

**“No Fellow Soul or Human Thing”: Influences of the Eugenic Imagination in Horror Fiction of the
*Fin de Siècle***

by

Torre Puckett

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Doctoral Committee:

Professor Petra Kuppers, Chair
Lecturer Gina Brandolino
Professor Emerita June Howard
Assistant Professor Ittai Orr

Torre Puckett

puckettt@umich.edu

ORCID iD: [0009-0000-0786-5590](https://orcid.org/0009-0000-0786-5590)

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Abstract

This dissertation reads anglophone horror fiction from the *fin-de-siècle* alongside the history and theory of eugenics—a pseudoscience that advocates for humans to guide the course of their own evolution through selective reproductive practices. With the goal of furthering the undertheorized intersection between disability and horror studies, I contend that anglophone horror fiction from the 1890s and the rhetoric of eugenics are engaged in similar projects. Both are invested in policing reproductive contact between the idealized human and the undesirable Other (figured by horror fiction as the “monstrous” and by eugenic theory as the “dysgenic,” both of which categories operate as functional placeholders for disability). Both discourses rely on a mix of narratives—for eugenicists, often curated from the findings of spurious research or misinterpretations of more rigorous work to bolster the foregone conclusions of eugenic logic—and affective appeals to infect readers with their own impulse to reject the monstrous-dysgenic. However, the excesses of signification and emotion upon which these rhetorical strategies rely can inadvertently slide sideways into a kind of perverse *appeal*, undermining their project of alienation. The discourses of horror fiction and eugenic rhetoric both provide outlets through which to engage with emotions and beliefs that feel inassimilable in real life: upsetting ones like overwhelming disgust, terror, discriminatory phobias, or fear for the future, but also ones whose seductiveness we would wish to declaim, like the appeal of aberrant sexuality or taboo behavior. Simultaneously, these discourses appeal to readers by offering a sense of control over these

overpowering feelings, the ability to manage them by closing the book or employing the tools of eugenic “science” to take hold of the otherwise uncontrollable human evolutionary future.

Texts under consideration include H. G. Wells’ *The Time Machine* (1895); Arthur Machen’s *The Great God Pan* (1894), “The Novel of the Black Seal” (from *The Three Impostors*, 1895) and “The Shining Pyramid” (1894); Richard Marsh’s *The Beetle* (1897); Robert W. Chambers’ “The Repairer of Reputations” (from *The King in Yellow*, 1895); and Guillermo del Toro’s *The Shape of Water* (2017).

Introduction Story-telling and Story-feeling: Eugenics, Horror, and Disability as Genre

Introduction

In May of 1904, British polymath Francis Galton delivered a paper at a meeting of the Sociological Society held at London University entitled “Eugenics: Its Definition, Scope, and Aims.” The term *eugenics*, coined by Galton in his 1883 monograph *Inquiries Into Human Faculty and Its Development*,¹ is composed of the Greek prefix *eu-* (good, well) and the root word *genos* (born). Drawing on Charles Darwin’s recently published theories of evolution, eugenics promoted practices that would incentivize those considered “well-born” to reproduce plentifully and the “ill-born” to reproduce not at all. In the decades that followed, as eugenics grew in influence in international scientific and public spheres, proposed strategies to promote these desirable behaviors would range from medals, tax breaks, and stipends for prolific eugenic breeders to the involuntary sterilization and incarceration of dysgenic potential parents. The ultimate aim of these selective reproductive practices was, through the course of generations, to improve the evolutionary trajectory of the human race.

Among the respondents at this particular lecture—which was well-attended by intellectual and cultural luminaries—was one Herbert George Wells. By this time, H. G. Wells

¹ While Galton coined the term *eugenics*, the idea that humans may improve their stock through selective breeding choices is likely as old as animal husbandry; they are explicitly articulated in Book V of Plato’s *Republic*, in which Socrates insists the lottery system by which mating pairs are to be selected in their hypothetical Just City must be rigged in secret. “The best men should have sex with the best women as often as possible, whereas for the worst men and the worst women it should be the reverse,” he asserts. “We should bring up the children of the best, but not the children of the worst, if the quality of our herd is to be as high as we can make it” (*Republic*, V, 459d-e). Galton’s own investigations into whether parental qualities impact those of the offspring also long predate *Inquiries*, beginning with “Hereditary Talent and Character” in 1865 and *Hereditary Genius* in 1869.

was already a well-known author thanks to the popularity of the early dark science fiction novels that have subsequently secured his place in the canon (*The Island of Dr. Moreau* [1896], *The War of the Worlds* [1898], and of course *The Time Machine* [1895], the subject of this dissertation's first chapter). This exchange between two of this dissertation's pivotal figures is not a pretty one by the standards of modern academic civility. Wells, like most of Galton's respondents, opens his comments with florid praise of Galton's eminence but quickly assumes an untactfully critical stance:

We can do nothing but congratulate ourselves upon the presence of one of the great founders of sociology here today, and upon the admirable address he has given us ... One does not feel it is the utterance of someone who has retired from active participation in life, but one who remains in contact with and contributing to the main current of thought.

(Galton, "Eugenics" 10)

From such a "congratulation," we can only assume that Wells is surprised to find Galton so intellectually active at his advanced age (81 when this address was delivered). Wells' subsequent remarks largely take the form of a backhanded compliment, praising the day's lecture as a step towards correcting a laundry list of weaknesses in Galton's earlier research: the speech's acknowledgement of different human types, each requiring its own breeding regime, of which Galton's 1901 "Huxley Lecture had no recognition;" acknowledging a variety of eugenic goods, when "Dr. Galton's² inquiries in this direction in the past have always seemed to [Wells] to ignore the consideration of social advantage" in achievements that eugenicists tended to ascribe to innate superiority; even dismissing the term "eugenics" as a mere reformulation of an earlier American term, "stirpiculture," and one that introduces "misleading implications" to boot

² Despite his polymathic accomplishments, Galton was not, and never would become, a doctor of any sort.

(Galton, “Eugenics” 10–11). Galton’s only reply to Wells’ comments (some of which are legitimate, if not very diplomatically worded, critiques) is a snappish reminder that he himself invented the term “eugenics,” offering no explanation for its preferability to “stirpiculture” (Galton, “Eugenics” 24–25). This comment must have particularly piqued Galton’s ire, since Wells is one of the few respondents Galton directly acknowledges in his terse closing comment.

This interaction is a notable one beyond its impolitic nature. It demonstrates that Wells—not a scientist, but an influential writer and public intellectual—had read extensively of Galton’s work and knew it well enough to make a legitimate and thoughtful critique of it. What’s more, Wells’ response makes clear that he did not consider his critiques as disqualifying eugenics as a field, only as advocating for a course reversal that would be necessary if eugenic goals were to be accomplished. In fact, Wells considers more drastic measures than the ones Galton tended to advocate as the only effectual methods at their disposal: just as it is nature’s way to “slay the hindmost” instead of particularly favoring the foremost among any given population, “it is in the sterilization of failures, and not in the selection of successes for breeding, that the possibility of an improvement of the human stock lies” (Galton, “Eugenics” 11). Reading Wells’ response to Galton and, through it, recognizing his level of familiarity with and investment in eugenic ideology, cannot but inform our readings of his novels, and perhaps especially the horrific elements at play in his early writings. These stories examine the boundaries between the human and the subhuman, betray anxiety about how porous humanity may be to monstrous invasion, and reveal a penchant for turning novels into the playground on which Wells worked through the most terrifying implications of the cutting-edge science of his day—all strong indicators that eugenic concerns could have been on his mind as he produced these tales.

Wells' conviction that only more aggressive tactics could achieve desired eugenic results gives voice to the convictions of an incoming generation of eugenicists; such a turn towards negative eugenics would characterize the theories and labors of many Anglo-American eugenicists after Galton's passing in 1911 (Klausen and Bashford 100). By the early to mid-twentieth century, eugenics would become a highly influential school of thought, a cornerstone of progressive social policy advocated by both scientists and the general public. At universities in America and Europe, eugenics and the nascent field of genetics were taught as a single cutting-edge subject. Eugenically informed policies began to appear in lawbooks at the state, local, and even national level; courts passed rulings on cases based upon the testimony of eugenic "experts;" cultural events and products reflected an embrace of eugenic goals amongst not only the scientific but also the general public.

Despite—or because of—its widespread influence, eugenics is an extremely capacious and mobile category. Jay Dolmage describes how eugenics at the "turn of the twentieth-century was very malleable, perhaps because its science was more rhetorical than factual" (Dolmage 138). Consider, for instance, the sharp internal divisions between eugenicists that Alexandra Minna Stern details in *Eugenic Nation*: "Some were beholden to doctrines of free love and anarchism, others believed in state-managed utopias. There were eugenicists who found answers in competing and often clashing doctrines of neo-Lamarckism, Mendelianism, biometrics, and, later, biotypology and population policy" (Stern 208). This diversity of policy and practice led to instability and lack of consensus even around the most fundamental definitions. Was dysgenic status correctable by realignments of behavior, lifestyle, and training? Or was it a biologically determined reality, leaving both the individual and their potential future offspring beyond the reach of intervention (Antebi 6)? The answer to this question was highly situational, exposing

dysgenic status—and among dysgenic categories, I argue, disability in particular—as a contested site of meaning for the discipline, both constructed and reconstructible.

