**

The end of the nineteenth century was also pervaded with anxieties about the evolution of science. The publication of Charles Darwin’s *On the Origin of Species,* in
1859, shook the very foundation of the understanding of human nature. Up to that point, human beings had been considered superior to animals, but Darwin demonstrated that humans were in fact descendants of animals, and, thus, not so different from them. Fred Botting explains: “Darwin’s theories, by bringing humanity closer to the animal kingdom, undermined the superiority and privilege humankind had bestowed on itself” (137).

Therefore, while Darwin’s theories explained the evolution of human beings towards an intelligent, civilized self, they also opened the possibility that this transformation could occur in reverse. In other words, according to Victoria Margree and Bryony Randall, the Victorians started fearing that “evolution could in certain circumstances work in reverse, returning a complex and civilised being to the state of primitivism from which it had emerged” (219). This fear of degeneration permeated the Victorian mindset and, inevitably, showed itself in Gothic literature.

Kelly Hurley notes that “the proliferation of Gothic representations of abhumaness at the fin de siècle may be partly attributed to the destabilizing effects of nineteenth-century Darwinian science” (“British Gothic Fiction” 195). The abhuman, the monster, can therefore represent the dread of degeneration and atavism. Defined as the “tendency to reproduce the ancestral type” (“atavism”), atavism was notably popularized by the work of Cesare Lombroso, a scientist who studied the physiognomy of criminals. Lombroso argued that certain bodily characteristics of criminals proved they belonged to humanity’s savage past. According to Stephen Arata, it expresses itself “most markedly through physical deformity” (234). Atavism was thus a representation of the fear of

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19 A definition of the abhuman was discussed in the previous chapter, about The Beetle. As a reminder, Kelly Hurley, in “British Gothic Fiction,” defines the abhuman as a being that retains “vestiges of its human identity, but has already become, or is in the process of becoming, some half-human other – wolfish, or simian, or tentacled, or fungoid, perhaps simply ‘unspeakable’ in its gross, changeful corporeality” (190). The mention of “wolfish” can be linked to Hyde, who displays animalistic features in his demeanor and behaviour.
primitiveness, of humankind devolving back into an animalistic state that was projected onto criminals and deviants.

In Stevenson’s novella, Hyde is nothing less than a monster. The first description of him illustrates his grotesqueness, which would have been considered typical of the atavist: “There is something wrong with his appearance; something displeasing, something downright detestable” (Stevenson 9). His deformity is much insisted upon: “He must be deformed, somewhere; he gives a strong feeling of deformity, although I couldn’t specify the point” (9). Hyde is also called a “Juggernaut” (7), which is a word typically used to describe something big, ruthless and inhuman. Generally speaking, Hyde “wasn’t like a man” (7). He is rather abhuman, monstrous, and misshapen, and he repeatedly commits shameful acts. The idea of deformity reflects the crushing effects of shame, which affect self-worth and social status, “consuming” the individual to something lesser. Just as shame stains Dorian’s portrait in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, shame corrupts Hyde’s body by deforming him into something judged “wrong” by those he encounters.

In many ways, Hyde is the Other. His immorality and atavistic characteristics transform him into an object of shame that must be hidden. In his very name is the idea that he is shameful, to be kept in the dark. As Mighall notes, the Other has to be everything the Victorian subject is not: “the Other, as object of knowledge, must be separate, distinct, and preferably distant from the knower” (135). No matter the words used to describe him, all relate to Hyde being abject, evil, and hateful. He inspires “unknown disgust, loathing and fear” and is considered “the mere radiance of a foul soul that thus transpires through” (Stevenson 15-16). As the monster, he is the symbol of everything one regards as abject. Hyde is much like the Beetle in Marsh’s novel in that he exists outside the boundaries of civilized society. More precisely, Melissa Ganz remarks, “the deterioration of Jekyll’s mind
is reflected in the transformation of his body, in accordance with evolutionist thought” (386). Hyde’s physicality and personality illustrates the Victorian’s dread of degeneration and loss of control into a more primitive, savage state.