Eugenics' lack of definitional mooring did not prevent the implementation of extreme and unethical legal policies based on its tenets, however. As engagement with eugenic ideology grew more widespread, eugenic approaches “that were initially unspeakable—permanent institutionalization, marriage laws, immigration laws, sterilization laws, and, eventually, even extermination—gradually creep into the discourse as a whispered plausibility” (Sharon Snyder and David Mitchell are thinking particularly of ones affecting disabled people as they write of this phenomenon) (Snyder and Mitchell 119). Once those whispers began, they note, it was only a matter of years before they found their way into real-world practice. The most extreme, but by no means final or anomalous, manifestation of eugenic policy was enacted by the Nazi regime of Germany, whose policies of *Rassenhygiene* resulted in the murder of millions of Jewish, Roma, queer, and disabled people in the name of Aryan racial purity and the strength of the German state. Despite the way that Nazism has assumed an almost synonymous association with eugenics in the popular historical imagination, however, these brutal policies were actually enactments and extensions of laws proposed by *American* eugenicists. They argued vehemently for the legalization of involuntary sterilization to prevent “dysgenic” individuals from reproducing, going so far as to propose and even enable the murder of infants born with disabilities. As the Reich's early eugenic policies were written into law and put into practice, American eugenicists lamented that the Germans were “beating [them] at [their] own game” (*The Eugenics Crusade* 1:36:00-1:36:10).

Narrative, Affect, and Genre

This dissertation examines one of the countless cultural phenomena eugenic thinking interacted with and influenced as the nineteenth century turned to the twentieth: horror fiction. The *fin-de-siècle* represents an inflection point for both horror fiction and eugenic studies. Eugenics was not yet being enacted in the world, but this period between the field's founding and its first practical victories was critical for conducting research (spurious as much of that research would be considered today), raising awareness, and recruiting public support for eugenic theories. This was a time for the first whisperings of atrocity, as Mitchell and Snyder describe, to spread with virulent speed through a public already terrified that their race and civilization had reached their zenith and the future could promise only decline. During the same period, horror fiction was enjoying an explosion of public interest thanks to a confluence of factors, including the ready availability of cheaper publications, an upswing in literacy amongst the lower classes, and the way that revolutions in industry, gender roles, and social stratification unsettled long-held social norms, providing fertile breeding grounds for fictionalized incarnations of these fears. Even after the scandal surrounding Oscar Wilde's sodomy trial subjected "unhealthy" literature to suddenly intensified scrutiny and disrepute, the genre's tropes, structures, and themes continued to solidify, among them an increasingly explicit fascination with the horrors and attractions of intense corporeal experiences like sex and disablement.

This dissertation argues that these two cultural endeavors—one a scientific discourse and the other a popular fictional genre—act on their audiences in similar ways, and that this insight is made particularly apparent when examining their portrayals of disability. Both discourses center on the effort to police the boundaries of an idealized human bodymind by defining and excluding

disability and disabled people; in eugenic theory this undesirable category is labeled “dysgenic” and in horror fiction it is labeled “monstrosity.” While there were other differences that eugenicists considered undesirable, disability was the most mobile and powerful amongst them. This is partly because its definition is particularly expansive and flexible. The category of “disability” as we know it today would have encompassed a multitude of terms from this time period, but due to the increasing medicalization of difference there was a growing tendency to consolidate these differences into a single category in the political, administrative, and socio-cultural spheres. As such, association with any quality that eugenicists speculated to be heritable and regarded as negative (including tendency toward poverty, low intelligence, laziness, etc.) could be met with the same uncontested rejection as disability was, since unlike other dysgenic qualities, its undesirability was uncontested. In the very paper with which I opened this introduction, Galton, while acknowledging the difficulty of reaching a consensus on what defines dysgenic status, argues that there exists “a considerable list of qualities can be easily compiled that nearly every one except ‘cranks’ would take into account when picking out the best specimens of his class. It would include health, energy, ability, manliness and courteous disposition” (Galton, “Eugenics” 37). Of the five qualities listed, the first three are inarguably describing able-bodiedness, and it is hardly a stretch to argue that four or all five may be easily connected to ability. To Galton, these qualities are so obviously desirable that only “cranks” would not list them among the qualities of a “best specimen.”³ Galton was right to suppose that these qualities would be universally rejected by eugenic theorists; in his article on eugenics and genetics, Nils Roll-Hansen writes that amongst eugenicists, “it was hard to agree on general

³ “Cranks” itself is a term possibly implying insanity, suggesting someone would have to be themselves disabled to view disability as an acceptable form of existence.

criteria, except in one area: genetically derived illness and severe disability” (Roll-Hansen 86). Not only did all eugenicists agree that disability was best prevented, but the reasons for this prevention were treated as so self-evident as to require no justification. In a 1922 catalogue of the rationales that American states gave for the implementation of their eugenic laws, only two states out of fourteen furnished any reason for wishing to prevent the birth of disabled children (those two justified their policies by asserting that disabled children, “because of inheritance of inferior or antisocial traits, would probably become a social menace, or a ward of the State”) (Laughlin 100). This preference for able-bodiedness imbedded itself in the very language eugenicists used to describe their most desirable subjects, such as “fit,” “capable, and “able.” Able-bodiedness, then, represented the most basic criterion for eugenic value, excluding from eugenically desirable status all bodies falling short of this ill-defined and elusive standard.

Not only was disability considered self-evident and uncontested grounds for dysgenic classification, but because of this uncontested status, ascriptions of disability were also deployed as a means of justifying the dysgenic status of other groups. Douglas Baynton has famously argued that “the concept of disability has functioned rhetorically to structure thought about social hierarchies in general” (Baynton, “Slaves, Immigrants, and Suffragists” 562). American chattel slavery was justified on the grounds that “the intelligence of African Americans was impaired to such an extent that they were unable to live in freedom on an equal basis with white Americans” (562); women were denied suffrage because of their “frailty, irrationality, and emotional instability” (563); and historically “the exclusion of disabled people was central to the laws and the work of the immigration service” in the United States (565). This history of deploying disability to justify discrimination places disability in a unique position relative to other minoritized statuses: if disability is at the base of other forms of discrimination, disability’s

positive value is treated as fundamentally indefensible in ways that other forms of difference are not. In fact, other minoritized groups have historically combatted their marginalization by distancing themselves from disability, arguing that their differences are not “real” disabilities and therefore not a valid justification for inequality—with the implication being, of course, that disability *is* a valid justification for such treatment (Snyder and Mitchell 17). Disability becomes, as David Mitchell and Sharon Snyder phrase it, “the master trope of human disqualification” (Mitchell and Snyder 3)—to the point that I consider dysgenic status as necessarily falling under the label of “disability” rather than the other way around, as my analyses throughout this dissertation will reflect.

My understanding of the work that both eugenic rhetoric and horror fiction do, in addition to being viewed through the lens of critical disability studies, is triangulated through a cluster of interrelated concepts: *narrative*, *affect*, and *genre*. Leaving genre—which I will argue occurs at the intersection of my other two terms—to the side for the moment, I will first examine narrative and affect. When regarding disability, both fictional and actual, narrative and affect overlap almost to the point of indistinguishability because bodily difference is experienced (primarily but not solely by nondisabled people) as *hyper-affective* and *demanding narrativization*. One consequence of this, as disability scholars like Ria Cheyne and Martha Stoddard Holmes have observed, is that disability is often deployed to intensify the emotional experience that stories create. Holmes observes that “the connection between emotion and impairment has become a kind of cultural shorthand: to indicate or produce emotional excess, add disability” (Holmes 3). This “shorthand” is exploited from everything from commercials to telethons to fiction, “a crutch upon which literary narratives lean for their representational power, disruptive potentiality, and analytical insight” (Mitchell and Snyder 49). The reverse is also true,

however. As Mitchell and Snyder put it in *Narrative Prosthesis*, “disability inaugurates the act of interpretation,” with disabled bodies so burdened with cultural connotations and layers of symbolic nuance that they are experienced by spectators, steeped in these cultural meanings, as inviting readings both practical and figural (Mitchell and Snyder 6). This demand for narrative may proceed from the powerful negative emotions nondisabled people may feel in response to disability—ranging from pity to overwhelm, disorientation to disgust—the same emotions that disability in narrative is deployed to inspire. While Mitchell and Snyder attribute this compulsion towards signification to disability’s unknowability and unruly defiance of idealized standards (Mitchell and Snyder 6), other disability scholars speculate that the intense emotional reactions nondisabled people experience may result from being forced to confront the precarity of their own idealized embodiment. In a chapter exploring “psycho-emotional disablism,” the detrimental psychological impact that living in an ableist world can have on those with disabilities, Donna Reeve details the experience of an interviewee, alias Adinuf (“self-named because he’d ’ad enough”) (Reeve 104). Adinuf’s wife was placed in the position of fielding invasive questions from strangers, all of which ultimately boil down to the question, “what does it [Adinuf’s nerve disorder] do to you?” Reeve interprets this questioning as proceeding from the same fear that causes even friends to cross the street to avoid meeting Adinuf in his wheelchair—the fear of contagion, that such a thing might happen to them (Reeve 104). The demand for narrative, then, comes from an overflow of powerful emotion, just as an overflow of powerful emotions drives and substantiates narrative.

It is this compulsion to *narrate* and to *feel* when confronted with disability that can make this subject position a particularly vulnerable one to suffering real-life consequences of demeaning, one-dimensional, or discriminatory representations in fiction. As Ato Quayson

describes it using his term *aesthetic nervousness*, “the representation of disability has an efficaciousness that ultimately transcends the literary domain and refuses to be assimilated to it” (Quayson 19). When fictionalization, driven by and driving emotional excess, becomes an essential part of the lived encounter with disability, the distinction between representation and reality thins past any practical usefulness as a boundary. Take, for instance, Alison Kafer’s observation from her monograph *Feminist, Queer, Crip* that the science fiction utopias that teach us what a better world should look like are often defined by the absence of disability (Kafer 74). And of course, this blurred boundary between fictionalization and reality not only matters to the participants in the disability encounter, but for scholars engaged in the analysis of such an encounter. As June Howard astutely points out, the social constructivist view of emotions brings them close to the purview of literary studies by positing them as not simply phenomena to be observed, but texts to be read for their origins and effects (Howard 220). Because boundaries between fiction and reality in the disability encounter, and cultural realities and political realities in our society, are already porous, disability representations in fiction matter. They have immediate bearing on the lives of real disabled people—especially those with such intense affective resonance as horror produces—and are therefore critical objects of study.

The final item in my triad of triangulating concepts is what, I argue, occurs at the intersection of narrative and affect: *genre*. I will of course be discussing the horror *genre* in a more pedestrian sense throughout this dissertation, but I am also interested in thinking of genre more expansively. Genre may be understood as the way that certain methods of conveying information (including narrative) produce predictable experiences and feelings (affect); the reader feels that they have engaged with a certain genre when the confluence of narrative and affective response match, at least to a certain extent, with their prior experience of interacting

with that genre. In other words, the union of predictable-because-familiar narratives and the predictable-because-familiar emotional reactions they inspire constitute the reader's experience of, and the writer's execution of, a work of a certain genre. In this, I am informed by a definition of genre proposed by scholars like David R. Russell and Carolyn R. Miller, which understands genre as "ways of recognizing and predicting how certain tools (including vocalizations and inscriptions), in certain typified—typical, reoccurring—conditions, may be used to help participants act together purposefully" (Russell). In other words, genres are pattern systems that structure behaviors or interactions, providing us with an array of possibilities that we might consider reasonable or appropriate for situations within the genre.

This definition of genre understands it in more expansive terms than can be confined to literature, expanding it to encapsulate human interaction generally; to take this one step further, we might consider eugenic rhetoric and horror fiction as linked by the "metagenre" of disability. Building on the definition of genre as a pattern structuring interaction, composition scholar Michael Carter proposes the "metagenre" as uniting methods that transcend disciplinary boundaries, "a structure of similar ways of doing that point to similar ways of writing and knowing" (examples of academic metagenres he proposes include problem solving, empirical inquiry, research from sources, and performance) (Carter 392). In this conception, genre/metagenre structures interpersonal interaction at a fundamental level, "constitut[ing] the scene of action itself as well as, crucially, the actors," who act in prescribed ways because they have been pre-trained to do so by the conventions of the metagenre (Carpenter). Rick Carpenter extends this concept to propose that disability itself might be considered a metagenre. Disability, like other genres and metagenres, is understood and enacted in ways that are both highly proscribed and continually rehearsed, both staging and enacting performances, training its

participants in how to respond even through the act of responding. Critically, Carpenter points out that the reason texts may result in “similar kinds of typified responses” and therefore be fruitful sites of comparison “because the situation—or ‘problem’—is the same for each of these particular texts.” The metagenre was originally formulated by scholars of composition to account for the fact that, across fields, similar situations of idea- or object-generation incite similar behaviors; if disability is identified as a problem in need of solving in the fields of both eugenic theory and horror literature, it stands to reason that the strategies employed to obviate that problem would overleap disciplinary distinctions. I would argue that typified responses in this metagenre’s arsenal include: binaristic thinking, such as in terms of “us versus them” and “normal versus abnormal;” the impulses to emotional excess and demand for narrative already explored above; and an aversion to the difference that disability represents and a desire to reinforce normalcy. Among the metageneric responses associated with disability, this dissertation is of course interested in the impulse to tame or exclude disability with the goal of reinforcing “normalcy,” an activity in which I will argue that both horror fiction and eugenic theory are engaged; however, the metageneric impulse most exposed by the readings I will perform is the twining of narrative with affect, the ways that emotional experience becomes indistinguishable from logical reasoning, the substitution of one for the other so unremarked by author or reader as to render them indistinguishable.

As an added benefit, conceptualizing disability as a metagenre—a structure whose power is diffused across all its participants, powerfully homogenizing but also so tenuous as to be constantly at the point of rupture—is appropriately expansive for a term so unmoored from concrete definition as “disability.” In this dissertation, disability will be understood with a mobility analogous to that which it occupied in eugenic thought, though this mobility will be

constrained by a useful metric I borrow from monster studies scholar Asa Mittman. Recognizing the insufficiency of any list of qualities to encompass the endless refractions of meaning monsters generate, Mittman proposes that we approach the problem backwards and attempt to conceptualize monstrosity “through its *effect*, its impact” (Mittman 6). The totality of disability, too, is perhaps best defined not by what it *is*—whether it is medical or cultural, in the body or society—but by the experiences shared by those living with it and the responses it incites in a society trained to view it as an upsetting deviance from a valorized norm.

Taboo, Control, and Fictional Feelings

I argue that a metageneneric activity in which both eugenic rhetoric and horror fiction are involved is policing the boundaries of the idealized bodymind by evoking negative affects—specifically, both discourses attempt to evoke fear, disgust, and anxiety in response to the violation of “proper” boundaries regarding sexuality, childbearing, and lineage. Eugenics and horror literature both turn what are often the most vulnerable members of our society into the most dangerous by rhetorically deploying fears about their ability to overtake, usurp, and corrupt the normate human body. As horror scholars have long recognized, there is nothing morally neutral about the act of scaring someone; it is a rhetorically charged act, even (or perhaps especially) when the writer professes no motive deeper than providing the reader or viewer a good scare. I contend that sexual threats exist in striking abundance in horror literature not just because sex is vulnerable and a primal field of power. Rather, to draw on Jack Halberstam’s argument that deviant sexuality becomes the “dominant mark of otherness” in the Victorian Gothic (Halberstam 7), I argue that sexuality operates as a site of terror not just because of its perceived perversity, but also because of the fear generated by a villain or monster’s *creative*

capacity. The consequences of sexual violation, of losing control of normative sexual practice—does not always end with the sexual act itself. Rather, deviant heterosexuality threatens a reproductive one that has repercussions for the future of the human race as it is currently understood and constituted: a concern that is, at its heart, eugenic.

The policing of boundaries through the evocation of negative affect, of course, necessitates the existence of a cultural standard that predates the affect-evoking text (in other words, a narrative structuring the affective responses). It is important to point out that this reliance on existing cultural fears for the effectiveness of both genres makes it impossible to disentangle any cause-and-effect relationship between eugenics and horror fiction. For instance, while Wells was a card-carrying member of the Eugenics Education Society (Bland and Hall 215), I have found no proof that any of the other authors represented in this dissertation subscribed to that ideology, at least explicitly or openly. But this does not disqualify the texts I have chosen from being read for eugenic themes; their nature, as well as the preponderance of other texts I could easily have included instead, demonstrates that the concerns eugenicists held about managing reproductive outcomes and the integrity of idealized human bodyminds were deeply present within the cultural zeitgeist, whether that zeitgeist was created by the prominence of eugenic discourse or whether eugenics emerged from the same cultural atmosphere (or, as I think most likely, that the two were co-constitutive). However, while anxiety may be the genesis of these cultural productions, eugenic science and horror literature were, in a tautological leap of logic, taken as confirmation of the validity of the very anxieties that produced them. The way eugenics and horror re-presented the concerns that created them before the minds of their readers were experienced as “confirming” the validity of these anxieties, and thereby augmenting the perceived threat posed by people of color, disabled people, immigrants, the poor, etc. This, in

turn, rendered eugenic imperatives all the more credible—even crucial for the salvation of the human race, or at least the white, male, able-bodied, heterosexual, cisgendered, wealthy sector of it. In other words, the rhetoric employed by eugenicists and the stories told by horror writers are effective partly because of their familiarity, their similarity to existing cultural attitudes and beliefs. They *feel* like truth because they play on notions already confirmed on a variety of cultural fronts. Therefore, the policing of the boundaries between the idealized bodymind and the monstrous-dysgenic is both a proof that a boundary exists and a reinforcement of that boundary, both a litmus test and a vector, intentionally awakening affect that already exists within the reader in order to reap a desired effect within the real world.