*The Beast Within*

Throughout the narrative, Hyde is described with animalistic qualities. He acts out with “ape-like fury” (Stevenson 20) and “ape-like spite” (66), drinks “pleasure with bestial activity” (57), jumps “like a monkey” (39), and has animalistic urges. Jekyll himself calls Hyde “the animal within me” (62). The contrast between them is particularly striking when it comes to the descriptions of their hands. Jekyll’s hand is “professional in shape and size: it was large, firm, white and comely,” while Hyde’s is “lean, cordinated, knuckly, of a dusky pallor and thickly shaded with a swarth growth of hair” (58). In every aspect, then, Hyde represents a return to the savage past. It can be argued that Darwin’s theories created shame in the Victorian population, the shame of knowing that all human beings were only animals once. Linda Dryden remarks in “‘City of Dreadful Night’: Stevenson’s Gothic London” that “by the 1890s the fear of this inner beast had become a hysteria, not just about the degenerative capabilities of the individual but of the whole race” (253). Hyde’s deviance is caused by his constant disregard for conventions and rules, and for that, he is an animal that lacks self-restraint.

Moreover, Hyde is othered to reject the possibility that this type of beast could be a part of society. He is “malign and villainous,” and his “every act and thought” is “centered on self” (57). He does not care about how his acts may affect others and is only driven with “vicarious depravity” (57) to yield to every pleasure and temptation he has. Hyde is also described as an emotional being. He talks with “defiance,” “with a flush of anger”
(Stevenson 15). He is the opposite of the gentleman, who needs to constantly assert self-control over himself. Hyde has absolutely no restraint and is extremely emotional in his transgressions. For instance, when Hyde murders Carew, he “br[eaks] out in a great flame of anger” (20), and Lanyon describes him as “wrestling against the approaches of the hysteria” (49). These descriptions contradict and even entirely ignore the poised, stoic standard of the gentleman in late-Victorian culture. It is a source of shame to demonstrate emotional sensibility, because one of the characteristics of the gentleman was to be, notably, “temperate,” “unobtrusive,” and “unaffected” (Waters 21). Hyde’s tendency not only to show emotion but to act upon his feelings separates him from the figure of the gentleman.

Additionally, Hyde is infantilized in many of his descriptions. He is “dwarfish” (Stevenson 16) and described as “less robust and less developed” (55). He is a “child of Hell” (63, my emphasis) whose clothes are too big for him (48). This can be related to his emotional sensibility; he is like an infant who throws tantrums and cannot control himself whatsoever. Mighall deems that Hyde is an “unfinished man” (148), alluding that something is missing from him. As Kelly Hurley notes, Darwin’s theories opened the possibility that “cultures were as likely to move ‘backwards’ as ‘forwards’ degenerating into less complex forms” (“British Gothic fiction” 195). Jekyll, as a smaller man, is denied the status of an adult, imposing male, and thus cannot assume the role of a prominent member of society. Through his childishness, his animalistic features, and his emotional tendencies, Hyde is othered. He does not belong in society. As a shameful subject, it is easy

20 Some studies of Jekyll and Hyde discuss the echoes of scientific research on the brain in the novella. Notably, Jekyll and Hyde would both represent the two hemispheres of the brain, Hyde being the less developed of the two. See Anne Stiles’ “Robert Louis Stevenson’s ‘Jekyll and Hyde’ and the Double Brain” (2006).
to reject and shame him outside the community. However, what particularly affected Victorians about the theories of degeneration and atavism proposed by Darwin and Lombroso was that degenerate and deviant forms could not only exist next to them, but also in them. According to Anne Maxwell, “degeneration gave rise to the possibility that even the most elite class of European could revert to be the ape-like creature from whom they were descended, given the right conditions” (48). The worst that could happen would be that the “criminal tendencies and depraved behavior” could “infect the middle and upper classes” (48–49). Monsters like Hyde became the projection of these anxieties, a way to express those fears. While Hyde is constantly othered in his descriptions, he is not merely an external monster. He is the double, the twin. While not being Jekyll, he is a part of him, and thus exists in the same body, in the same environment. While Hyde is othered, he does not reside entirely outside the boundaries of society like the Beetle does. He remains a part of the community because he exists within Jekyll.