This dissertation is about how horror fiction and eugenics have invited us to fall into well-worn grooves of the disability genre, so familiar that it's easy to forget that they are the marks of social wear and tear rather than natural features. For instance, eugenics retains a powerful influence over discourse about parenting, natalism, immigration, and more—who gets to reproduce, who gets to live where, even who gets to be alive. Horror fiction, especially in the form of films and television, continues to climb in popularity, but horror scholarship has neglected to adequately explore disability concerns despite the prominence of tropes of disability and disablement in the genre, a neglect that Ria Cheyne attributes to a troubled relationship with horror's excessive corporeality, which horror scholars have felt the need to distance themselves from in order to legitimate their study of a genre considered so low-brow as to be beneath critical attention (Cheyne 34).⁴ However, this dissertation is by no means a call to abandon the horror

⁴ The avoidance is mutual; scholars of disability have also avoided horror. Cheyne attributes this to 1) perceptions of the genre as lacking rigor and disengaged from the social; 2) “the sheer frequency with which problematic images of disability have appeared in the horror tradition;” 3) the fact that these problematic tropes evade the redemptive readings of disabled characters by which disability studies scholars have carved out a literary lineage for themselves in a hostile canon (Cheyne 30–32).

genre as an irredeemable moral failure or cut off its future progeny. This act of rifling through records of horror's ancestry in order to extract some explanation for present phylogenies or some projection for future catastrophes—essentially, a textual variant of biological determinism—I admit, smacks of the very eugenic practices I denounce in this dissertation. Rather, I issue a call to scholars, fans, and creators of the horror genre to notice and engage with disability more often and substantively and to grow in sensitivity to the genre's troubled entanglement with problematic rhetorics like eugenics. I also attempt to demonstrate what such an engagement might look like. I believe that disability studies has much to offer horror studies, not the least of which is the promise of addressing horror's corporeality—which Cheyne suggests that horror studies struggles to engage with—in sophisticated, creative, and innovative ways (Cheyne 34). This dissertation offers a reframing of horror's problematic treatment of disability that offers similar benefits as Carpenter's conception of disability as a metagenre. If we recognize disability as continually rehearsed in the world and reinforced by that rehearsal, it allows us to recognize “not just *that* disability is a socio-discursive construct” as disability scholars have done since the rise to prominence of the social model of disability in the 1970s. Rather, considering disability as a metagenre allows us to question “*how* and *to what end* that construct is routinely and strategically deployed” both on a macro and a micro scale (Carpenter, emphasis original). It allows us to think of disability as a performance in which we are always already engaged—and that with each new enactment, we have the opportunity to recreate the genre, undermining its tropes to invent new paradigms of how we know, respond to, and inhabit disability.

My metageneric reading of horror fiction and eugenic rhetoric is also sensitive to the reality that no performance occurs twice. Instead, I attend to what Petra Kuppers refers to as the “recombinant pleasures” of genre—the way generic innovation occurs through an iterative

process of “repetitions with a difference” (Kuppers 83). The act of creation is, for Kuppers, a palimpsest that “both denies and makes visible the erasures of history” and a participatory act in which both writers and readers are engaged together, allowing “agentic reclaiming of violent, racist, ableist, misogynist, and homophobic material, adapting them to new ends” (92, 84). The texts under scrutiny here are not merely reproducing either prejudice or fascination, but engaging with their motivating concerns in complex and unique ways. Whether for shock or entertainment value, to revolutionize that genre, or simply due to the contradictions of performance, the morphology of a given genre is subject to a process of evolution, complete with evolutionary throwbacks, atavisms, rapid mutations, genetic drift, and speciation.

The unruliest term in my triangulation, perhaps the very source of the fluidity of genre identified above, is *affect*. Despite the importance of emotional motivators to eugenic “science,” it is unlikely that early eugenicists would have recognized these motivators as emotionally driven or regarded them as impairing their objectivity if they did recognize them. Sara Ahmed notes early in her monograph on the social dimension of emotions that “evolutionary thinking has been crucial to how emotions are understood,” with emotion viewed as inferior to rational reasoning (Ahmed 3). To be emotionally driven, by this logic, is to be underevolved. This construction explains why women and nonwhite people have routinely been charged with being unable to govern their emotions, and why their emotions have been portrayed as unreasonable and even dangerous; by aligning these groups with emotions rather than logic, their social subordination has been justified as proper and civilized, even benevolently paternal. Therefore, while my above argument has shown that eugenic theory is as driven by emotion—hatred motivated by xenophobia, racism, and ableism; fears of degeneration; defensiveness of white supremacy,

patriarchal hegemony, and compulsory able-bodiedness—as by logic, eugenicists could never acknowledge emotions as a driver of their intellectual labor. If they are driven by emotion, especially without recognizing it, they must be underevolved; being underevolved, they become dysgenic. To acknowledge themselves as emotionally driven would therefore be to acknowledge themselves as committing the cardinal sin of their own creed.

Throughout this dissertation, I will frequently critique eugenic methods and ideologies as unscientific, but I wish to make it clear that there is no way eugenics can be undertaken that would make it scientifically valid. Eugenics as a discipline is fundamentally irreconcilable with our modern conception of valid scientific investigation because it is founded on premises that are socially constructed and emotionally felt, supported more by the way they conform to existing discriminatory logics than by the findings of reproducible and impartial research, as we would have our science be today. In pointing out this mindset, and in exploring the silent substitution of emotions for logic in eugenic theory throughout this dissertation, though I do not mean to reify a simplistic hierarchy that prizes logical over emotional reasoning; the dismissal of somatic forms of knowledge has had immeasurable and material impacts on the disabled community throughout its history. The field of eugenics would not have been more valid had their researchers conformed more to logical and “objective” processes; rather, with my argument I critique the bait-and-switch that eugenicists perform by masquerading emotionally-driven argument as logical argument, which they do in order to claim the prestige that Western society bestows upon logical argumentation and not upon the emotional reasoning upon which they were, in fact, relying.

It is also important not to fall into misconceptions that can accompany such critiques of eugenics’ validity as a science, two of which are elaborated by Martin S. Pernick: “that eugenics

was uniquely value-laden, unscientific, and prejudiced; and that any science that is valid and well-intentioned can have nothing in common with eugenics” (Pernick, “Eugenics and Public Health” 1770). Science is performed by human minds, which are rife with prejudice and confirmation bias. This means that our current scientific fields are not exempt from the biases and unscientific practices for which eugenics will be rightly derided in this dissertation, nor are they exempt from the ongoing influence that eugenics retains across a variety of fields. The attempt to place distance between eugenics and sound scientific practice, as Mitchell and Snyder point out, is an unwitting attempt to conceal the extent to which scientific authorities were involved in perpetuating eugenic claims—and, Pernick might add, the extent to which all supposedly impartial science traffics in the marketplace of “commonsense” ideas (Snyder and Mitchell 26).

Another overcorrection we must avoid is focusing on science as the sole driver of eugenic policy. Focusing exclusively on the medical field as antagonistic to disabled citizenship in the eugenics era obscures “heavy reliance on non-medical sources of control to achieve their goals” and also “treats the exclusion of people labeled as disabled as fundamentally different than the exclusion of other populations”(Carey 413). The progress of science and the interests of politics were heavily imbricated with one another (and remain so today, as current debates about climate change, vaccination policies, and pronatalism in the political sphere make abundantly clear). Nor can we allow a dismissive attitude towards eugenics to entrap us into underestimating either the depth or breadth of what was a uniquely “transnational ideology,” especially for its time. Sharon Snyder and David Mitchell’s analysis in *Cultural Locations of Disability* identifies “the transatlantic commerce in restrictive disability measures” as “one of the earliest examples of a cross-cultural scientific discourse,” whose “transatlantic appeal ... would rest primarily on its

ability to offer up the power of classification to a host of professions and cultural administrators rather than hoarding the technology within a disciplinary or national domain (Snyder and Mitchell 121). The tenets of eugenics were easily transferred across disciplinary and national contexts and applied to that discipline or country's specific values and contexts (especially in the anglophone world, which is why I will reference the eugenic ideology of both America and the United Kingdom in this dissertation). The essential fact to recognize is that, in every sphere in which it operated, eugenics' primary aim was propagandistic, aiming to spread itself to as many adherents and as many spheres of influence as possible, and therefore heavily reliant on its ability to emotionally influence its audience despite its claims to describe objective scientific reality.

Horror, on the other hand, is unabashedly and overwhelmingly emotional in nature; its very name is derived from the affective response it seeks to invoke. Horror is intentionally off-putting, gory, insidious, nightmarish, even traumatizing or obscene. This is part of the reason for its perennial dismissal from the category of serious literature; as June Howard points out in her analysis of sentimental literature, some literary-affective experiences are valorized above others, with those represented as inciting superficial or excessive affect more prone to stigmatization (an argument we might expand to scientific-affective experiences) (Howard 218). Yet, as Ria Cheyne argues in her monograph *Disability, Literature, Genre: Representation and Affect in Contemporary Fiction*, genre reading is motivated by the pursuit of a certain affective experience (which, she argues, disability is often deployed to augment or complicate) (Cheyne 2). We choose to engage with horror specifically because we expect and hope to walk away horrified, or at least exhilarated. This raises the question of why its readers choose to rehearse known and accepted cultural lessons in a format crafted specifically to inspire unpleasant emotions.