Significantly, despite his constant descriptions of being monstrous and vile, Stephen Arata observes that “the noun used most often in the story to describe Hyde is not ‘monster’ or ‘villain’ but — ‘gentleman’” (238). Even more striking is the example of Enfield who calls him “my gentleman” (7, my emphasis), illustrating a certain belonging in the community. Despite his more primal features, Hyde is sharply dressed, has considerably good manners, and his home is finely decorated with art. Arata continues to note that “this is in fact a prime source of horror in the tale: not that the professional man is transformed into an atavistic criminal, but that the atavist learns to pass as a gentleman” (240). Jekyll’s companions, however, seek to other Hyde in terms of his shameful features, rejecting the possibility of Hyde being a gentleman because of his immorality and depravity.
Despite their efforts, Hyde, much like the Beetle, has the capacity to evade strict definition. Jane V. Rago remarks that “there is a discursive explosion that frantically and obsessively tries to fix Hyde’s identity as deviant” (277). While others cast him as the shameful Other, he repeatedly challenges such efforts to marginalise him by continuing to exist in the male-driven society of the text. He cannot be entirely rejected by society because, as Judith Halberstam remarks, “Hyde cannot be classified, he has no place in the order and history of things” (67). Furthermore, like the Beetle, Hyde does not adhere to the codes of society. He is shameless: he refuses to obey society’s rules, lives only by his own moral code, and thus evades feeling shame for his identity and actions.

*Hyde’s Lack of Shame*

While Hyde does not feel shame, he is still confronted by it. He evades Jekyll’s internal shame but is consistently shamed by other characters. For instance, at the beginning of the story, after Hyde tramples the child, a “circle of hateful faces” gathers to shun him, and he stands in the middle “with a kind of black, sneering coolness” (Stevenson 7). In this scene, Hyde is clearly shamed by others for his cruelty. This shaming ritual, of witnesses gathering around the shamed to oppress him, would generally result in a loss of status, in a sense of worthlessness, and in a desire to flee. But shame does not seem to affect Hyde, who remains in his place without feeling the need to hide. His reputation is threatened, which most gentlemen would fear, but according to the narrator, Hyde receives it “really like Satan” (Stevenson 7). As a shameless man, Hyde is unaffected by his shamers, and this only increases their rage.

The possibility of a ruined reputation does not seem to trouble him, unlike Jekyll, who is constantly concerned with his social status. Nonetheless, the creation of Hyde
“allows [Jekyll] to be a man who could afford to laugh at suspicion” (Stevenson 57). Because of Hyde, Jekyll feels protected from external shame. This is shown through Hyde’s disdain at the menace of exposure. Hyde, who is described as a “ghost” (23), existing within Jekyll, cannot suffer from disgrace. Since he has no concrete existence in society, there is no social status to lose, and no shame for not adhering to standards or ideals. As Jekyll writes in his confession, the bounds of morality have to be kept for the “upright twin,” who has to exist within the world. The “evil twin,” in contrast, exists only in the shadows, allowing the public twin to evade external shame. All the shame is projected onto the depraved twin, but it does not matter, because that twin does not really exist.

Although Jekyll is sometimes shocked at Hyde’s actions, “it was Hyde, after all, and Hyde alone, that was guilty” (Stevenson 57). Projecting the guilt and the shame outward, Jekyll attempts to free himself from shame. In a way, he aspires to be shameless like Hyde, but his loyalty to his moral code prevents him from that. Jekyll does not disregard convention and propriety like Hyde does. Stephen Arata notes that both Jekyll and Hyde indulge in pleasure, but “what differs is the manner in which they enjoy them: Hyde openly and vulgarly, Jekyll discreetly and with an eye to maintaining his good name. Gentlemen may sin as long as appearances are preserved” (241). Jekyll keeps his shame internalized and private, while Hyde puts himself in the external gaze. His shamelessness allows him to remain free, while Jekyll still suffers from his internal shame.

As the story progresses, Jekyll loses his control over Hyde, whose shameless attitude allows him to act recklessly without being refrained by the thought of consequences or retribution. Hyde, who was at first like a protégé to Jekyll, becomes more dangerous as he gains confidence. Hyde, the “animal” within Jekyll, begins to “growl for
license” (Stevenson 62) and gets more and more violent. Confronted by Hyde’s actions, Jekyll sheds “streaming tears of gratitude and remorse” and is “plagued by hideous images and sounds” (61). If Jekyll previously rejected the moral consequences of Hyde’s acts, it starts to pervade his mind as Hyde develops. He then considers getting rid of Hyde in order to “walk steadfastly and securely on his upward path, doing the good things in which he found his pleasure,” “no longer exposed to disgrace and penitence by the hands of this extraneous evil” (Stevenson 53). This passage reveals how Hyde’s existence threatens to expose Jekyll and make him vulnerable to retribution. Jekyll’s chronic shame is exacerbated by the external shame caused by Hyde. He starts to fear becoming “despised and friendless” (59) and to suffer humiliation and external shame until he loses his social status and reputation.

Scandal and Exposure

One moment is particularly crucial in Jekyll’s devolution: Hyde’s murder of Sir Carew. This violence is not perpetuated in private, mirroring the scene with the trampled child as it is a public crime. However, even more significantly this time, it becomes a nationwide scandal. Murdering a man of great power and reputation speaks of Hyde’s insolence and his disregard for conventions and the sanctity of human life. It also propels him into the public eye. O’Dell comments on this moment: “Stevenson’s decision to cast the scene as a sensational newspaper account not only identifies a primary audience for Hyde’s performance in the London citizenry but begins the process of reevaluating his character in the public realm” (515). Hyde is no longer Jekyll’s secret. While still a part of him, Hyde is now a public figure. This exposure creates an external shame that affects both Hyde and Jekyll, thereby realizing his fears. As Carew’s murder “fills the public realm”
(O’Dell 517), Jekyll’s reputation is more threatened than ever. If he thought himself protected by the fact that Hyde was mostly internalized by being kept private, this exposure lets external shame complicate his struggle. O’Dell argues that “the true source of Hyde’s monstrosity rests not in what is hidden so much as what gets revealed and how” (515, original emphases). Hyde’s external existence is consolidated in the murder and it renders Jekyll’s struggle with shame even more complex since he now has to live with his own shame—both for desiring deviant pleasure and for descending into moral insanity—and the shame forced upon Hyde by the external gaze of all London.

There is, however, a sense that Jekyll was aware that Hyde’s actions would catch up to him. At the beginning of his confession, he writes: “the doom and burthen of our life is bound forever on man’s shoulders, and when the attempt is made to cast it off, it but returns upon us with more unfamiliar and more awful pressure” (Stevenson 53). In this passage, Jekyll is aware that retribution is inevitable for the immorality to which he yielded, both in private and through Hyde. But Jekyll is in denial, trying to project his shame onto the shameless Hyde, thinking it will disappear. However, Melissa Ganz remarks that while “Jekyll attempts to distance himself from his alter ego … the novel undermines his efforts, highlighting his guilt, shame and ‘remorse’… Indeed, the specter of legal punishment looms large in his consciousness” (395). Jekyll has to realize that he cannot escape external shame because while Hyde is not him, he is a part of him.

Throughout the novella, Stevenson hints at the fact that while Hyde feels no shame for what he does, he is still afraid. At the beginning, in the scene with the trampled child, he stands proudly in the middle of his shammers, but he is still “frightened” (Stevenson 7). Jekyll, in his confession, writes of Hyde’s “terror of the gallows” (65). But Hyde is devoid of a moral sense. It is not external shame—and thus loss of status and reputation—that he
fears, it is only legal punishment. Jekyll writes of Hyde’s hatred of his “good” side: “he would long ago have ruined himself in order to involve me in the ruin” (65). Hyde does not act upon this desire because he knows that it will inevitably bring about legal retribution. Adamson and Clark write that “the capacity to experience shame and guilt may serve to defend against egotism and coldness” (27). In a sense, then, Jekyll’s shame is his last weapon against Hyde, his last attempt at maintaining humanity and a moral sense. Against Hyde’s villainy, Jekyll remains the “good twin” because he is able to feel shame for his actions. But one has to remember that Jekyll and Hyde are one, and one’s shame is therefore inevitably the other’s. Despite Hyde having an internal and external existence, he and Jekyll inhabit the same body. The notion of duality is crucial in the narrative, and essential to understand the dynamics of shame.

The Reflection in the Mirror: the Duality of Shame

The coexistence of Jekyll and Hyde results in a fragmentation of identity. Ian Bell observes: “Hyde is a monster not because he is an alien creature but because he is Jekyll, with his repressions dissolved utterly, out of control” (178). The Gothic monster is thus not entirely Jekyll but is him nevertheless. This fluidity creates a struggle for Jekyll, who is not able to keep his two identities distinct. The chronic internal shame and the external shame intertwine and reinforce one another. Karen Vollan Waters argues that the “Victorian man’s preoccupation with identity was motivated by his desire to define the self, to fix boundaries for the self and thereby assure himself of a unified, controlled being in the face of the realization that his control, of both himself and his environment, was breaking down” (115–116). This alienation, resulting from the creation of Hyde, erodes Jekyll’s sense of self. At first, he is able to keep his two identities separate, but the blending of his internal and
external shame precipitate his “increasing inability to stabilize his own identity,” as Linda Dryden argues (“City of Dreadful Night” 262). This conflict between the within and the without is notably reflected in the setting of the story.