Eugenics might have commanded engagement and attention through its status as a science, which allowed even its grislier undertakings to be portrayed as a necessary facet of human knowledge production and advancement; but, when knowingly and voluntarily undertaken, there must be *some* pursuit of pleasure motivating engagement with horror fiction. Philosophers and literary scholars have presented many compelling explanations for the delights of upsetting art, including: the purgative sense of catharsis (Destrée 5); the relief of curiosity satisfied (Korsmeyer 46–47); and, compellingly for the way I have thus far situated horror fiction as participating in the rehearsal of socio-cultural norms, the gratification one might derive from feeling that one has reacted in appropriate ways to something distressing (Feagin 98). (This last explanation, posited by philosopher Susan Feagin, is additionally interesting in light of our current argument since it suggests that the pleasure of horror-viewing comes from the *meta-response*, the satisfaction that arises from a reassurance that we are not aberrant beings—the pleasure that we are *normal*, perhaps even nondisabled.)

However, while I believe there are elements of truth to all the explanations listed, they fail to account equally for the undeniable delight in perversity experienced alike by the creators and consumers of horror, a failing Noël Carroll regards as a particular pitfall of horror theory (Carroll 161). While the genre is regarded as a notoriously conservative one (as modern master Stephen King once quipped, as much as “Illinois Republican in a three-piece pinstriped suit”) it is restrictive and incomplete to regard horror as a single-minded enforcer of cultural boundaries (King 368). By explaining or demonstrating in bone-chilling detail the consequences of violating those boundaries, these genres also permit an experience of the taboo that readers can find thrilling and seductive, a vicarious violation that allows us to savor a hint of the forbidden without the weight of guilt or consequence. In her study of eugenics themes in early horror

cinema (an important conceptual forebear for my own study), Angela Smith notes that “classic horrors catered to continuing voyeuristic desires to see disabled and unusual bodies while making the subject matter ‘safer,’ encasing it in overtly fictional and sometimes supernatural narratives” (A. M. Smith 21). For Sara Ahmed in *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, such paradoxical distancing and drawing close is central to the nature of fearful affect. For Ahmed, fear pivots around “relationships of proximity”—fear is the effort to create distance between self and other, or, alternatively, the collapse of distance between an undesirable future event and our present moment (Ahmed 63–65). When we fear something, we are creating a border, establishing a point from which we distance ourselves; for us to distance ourselves, however, we cannot be distant already. Carroll’s *The Philosophy of Horror* is similarly attentive to the contradictions inherent to fear, arguing that we can enjoy the upsetting content of horror because feelings of fascination and fear both tend to “converge on the same type of objects”—specifically, categorical violations as described in Mary Douglas’ *Purity and Danger* (Carroll 191). Even as we recoil, we cannot look away; the bodily impulses are simultaneous, perhaps even a singular reaction.

With this dissertation, I will show that both horror fiction and eugenic theory function not solely as a neat carbon copy of existing cultural norms—though this element is indeed present—but also as a safe or liminal space that allows its interlocutors to make controlled contact with fears and desires that feel overpowering or unacceptable in the real world. Leslie Fiedler argued that fiction holds a unique power that helps us to structure our reality; it “[releases] in us much that we customarily repress; thus making us more aware of, more at home with, certain dark responses to certain of our fellows, attitudes we tend consciously to despise—even to deny” (Fiedler 59). While I find merit in Fiedler’s formulation of myth-making, I would counter that

the unreality of fiction affords readers a freedom *not* to bring home those dark responses if we do not so choose. The following chapters will demonstrate that horror stories, especially those informed by eugenic anxieties around reproduction and disability, permit play with uncomfortable feelings about gender, race, nation, and above all sex and disability—all, I argue, without requiring the reader to properly engage with those feelings. For one, any “fascination can be savored, because the distress in question is not behaviorally pressing,” as Noël Carroll points out; we need not respond, since the threat is mere fiction, and that leaves us free to simply feel the resultant emotions in all their complexity (Carroll 190). More saliently for this analysis, fiction’s unreality allows us to declaim any feelings aroused in response to its content as *also* unreflective of reality; these feelings, felt to be fictional because generated by fiction, do not therefore require confrontation, fixing, or even recognition as one’s own. The fact that so many horror stories culminate in the violent foreclosure of transgressive possibility and punishment for those who have engaged in taboo behaviors can contribute to the readers’ sense that they need take no accountability for any unseemly things they may have felt in the course of the story; they have also participated in the reassertion of the normative and are therefore themselves reinaugurated into normalcy. In a space safely enclosed within the bounds of fiction, the reader or listener may play with fears—even, perhaps, to revel in them—while retaining a sense of control that makes such contact feel safe, nontransgressive, or even empowering.

The perception that the feelings generated by fiction may be safely dismissed by the act of closing a book or clicking a remote control is, of course, fallacious, and in the case of affects generated by horror to a more extreme extent than most. What horror fan (the ambulatory ones at least) has not attempted that maneuver, worthy of an Olympic gymnast, of turning off their bedroom light and vaulting into the safety of their bed in a single motion after an encounter with

a particularly chilling story?⁵ Angela Smith suggests that, in some cases, eugenics relied on fictionalized representations *more* than on direct messaging because coming face-to-face with the brutal realities of the eugenic project could render the public uncomfortable, distancing them from its logics instead of reconciling them to them (16-17). In making this argument she draws on Martin Pernick's reading of eugenic propaganda film *The Black Stork*, which was created to promote the practice of allowing disabled infants to die. Instead, it inadvertently alienated its audience through its sympathetic rendering of the to-be-euthanized baby and his family, which was unintentional, and representation of disabled people, which *was* intentional but ended up repulsing audiences to the point of rejecting the film entirely (Pernick, *The Black Stork* 145). (Note that all reactions Pernick details are emotional ones rather than logical ones, and went on to have affects beyond the scope of eugenic propaganda measures, including on censorship policy and the generic typing of films in order to sway investment decisions.) With such explicit eugenic propaganda rejected as upsetting to the public, it was through monstrous representations—which were larger than life but somehow also more approachable than life—that eugenics gained a stronger foothold in the hearts of the public. Representations that were more overtly fictional gained more sway over people's minds *because* their fictionality left lasting emotional impressions without forcing viewers to engage on a conscious or intellectual level with eugenic atrocities.

⁵ This paradox—the way readers are drawn to a text for the experience of fears or pleasures that can later be safely left behind in the world of fiction, despite the fact of their persistence into reality—is part of why I am drawn to horror above the other affective responses disability is deployed to inspire. To borrow again from Feagin, the “meta-response” to feeling pity and sadness in response to disability may be one of pride in nobility; it might even motivate action, such as a donation to a charity or accommodation assistance. Feeling horror in response, on the other hand, requires the person either to feel, painfully, that their response has been inappropriate or that there is something in the disabled person's body legitimating a visceral rejection response. This reaction is congruent with the response eugenicists desired to elicit in regard to disability, portraying disabled bodies as threatening and therefore more deserving of elimination than assistance.

The role unpleasant affect plays in eugenic rhetoric is not perfectly analogous to the role it plays in horror fiction, of course; this is because, rather than enjoyment, the goal of negative affect in eugenic rhetoric was to impress upon scientists, government officials, and the general public the importance of their claims and goals. Anxiety about the state of human evolution and repulsion toward certain types of human beings are inextricable from eugenics, since these feelings were not only central to recruiting support for their cause but motivated the very formulation of eugenics and its subsequent cultural ascendancy. However, the structuring paradoxes of enjoyment in horror fiction (how horror offers ways to control excessive experiences and manage unassimilable emotions) is also paramount to understanding eugenics. As Phillipa Levine and Alison Bashford astutely describe in their introduction to *The Oxford Handbook of the History of Eugenics*, despite its groundings in discrimination and hatred and the devastating outcomes it incited, eugenics was at its heart optimistic in that it fervently believed that its intervention could correct the many ills it saw at work in the world. To be sure, that optimism was grounded in a profoundly dystopian view of the world which portrayed human evolution as on a collision course with disaster—but it also promised its practitioners control over the outcomes they feared. “There was a power in eugenic promise,” write Levine and Bashford, “—perfectibility, improvement, the benefits that would accrue from rational planning ... it was an active creed, an applied science” (Levine and Bashford 10). So even as eugenics cultivated affects like anxiety, hatred, disgust, and fear—inspiring them, feeding upon them, spreading them—it promised a method of managing circumstances to obviate those emotions rather than confronting the emotions themselves. At the same time, like horror fiction, eugenics was not exempt from a fascination with the perverse and forbidden embodiments and behaviors that it aimed to reject and regulate. There are many examples I might mention, among them the

exhaustive study eugenicists undertook of the sordid realities of the history of “degenerate” families, often amounting more to disseminating faulty questionnaires and plugging into town rumor mills—as the field workers from America’s Eugenics Record Office were trained to do—than performing proper scientific investigations. Classifications of disability, particularly mental/developmental disorders, proliferated under the scrutiny those considered dysgenic underwent in research and institutional settings. In violation of a more universal taboo than voyeurism regarding the lives of the degenerate, eugenics influenced radical changes in the openness with which sex was discussed in British and American society. Eugenicists considered candor on practical matters of sexuality essential to ensure that people (particularly women) were equipped to make intelligent reproductive choices, thereby legitimating the spread of open discourse on such stimulating topics as miscegenation, promiscuity, birth control, nymphomania, even the female orgasm.