_The Streets of London_

Stevenson’s novella, like _Dorian Gray_ and _The Beetle_, takes place in London. As the city expanded and changed in the nineteenth century, it increasingly became the usual setting for late-Victorian Gothic literature. Kenneth Womack observes, “Envisioning the world as a dark and spiritually turbulent tableau, the fictions of the late-Victorian gothic often depict the city of London as a corrupt urban landscape characterized by a brooding populace and by its horror-filled streets of terror” (168). The labyrinthine streets, plunged in the dark, made London the perfect setting for tales of terror, especially for one like _Jekyll and Hyde_. Indeed, the duality of the city, signalled in its fancy neighbourhoods and its more dismal quarters, reflects Jekyll’s struggle. In Stevenson’s story, London is not only a setting but a character of its own: “London hummed solemnly all round” (Stevenson 40). Its atmosphere not only creates the ambiance but reinforces the mindset of its characters. Linda Dryden indeed remarks that the “physical city has a multiple personality: its daytime and nighttime faces strongly reinforce the sense of duality” in the narrative (“City of Dreadful Night” 257). London, just like Jekyll, has two faces.

Gail Marshall writes that “the gap between vice and virtue, between the respectable professional and the dissolute Hyde, are as porous as that between the East and West ends” (_Victorian Fiction_ 111). Jekyll’s house is located in a respectable West End square, and is

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21 The Industrial Revolution notably contributed to the changes in the structure of the city, as London and other English centres experienced a rapid urbanisation. The rural landscape also shifted with the introduction of more and more factories and machinery, affecting the economy and lifestyle in the country. The movement of population into urban areas and the increase of immigration also influenced the life in London. For more information, see Jerry White’s _London in the 19th Century_ (2008).
everything expected of a gentleman: clean, respectable, and imposing. It is Jekyll’s mask to maintain a good appearance. Significantly, however, it has a back door “that leads directly into a disreputable, lower-class area” (Luckhurst xxviii). This door does not evidently lead to Jekyll’s house, “for the buildings are so packed together about that court, that it’s hard to say where one ends and another begins” (Stevenson 9). It is hidden, secret, and thus represents Jekyll’s shameful double life. In this way, Jekyll’s house itself stands in between two identities, between the acceptable and the wretched, the good and the shameful.

Luckhurst writes that “this physical split reinforces the division of personality” (xxviii), allowing Jekyll to more easily navigate between his two identities. While Jekyll belongs in the West End, Hyde is a creature of the East End. His “home” is Jekyll’s laboratory, located at the back of the house, a “dingy windowless structure” that invokes a “sense of strangeness” (Stevenson 24). Its back door, through which Hyde travels, leads to the dark streets of London in which Jekyll does not belong. Hyde has his own house in the “dismal quarter of Soho” (22), an uninviting neighbourhood where one would be ashamed to be found. But as Linda Dryden argues, “Hyde belongs there, among the degenerate population who will ask no questions, or turn a blind eye to his activities” (“City of Dreadful Night” 260).

22 Soho, with its “muddy ways, and slatternly passengers,” is “like a district of some city in a nightmare” (Stevenson 22). In Jekyll and Hyde, London mirrors the conflict of the mind that Jekyll suffers, and reflects the anxieties of Victorians through its nightmarish streets and atmosphere. The streets, being public, also represent the menace of external shame.