This dissertation, then, is an attempt to trace out convoluted relationships not just between horror fiction and eugenic rhetoric, but amidst the paradoxes of power and control, emotion and intellect, storytelling and story-feeling with which these genres wrestle. Horror writers and eugenicists may have infused their works with fearful affects to enforce compliance with social norms, but the affects at play are simply too powerful and complex to contain in such an orderly fashion. Even as these powerful affects overrun us, however, both fiction and rhetoric offer a mode of control that lets us retain a feeling of safety and control at being thus overrun—we can always close the book, turn off the film, do more research, lock away disabled people, sterilize poor people, women, and people of color against their will. The emotions we experience in response to monsters and the dysgenic, however powerful, need not be fixed, rejected, or internalized when we enjoy the promise that their cause can be simply erased from existence.

Chapter Summaries

Each chapter that follows will explore my claims in depth through readings of horror texts from the 1890s alongside eugenic theory and history. The texts under consideration were chosen from amongst a variety of options because of the interesting ways that they take up eugenic concerns, of course, but also for their popularity and/or lasting influence on the producers of horror fiction today. This dissertation is concerned with the current state of the horror genre today, not just in the nineteenth century, and the work yet to be done to heal the problematic nature of its relationship with disability. My readings are also attuned to the ways that information is legitimated, and the varying levels of prestige accorded to logical and emotional reasoning, science and fiction, canon and cult classics. The texts, then, are selected because they carry some form of social currency and influence, though the nature of that influence and the extent to which it is legitimated or denigrated varies.

My first chapter reads H. G. Wells' *The Time Machine*, a text that, I argue, enacts many of the unstable roles that emotionality plays even in the most supposedly logical and scientifically supported aspects of eugenic rhetoric. *The Time Machine* is the horror text most explicitly informed by science included in this dissertation. However, its engagement with Darwinian evolutionary theory demonstrates a hesitancy to embrace the aspects of the theory that expose the hope of human perfectibility as a fragile fiction. Eugenicists also shared this hesitancy, as is demonstrated by the way that the pseudoscience of degeneration theory and Lamarckianism retained influence over their interpretations of Darwin. I go on to read an early version of the novel, published in *The National Observer*, to demonstrate that a deepening engagement with the tropes of horror was central to the novel's development as it progressed

through successive rounds of revision. With the role that fearful and disgusted affects play in the text thus inflated, it more closely mirrors the anxieties that eugenicists felt at the fact that evolution does not promise to propel humanity's development along lines we might recognize as a positive trajectory. It thus enacts in fiction both apocalyptic scenarios and horrified affects that eugenicists were deeply invested in forcing the public to confront; at the same time, Wells and his fellow eugenicists shrunk from fully confronting the implications of their foundational science themselves because these implications did not reconcile with the predetermined goals of the field.

Chapter 2 takes as its subject a handful of short stories by Arthur Machen, all based upon a fairy lore that posits magic as a sort of vestigial organ, and its possession the proof of the underevolved and primitive nature of fairies. All three stories also feature the rape of human women by these sinister and dimly described creatures, drawn from the lore of Machen's native Wales; in two, the hybrid offspring of these unions form the horror upon which the stories pivot. My readings explore how these fairies burst with excesses of signification analogous to those eugenicists ascribed to the dysgenic, with discriminatory representations of race, gender, sexuality, and above all disability all colliding in Machen's representations of fairies and eugenicists' representations of the dysgenic. With meaning thus fluid, *any* sign can be taken for proof of further monstrosity and as justifying further marginalization; marginalization becomes a shifting, multiply intersectional mosaic that ensures an inexhaustible source of justifications for socio-biological inferiority. This chapter also digs intentionally into gaps in Machen's narratives and eugenic theory, tracing out the shape of absences in order to better understand the anxieties and incongruencies motivating these omissions.

The third and final chapter takes up the national character of the eugenic project as conveyed through *The Beetle* and “The Repairer of Reputations.” These stories demonstrate that in eugenic paradigms, it is both highly imperative and terribly precarious to maintain the façade of eugenic status in order to retain the rights of citizenship. Specifically, eugenic status in these stories is tied to the ability to provide for oneself financially and, ideally, to provide for the national welfare. Inimical to this goal are the antagonists, who embody anxieties about both immigrants and the dysgenic hiding in plain sight amongst the existing citizenry; they not only represent a threat to national financial and reproductive prosperity in themselves, but are capable of wrecking the eugenic qualifications of idealized citizens. Furthermore, even for representatives of a genre with a close relationship with camp and cliché, these two texts are also extremely over-the-top. They thus participate overtly in a generic pattern that gives horror its lowbrow reputation but, I argue, also the affective power and lasting impact on readers required to impart the anxieties at their hearts. These infectious anxieties can be easy to discount because of horror’s tendency towards schlock, but horror’s very absurdity coupled with its power over readers’ feelings can leave impressions upon the memory and emotions of readers that are as insidious as they are indelible.

I conclude with a reading of *The Shape of Water*, a modern film that raids the toolbox of some of horror’s most well-worn tropes to create a love story instead—a choice that reveals the constructed nature of the generic patterns that the film rejects. In the process, the film also speaks to the constructed nature of disability with its reveal that the mute protagonist, Elisa Esposito, is not entirely human and therefore not subject to the standards by which humans define disability. It is an irruption from the well-worn patterns of the genre, proof that the “commonsense”

structuring of literary genres—and perhaps, by extension, disability as a metagenre—were only ever artificial after all.

Chapter 1 “The Sunset of Mankind:” On Darwinism and Degeneration in *The Time Machine*

Introduction

H. G. Wells’ *The Time Machine* (1895) remains to this day one of the novels to deal most explicitly with human development as an evolutionary process. In a twist that one contemporary reviewer referred to as “a fine imaginative creation worthy of Swift” (Zangwill 184), Wells presents a vision of the year 802,701 in which humans have degenerated by nearly every conceivable measure of both Wells’ time and our own—stature, strength, intelligence, bravery, compassion, even heartiness of diet and resistance to illness—into frail and frivolous beings who enjoy an idyllic life evacuated of want or fear, but also of all the pleasures of intelligence, vigor, and creativity. It is not until later in the novel that the Time Traveller discovers that, in fact, their idyllic life is not quite so unmarred by fear as he initially thought—humans have (d)evolved not along a single branch, but two, and the frolicsome surface-dwellers (the Eloi) live in terror of their cannibalistic once-kindred (the Morlocks) living in networks of tunnels below the ground.

This chapter is about *The Time Machine*, but it is also about the writings of Charles Darwin, Francis Galton, and Richard L. Dugdale. I will argue that all of the texts read in this chapter, from novels to sociological tracts to scientific monographs, are feats of narrativization. One and all, they are the results of a creative use of proffered facts to piece together a narrative that conforms to the writers’ existing fears, beliefs, and ideals. In the introduction, I identified this overlap and interchange of affective and logical reasoning as characteristic of the *metagenre* of disability, a socially constructed and solid but ever-shifting way of thinking, doing, and self-

positioning in response to disability that spans such disparate genres as horror fiction and eugenic theory.

Through readings of both an early and final form of the novel, I will expose the ways in which *The Time Machine* leverages the discomfort generated by the less palatable claims of evolutionary theory to impart eugenic anxieties to its readers, making horror fiction's affective intensity uniquely qualified to assist in the spread of eugenic ideology. Though the novel undeniably works as a eugenic cautionary tale, I will not go so far as to argue that Wells crafted *The Time Machine* as an *apologia* for the eugenics project.⁶ However, the novel does represent in lurid and horrific terms the possibility (perhaps even probability) that the human future promises only degeneration, and demonstrates the porous and unstable nature of the very category of the human. In so doing, the text impresses its audiences with anxiety regarding the dangers of inaction. More crucially, it also reveals the act of narrativization, driven by personal anxieties and confirmation biases, as essential to all stages of the eugenic project: in theorization, in research, and in garnering support and advocating for the importance of their agendas. In other words, I argue that even as *The Time Machine* attempts to infect readers with the urgency eugenicists felt regarding the need for immediate interventions in the reproductive spheres, it is also possible to trace in the novel their inability to fully embrace Darwinian evolutionary tenets due to their difficulty releasing preconceptions about what humanity ought to become. This selective suspension of supposedly vital narratives when they come into conflict with intense

⁶ Wells' response to Galton's 1904 address to the Sociological Society, already described in the introduction, reveals significant reservations about the current trajectory of the eugenics project—some heartening, some disheartening from an anti-eugenic perspective. Wells was skeptical of Galton's criteria for determining eugenic desirability, pushing back against his simplistic definitions of health and criminality and, as we have seen, advocating for the acknowledgement of different "types", each requiring their own standard of "superiority," and questioning the efficacy of positive eugenic measures (which operated by encouraging the breeding of the "fittest") (Galton, "Eugenics" 10).

emotional responses is not only a paradox at the heart of the conflict between rationality and emotionality in eugenic thought, but in the metagenre of disability more generally.