22 Many studies of the novella refer to the resemblances between the setting of the novella and the murders of Jack the Ripper, which were the sensation in London only two years after the publication of Jekyll and Hyde. The safety of the streets of London was questioned during the scandal. In “City of Dreadful Night: Stevenson’s Gothic London,” Linda Dryden notes that the “vastness and anonymity of the city helped to mask the Ripper’s identity” (256). Indeed, “Hyde embodies the nocturnal threat of Victorian London” (257).
Jekyll’s two identities blend into one another, and Hyde, the monster, invades every aspect of his life, similar to his shame. Just as Jekyll cannot escape Hyde, he cannot escape his shame. The scene where Jekyll falls asleep on a bench in the middle of London and involuntarily wakes up as Hyde in plain daylight shows that the boundary is fractured. The self, which should be distinct, is obscured. The fog that is ever-present in the narrative particularly reinforces the idea of indistinctiveness. According to Roger Luckhurst, London is “a hallucinatory place, never clearly navigable” (xxviii). The fog allows the identities to be blurred, to remain unseen. Moreover, exposure is evaded through the fact that London is both “very solitary” and “very silent” (Stevenson 13) throughout the tale, with its “streets unusually bare of passengers” (35). At the same time, such an indistinct setting allows experiences of shame to linger. As everything remains blurry and unnamed, the experiences cannot be confronted. The fog acts like a mask as shame permeates the air.

Confessing Shame

The importance of writing is undeniable in Stevenson’s novella. Without Jekyll’s confession, the story of Jekyll and Hyde would remain a mystery. As his struggle reaches an end, Jekyll is unable to live with his two identities that pervade one another. J.R. Hammond argues that Jekyll “is not faced with a simple choice between good and evil; he is compelled to accept that either both exist or neither” (125). Having given too much power to his evil nature, Jekyll realizes that his demise is inevitable.

Significantly, he decides to write his tale so that his friends know the truth about what he has done. For a man crippled with shame, it is surprising that his final act is to

23 According to Judith Halberstam, “handwriting, at several points in the narrative, is held up as a witness to identity” (60). It is thus interesting that Jekyll and Hyde’s handwriting are one and the same, reinforcing the fact that while they represent two different beings, perhaps they are not that different.
expose himself. As Joseph Adamson and Hilary Clark remark, “writing is potentially an act of the most dangerous exposure.” They argue that writing “allows for one to hide and reveal oneself at the same time” and “for an intimacy and trust to be established with another or others” (28). This can explain Jekyll’s decision. Intimacy and trust are two things that he has lost because of the consequences of his shame. The creation of Hyde results in his withdrawal from society and his inability to exist in either sphere of his life. Writing his confession, Jekyll attempts to restore what had been destroyed, that is honesty towards his community. Adamson and Clark argue that “the writer seeks, through his or her capacity to communicate, nothing short of the surmounting of shame in its destructive aspects” (29). To expose himself through his confession is to confront his actions and to act upon the morality he has left. He is able to face his shame, expose it in his confession, and to free himself of its weight.

Writing, according to Adamson and Clark, can be “a defiant and even ruthless decision not to turn away or to lie, a courageous and almost shameless will to see and to know that which internal and external sanctions conspire to keep us from looking at and exploring” (29, my emphases).24 Jekyll’s confession confronts both his internal and external shame, because he not only seeks to establish the truth about his internal struggle but also for Hyde to face external shame for what he has done. During his confession, he shuns Hyde like he would another person, as well as acknowledging that Hyde is a part of him. The constant oscillation between his use of “I” and “he” illustrates this idea. His shame of Hyde, however, is never more obvious than when he writes: “He, I say—I cannot

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24 An individual can also use writing to define his own truth or to obscure his confession to his advantage. This is not the case for Jekyll, who uses his confession to admit his culpability and to reveal the truth, but it is certain that writing can be used otherwise. In these other cases, it is rather a refusal to admit the shame, and to further descend into denial – or, perhaps, a sign of shamelessness.
say, I” (Stevenson 63). It is difficult to admit that he is Hyde, insisting that the latter is a separate person: “This, then, is the last time, short of a miracle, that Henry Jekyll can think his own thoughts or see his own face (now how sadly altered!) in the glass” (66). In this passage, Jekyll abandons the part of him that cannot live with shame anymore and allows Hyde to take it over. This act of division reinforces the duality. Jekyll ceases to exist, but Hyde cannot live any longer either. Because of their inter-related nature, the death of Jekyll inevitably means the demise of Hyde, as they are one and the same.

**Conclusion**

*Jekyll and Hyde* is a complex novella because it offers nothing definitive. Like its protagonist, it is fragmented and uncertain. Every boundary is blurred, and what one could take for granted suddenly is not so certain anymore. The conflict between internal and external shame shows that while both impact Henry Jekyll, they are inevitably intertwined, and their coexistence can help better understand the struggles at play. The dynamic between internal and external shame can be summarized as how one sees oneself as a consequence of how others judge that self, as much as how others see one in terms of how one judges oneself. This interchangeable relationship illustrates how internal and external shame are interlinked.