As such, this chapter is also concerned with the ambivalence with which eugenicists regarded Darwin's work, ostensibly the basis of their "science," and the ways that the pseudoscience of degeneration theory unseats Darwinism time and time again in their thinking. This is not to say that Darwinism is an unimpeachably reasoned science; in *Beasts of the Modern Imagination*, Margot Norris writes that Darwin cannot be considered an empiricist "because what he construes as 'facts' are neither observable phenomena nor demonstrable forces but rather the relations between them" (Norris 36–37). It is in this liminal space between phenomena and forces where narrative lives, where we trace out relations that may or may not exist based on what our personal perspective allows us to see, or what it conceals from us. And though much of the narrative Darwin crafted has come to be regarded as scientific truth, others used this same space to draw more harmful connections and imagine darker futures. Though to an extent far less apparent due to the differences in their professions, eugenicists occupied a similar role in their analyses as Wells did as the author of *The Time Machine*: identifying social rifts that could slip sideways into the realm of the biological, imagining evolutionary worst-case-scenarios in an attempt to prevent them from coming to pass, and using the frightening power of the dire stories they told themselves to convince others of the necessity of the conscious self-direction of human evolution for the sanctity of our species.

Darwinism's Discontents

Margot Norris succinctly explains the tectonic impact of the publication of Charles Darwin's *On the Origins of Species* when she writes, "the philosophical ramifications of

Darwin's theories are so immense that they strike at the most fundamental oppositions at the heart of Western culture: the difference between human and animal, male and female, Nature and culture" (Norris 37). As soon as Darwin's theories were published, both the scientific and general public recognized that they had implications that extended beyond the animal kingdom to lay siege to foundational understandings of the human. Nor did Darwin himself operate under any delusions that the impact of his proposals could be confined to the realm of the animal; in his study of Darwin's scientific-creative process, psychologist Howard E. Gruber argues that "the subject of man and his place in nature ... forms an indispensable part of the network of his [Darwin's] beliefs," not "an afterthought or a separate line of inquiry" (Gruber 10). According to Gruber, Darwin not only thought of humans as subjects of evolutionary change but explained natural selection by with "images drawn from human experience and conduct," personifying nature in order to illustrate his claims in understandable ways (10). A vivid example comes from Darwin's use of the husbandry practiced by humans to illustrate natural selection. Just as "savages so barbarous as never to think of the inherited character of the offspring of their domestic animals" would ensure that a particularly useful animal "would be carefully preserved during famines and other accidents," extending its reproductive opportunities in the bargain, so nature "preserves" some over others when conditions of life grow hostile (39). Setting aside the disparaging language Darwin uses to refer to less technologically advanced civilizations (some of which practiced extremely sophisticated systems of selective breeding), in Gruber's estimation, this comparison is not merely a device Darwin uses to illustrate his theory in a way that softens the enormity of his suggestion for a skeptical public. Rather, it is essential to how *Darwin* came upon the insight, making the human practice of husbandry the epistemological

forebear to the concept of natural selection. The human and the agential, then, has always been an essential element of evolutionary theory.

Readers picked up on these implications immediately upon the publication of *Origin*, and humanity's involvement in the scheme of natural selection soon became a topic of contention among its readership. The most influential thinker to emerge on the topic of human evolution in the years following the publication of *Origin* would turn out to be none other than Darwin's own cousin, Francis Galton. Galton's expansion of Darwin's theory, which already acknowledged human power to direct evolution in the case of domestic animals, was his argument that humans might direct this force *inwards*, towards themselves. Among his many accomplishments, Galton was a statistician, and as Lennard Davis points out, his numerous statistical innovations were largely developed in service of the needs of eugenic science. Working in tandem, these two lifeworks of Galton's helped elevate the concept of normality to new heights of cultural ascendancy, which caused a proportional degradation of the acceptance abnormal bodyminds enjoyed (Davis 30). Galton's most statistically rigorous eugenical research, which would form a basis for all his future theorizing on the topic, appeared in *Hereditary Genius*, published 1869. This book—which is, according to psychologist H. J. Eysenck, the first scientific work to consider intelligence from a hereditarian perspective and foundational to establishing scientific interest in the concept of genius (Eysenck 14)—contained exhaustive statistical analyses of the prevalence of “genius” within the families of “the most illustrious Commanders, men of Literature and of Science, poets, Painters, and Musicians” as well as “a certain selection of Divines and of modern Scholars” (Galton, *Hereditary Genius* 2). While both his selection criteria for these “geniuses” and his evaluative criteria for the exemplarity of their relatives remain vague, Galton believed that his analysis definitively identified a high proportion of eminent

individuals among the families of men of “genius,” thereby establishing it as a heritable quality. Furthermore, the very first page of the introduction translates these findings into a call to action:

“I conclude that each generation has enormous power over the natural gifts of those that follow, and maintain that it is a duty we owe to humanity to investigate the range of that power, and to exercise it in a way that, without being unwise towards ourselves, shall be most advantageous to future inhabitants of the earth.” (Galton, *Hereditary Genius* 1)

Alongside the enthusiasm for the “positive” results that could be achieved from the conscious direction of evolutionary processes came anxiety regarding the stakes of failing to direct those processes—Galton’s “duty we owe to humanity.” However, the imperativeness of immediate and drastic intervention that eugenicists felt regarding the issue of human evolution was matched only by their ignorance on how to go about achieving it. At this time, Darwin and Galton operated only on speculation about the mechanisms of inheritance,⁷ and the data necessary to produce research on human heredity was unavailable. Documentation on family histories and hereditary qualities were extremely poor or nonexistent, and experimental crossing like that Darwin conducted on pigeons was clearly out of the question not only for ethical reasons, but also because of the extreme length of the human generation. Even collecting the data of three generations of humans could extend beyond the scope of a researcher’s professional career, and so few generations would constitute an all-but-useless sample size.

⁷ At this point in time, Gregor Mendel had already conducted his famous experiments with pea plants, which would define the basic laws of heredity; these experiments took place between 1856 and 1863 but would not be elevated to widespread knowledge and acceptance until 1900. Darwin’s theory of inheritance was called *pangenesis*, proposed in volume II of *The Variation of Animals and Plants Under Domestication* (1868). He conjectured that somatic cells or tissues “throw off minute granules which are dispersed throughout the whole system...not only during the adult state, but during each stage of development of every organism” (456-457). This theory accounted for the atavism, or recursion of traits from a distant ancestor, that puzzled Darwin so exceedingly, as well as other as-yet unexplained peculiarities like regeneration of limbs or organs (which depend on the reactivation of reactivation of genetic factors used for initial growth), age-specific or environmentally-influenced traits (which have both a genetic and an epigenetic basis), or the emergence of traits of the opposite gender after damage to the sexual organs (which result from hormonal differences).

In fiction, however, Wells is free to range to a far future, which enables *The Time Machine* to illustrate eugenic principles in a way eugenics itself was not prepared to do, albeit in a speculative format. Unencumbered by the plodding pace of human reproduction to which eugenic scientists were constrained, he can contrast an idealized human specimen of his own time with degenerates hardly better than animals as easily as Darwin can contrast the almost one thousand distinct species of domestic pigeon, all descended from a single ancestor (*Columbia livia*) (“Breeds: From the NPA Standard”). The comparison between the Time Traveller and the Eloi and Morlocks is meant to shock, awakening the reader with vivid clarity to one of the central implications of Darwin’s theories of evolution: that evolution is not a teleological process tending towards greater complexity, higher sophistication, intelligence, abstract or moral thinking, or other qualities we might identify as “goods” from our temporally and socio-culturally situated standards. As Darwin puts it in the introduction to *The Variation of Animals and Plants Under Domestication*, “natural selection would tend to simplify or degrade the organization” in order to qualify “members of a high group...for simpler conditions of life,” “for complicated mechanism for simple actions would be useless or even disadvantageous” to its survival (Darwin, *Variation* 10). If the only standard natural selection recognizes is survival, creatures might develop lower complexity or social tendency if that is what best promotes their fit with their environment. While far from the most controversial of Darwin’s claims, it was perhaps the one that sat most uneasily with the sectors of the scientific community that otherwise embraced the concept of evolution. Eugenicists, who counted among their numbers respected scientific professionals from an array of fields, were well aware that survival is the only value to which natural selection

subscribes, but this conviction motivated them all the more to impose human systems of value over a process that they recognized as crucial to their own racial future but also, terrifyingly for them, lacking in any moral or ideological boundaries. Even in Darwin's own description, the use of the verb "degrade" hints that simplification is an unwelcome evolutionary trajectory, and betrays a hint of distaste (which much of the scientific community shared) for natural selection's neutral regard for complexity and simplicity. The use of this term suggests that even the originator of the theory was not free from the tendency to regard evolution's streamlining tendencies as a lamentable deterioration of more complex, and therefore more sophisticated and more admirable, lifeforms. The evolution of the human race was simply too important to be left to chance, and this affect-driven interpretation of Darwin would become the central rallying cry of the eugenic cause.