Henry Jekyll, shame-bound because of the rigid conventions he has to respect as a gentleman, desires to embrace his secret pleasures. The creation of Hyde, however, reinforces his internal shame by precipitating a moral degeneration that results in Hyde gaining power over him. If Hyde is at first concealed and controlled, the exposure of his crimes and the external shame to which he is subjected gradually overcome Jekyll. The two blend into one another, and the combination of his internal and external shame becomes too
much to endure. Although he attempts to exorcise his shame through his confession, Jekyll is consumed by it.

In the end, Jekyll is found dead in his laboratory. His death is deemed a suicide, but the story remains, in many ways, unsolved. The fragmentation and dissolution of identities render it difficult to assert if one is dealing with Jekyll or Hyde. Luckhurst argues that the last words of the confession leave “one radically uncertain about who in the end is writing” (xvi). Does the monstrous part of Jekyll crush his soul and lead him to commit suicide? Or does Jekyll’s “good” side vanquish the “bad” and kill it in a moment of clarity to save the last remnants of his morality and dignity? Hyde is not only external, like the Beetle, and not mainly internal, like Dorian’s portrait. Instead, he incarnates the dual nature that exists in each of us, in our desire to be true to ourselves as we find our place in the world.
Conclusion

Emotions can be as nourishing as destructive, and they also relentlessly prove themselves to be as changeable as our very identities. Uncontrollable and permeable, emotions strike deep inside our hearts and can quickly disrupt our entire lives. Shame, in particular, has the capacity to transform and influence us because it is so connected with our desire to belong and to be esteemed. Elspeth Probyn writes that shame “makes us question what we are feeling, the nature of the loss of interest, and fundamentally… who we are, as a reevaluation of the self” (64, my emphasis). It was seen in the three chapters of this thesis that shame often acts as a regulating force in a society, creating an ideal not only for what kind of person one should be, but also who one should want to be. This can be positive, allowing for growth and maturation. However, as demonstrated by the three novels I have studied, it can also be negative, effectively preventing the free expression of the self. It becomes even more problematic in a society where the very notion of identity is questioned, and where everyone is searching for who they are.

As Stephen Pattison notes, “there is no fixed essence of meaning or experience that underlies all usages and instances of the category ‘shame’” (39). Everyone interprets and deals with shame differently, just as it is conjured and produced in a variety of ways. The thesis looked into internal and external shame in particular. Internal shame occurs when an individual feels he has betrayed his expectations of himself, judging his own behaviour as a failure and cultivating feelings of worthlessness. The chapter on Dorian Gray considered how the portrait became a reflection of Dorian’s soul and thus nourished his internal struggle with shame. The shamed individual indeed becomes unable to see beyond his self-denigration. External shame, in contrast, is caused by the evaluation of the self by others.
An exterior gaze judges the individual as incompetent, or as someone who betrays the rules and codes of a group or society. This external shame precipitates a loss of social status or reputation, and often results in rejection. The fear of this loss was studied in the characters of *The Beetle*, who find themselves confronted with a creature that wants to punish them with external shame.

While internal and external shame are not always interdependent, they are not mutually exclusive either. Both influence the individuals’ sense of self-worth and his connection with the world. *Jekyll and Hyde* provides an example of this idea, as Jekyll struggles with both his internal shame and the external shame brought about by his immoral alter ego, Hyde. There are thus multiple ways in which one can experience and feel shame. It is generated by a variety of factors, but it has to be something about which the individual cares. This is at the heart of shame. In the case of *fin de siècle* narratives, one’s identity and sense of belonging in the world is especially crucial.

Despite the fact that shame escapes strict and predictable patterns, the examples of *Dorian Gray*, *The Beetle* and *Jekyll and Hyde* show that shame can sometimes be portrayed similarly. Indeed, it is interesting to realize that all three monsters—Dorian’s portrait, the Beetle, and Edward Hyde—are shameless beings. They entirely disregard the rigid rules of society and live according to their own moral codes. This rejection of conventions is seen as a liberation, especially for Dorian and Jekyll, who find themselves in a situation where they can be authentic to themselves without fear of judgment. This characteristic erupts in response to the *fin de siècle* context, which saw battles between the rigidity of tradition and the appearance of new perspectives and ideologies.

However, it also quickly becomes clear that this shamelessness is equated with degeneration. Both Dorian and Jekyll devolve into monstrous beings, while the Beetle is in
itself an abomination that has no place in society. Therefore, while shamelessness is liberating, it is also synonymous with monstrosity. All three novels depict shamelessness as degenerative and essentially wrong. It is only a lie that always catches up to the villain eventually and ends up destroying them entirely.

In the three narratives, the monster is eliminated while social order and morality are reinstated in their rightful place. Benjamin O’Dell notes that the “death of a ‘toxic’ character in each of these novels’ conclusions allows for the restoration of the social order. The remaining characters, who have no capacity to change, do not feel the repercussions of their actions so much as the reader him or herself, who takes the novel’s lessons … from the page” (519). This is true of The Beetle, in which the social order is re-established for all the characters. The creature, vanquished by male patriarchy, becomes only a bad memory. It is also true of the silence in Dorian Gray, as there is absolutely no trace of Dorian’s struggle with his own shameful portrait. Moreover, despite Jekyll’s confession in Jekyll and Hyde, the protagonist destroys himself in order to rid the world of the immoral and deformed Edward Hyde.

One can thus conclude that despite its radical way of tackling certain issues and anxieties, fin de siècle Gothic narratives are quite conservative. While they are unusual texts, the shameless monster never triumphs but is rather vanquished by the “normal” society. What does that say about shame? If shamelessness is vilified and eradicated, the presence of shame is inevitable. But while possessing some shame can be good, in order to preserve morality and consideration for others, too much shame can be destructive. The three Gothic narratives remain elusive as to what should take the place of shame, and how to transform shame into a positive force. These works, through their characters and motifs, try to find an escape out of the rigid control of shame without really finding a way out.
At the same time, it should be noted that all three novels end on an ambiguous note. What happened to Dorian’s portrait? Is the Beetle really dead? And who is really responsible for Jekyll’s death—himself or Hyde? This elusiveness is characteristic of the Gothic, which exists not to give clear-cut answers but rather to explore those parts of the mind that one is usually too afraid to approach. Robert Mighall remarks that in Gothic narratives, “objects that are veiled, indistinct or in some way ambiguous, and of which ‘none can form clear ideas’, are more likely to arouse terror than those explicitly defined and rendered unambiguous” (185). These classic Gothic endings thus create terror inside each of us, as well as to make us think about ourselves. After all, it was shown in the three preceding chapters that while the monsters are grotesque and dreadful, they are not so different from us. Their lack of shame speaks to our struggle with this same emotion.

Judith Halberstam observes that the “monster always represents the disruption of categories, the destruction of boundaries, and the presence of impurities and so we need monsters and we need to recognize and celebrate our own monstrosities” (27). In between the degenerative shamelessness of the monster and the repressed, chronically shamed human being, there exists a space for the liberation of the self. Everyone has a moral code to follow, as much as everyone is a little monstrous. Perhaps it is exactly in this grey area that we need to look into in order to better understand and relieve our anxieties and difficulties with shame.

This thesis looked in particular at the role and place of shame in fin de siècle Gothic literature. It would be interesting, in further research, to see how shame is manifested in the Gothic fiction of other periods. The end of the Victorian era was particularly prone to shame because of the many changes in society and its stringently conservative nature, but what about a hundred years before? Were the struggles with shame similar, or was it
experienced differently? How were the writers from the eighteenth century translating
shame into their work? Horace Walpole’s *The Castle of Otranto*, published in 1764, is
generally considered to be the first Gothic text. There is thus an entire century to explore in
terms of shameful monsters. Furthermore, it would be interesting to see how the place of
shame evolved after the beginning of the twentieth century. As the Gothic genre evolves,
how is it approached and experienced? To consider these issues with the appearance of the
horror genre in more recent decades would be equally compelling. For instance, how does
the media factor into shame? The role of shame in the Gothic has not been explored much
as of yet, so there is still a great deal to discover. How is Frankenstein similar or different to
Dorian Gray? Or how does Pennywise, the clown from Stephen King’s *It*, measure against
the Beetle? What does the castle in Walpole’s tale tell us about shame that Jekyll’s
laboratory did not? In the spirit of Gothic fiction, we need to explore this darkness.
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