A scientist himself who regards the vast vista of the future with a naturalist's eye, the Time Traveller also struggles to escape from the fallacy of imposing human value systems upon impartial natural forces. After his first headlong plunge into the future, the Time Traveller immediately begins to panic upon realizing the "full temerity of [his] voyage" (Wells, *The Time Machine* 19):

"What might not have happened to men? What if cruelty had grown into a common passion? What if in this interval the race had lost its manliness, and had developed into something inhuman, unsympathetic, and overwhelmingly powerful? I might seem some old-world savage animal, only the more dreadful and disgusting for our common likeness—something to be incontinently slain." (Wells, *The Time Machine* 19–20)

It is not until this moment that the Time Traveller recognizes that the transformations that have taken place in this lapse of eight hundred thousand years—with all the vicissitudes in values and morals that would likely have shifted the very definition of an “upward” evolutionary trajectory beyond recognizability to a contemporary man—might not be improvements by his own socio-temporally situated standards. What seems to strike him with even graver worry is the recognition that these transformations might not have been uniformly positive *or* negative; the worst-case scenario he envisions in his panic involves humans who have grown in strength (a largely favorable development by the standards of his period and our own), but who have also grown in cruelty and lost in “manliness.” These latter developments he surely regards as negative not merely because they endanger him, but because they represent to him a degradation from the status humanity possessed when his voyage began. It is not merely the “inhuman” and “unsympathetic” or “overwhelmingly powerful” aspects of future humanity that frightens him, but the *conjunction* of these qualities.

This moment of panic is striking because of the shift that will soon occur when the Time Traveller discovers the inferiority of the Eloi—the childlike surface-dwellers whose stunningly ignorant questions about his arrival make him despair of having “built the Time Machine in vain” (Wells, *The Time Machine* 22)—and the loathsomeness of the subterranean Morlocks—who he refers to, when he first realizes their shared ancestry with the Eloi and himself, as “this bleached, obscene, nocturnal Thing” (38). By every standard, the Time Traveller seems to regard himself as the superior to his distant cousins of the year 802,701, but realizing his own “superiority” does not foreclose the dangerous situation he expected to arise. Rather, it places the Time Traveller in the position he earlier imagined to be occupied by the inhabitants of the future. He himself is the “inhuman, unsympathetic, and overwhelmingly powerful” being between the

two, and instead of fearing that he will be “incontinently slain,” the Time Traveller finds himself in the position (and of the inclination) to do the slaying himself. Though the Morlocks are indeed murderous, their killing is a result of their cannibalistic hungers; the Time Traveller finds in himself a much more “incontinent” killing instinct that springs from his disgust for the new humanity (20). When listening to the Morlocks skitter about in the shadows of the long-abandoned museum, for instance, the Time Traveller reacts with startling ferocity, “long[ing] very much to kill a Morlock or so” (54). Anticipating his listeners’ shock at the brutality of this statement, he immediately adds, “Very inhuman, you may think, to want to go killing one’s own descendants! But it was impossible, somehow, to feel any humanity in the things” (54). The Time Traveller justifies his own “inhuman” urges by insisting on the inhumanity of the Morlocks, attempting to diminish a relationship between the two of them that cannot be denied. The Time Traveller does not actually declaim relationship with the Morlocks—their human origin on a planet devoid of all other animal life is all too apparent—but rather claims that he cannot *feel* any humanity in them. It is as if the Morlocks fall into the uncanny valley which Masahiro Mori famously theorized for the field of robotics, in which a nearer resemblance to humans in fact *decreases* affinity rather than increasing it (Mori 90). Common humanity inspires abhorrence and disgust in the Time Traveller rather than a sense of fellow-feeling or compassion, and thereby becomes rather a *motivator* for intraspecies violence than a *deterrent*. Thus, while the roles in the confrontation that the Time Traveller anticipates change, the power dynamic and the operant value system—which legitimizes the use of lethal force against another creature on the same phylogenetic tree if they turn out to be “old-world savage animals,” rendered only more repulsive by a common humanity—remains (Wells, *The Time Machine* 20).

The fear of inhuman humans is in some ways quite antithetical to Darwinian definitions of evolution, because his formulation unsettles the very notion of a static and definable standard of humanity from which we can fall away. Darwinism recognized the human body as necessarily *inhuman*, bearing (as Darwin concludes in the ominous final line of *The Descent of Man*) “in his bodily frame the indelible stamp of his lowly origins” (Darwin, *Descent of Man* 405). As Margot Norris formulates it, Darwin exposed the fact that the body “was as much a palimpsest as the earth, an irregular, haphazard, and incomplete inscription (and erasure) of its own evolutionary history” (Norris 39). Darwin described the body as teeming with vestigial organs as well as instincts and habits persisting from a bygone ancestor but which have no relevance to the current organism, from the coccyx bone—which Darwin interprets as a vestigial tail and which is far more pronounced in fetuses than in adult humans (*Descent of Man* 29)—to the way humans experience animalistic responses, like the bristling of body hair when frightened or the baring of the teeth when angry, under extreme emotional conditions (Darwin, *Expression of Emotions* 12). Even worse, according to Darwinian theories, it is not only the current human body, but the entire category of “humanity,” that might be irrevocably tainted. In her chapter on Gothic creatures and Darwin, Kelly Hurley muses, “if humans derived from beasts, then they might still be abhuman entities, not yet ‘fully evolved,’ not yet ‘fully human’” (Hurley 56). The goal of a standalone “humanity” unsullied by our primordial beasthood might not only be something we have failed to yet achieve, but something beyond possibility.

In concurrence with Hurley’s analysis, the Morlocks are represented as teeming with resemblances to animal forebears. Wells’ descriptive arsenal for the Morlocks is extremely biodiverse, starting from the very first time Time Traveller notices “some white animal that, in the dim light, [he takes] for a small deer” (Wells, *The Time Machine* 30). The next trace he

notices are some “queer narrow footprints like those [he] could imagine made by a sloth” around where the Time Machine landed (31). On the same page Morlocks are referred to as “queer little ape-like figure[s]” and “human spider[s]” (38); their color is compared to that of preserved worms (42); they are called “ant-like” and “human rats” (50, 59); they are persistently regarded as, not only compared to, animals until the Time Traveller finally realizes their human origins. The animals deployed in simile and metaphor to describe the Morlocks cut through a vast swath of the evolutionary tree—vertebrates and invertebrates; hive animals and pack animals and solitary animals; egg-laying animals and animals that give birth to live young; mammals and insects; annelids and arachnids; Cervidae and rodents and primates and Xenarthra. It is unscientific to suppose that all these creatures could be direct ancestors of the Morlocks (and the humans from which the Morlocks descend). However, using these comparisons deepens the sense of interconnectedness between different forms of life, and demolishes any possibility of easy identification of Morlocks as either human or inhuman.

Perhaps the most interesting comparison of Morlocks to animals is when, upon realizing that the Morlocks too are descendants of man, the Time Traveller refers to the creature as a “Lemur” (Wells, *The Time Machine* 39). This word is rife with implications—the term may refer to the animal, which Darwin considered to be a distant and particularly feeble ancestor of humans (Darwin, *Descent of Man* 202); or to “the spirits of the departed” in Roman mythology (“Lemur, n.”); or possibly even to Lemuria, a proposed lost continent after the style of Atlantis, which was thought to be a possible birthplace for humanity. In 1864 English zoologist Philip Lutley Sclater was attempting to explain the strange composition of the native fauna of Madagascar (which differs markedly from that of the nearest landmass, Africa). He proposed without substantial evidence that Madagascar and the Mascarene Islands were “existing relics of

[a] great continent” stretching between India and the Americas (Sclater 219; Ramaswamy 21–22).⁸ Sclater concludes his essay with the flourish, “I should propose the name Lemuria!” (Sclater 219). In a textbook example of affect-driven narrative taking on scientific credibility, in 1870, German biologist (and future eugenicist) Ernst Haeckel expanded the narrative by seizing upon Lemuria as a possible solution to another zoological conundrum, that this sunken land might contain the fossil record of the intermediate species between man and apes—and the support for Darwin’s argument that humans evolved from lower primates—that were so conspicuously missing in his own time period (DeCamp 52). Haeckel’s proposal in *Natürliche Schöpfungsgeschichte* (*The History of Creation*) that Lemuria might represent the cradle of human evolution cemented Lemuria into the public imagination (Haeckel 376). Though dozens of “lost continents” were proposed as catchalls for zoological and botanical realities science could not (or could not yet) explain, Haeckel elevated Lemuria to a cultural status by wedding it to the destabilized myth of human origins, attempting to create a scientific alternative to the “Paradise” we lost when Darwinian evolution replaced God as our creator in the scientific and public imagination (Ramaswamy 36). Therefore, by calling a Morlock a Lemur, in a single word Wells calls up three distinct connotations, all pointing to different visions of human ancestry—the ghosts of our departed forebears, an animal swinging through the branches of our phylogenetic tree, and the supposed sunken land of human origin. All three of these definitions of the word “lemur” suggest a connection between Wells’ Morlocks and human *ancestry*, rather than human *offspring*, implying that the progress of humans in the future is in fact a tumble backwards towards their past.

⁸ Sclater was not the first to theorize the existence of a sunken continent in the Indian ocean; several scientists from various nations had adopted this as an explanation for the strange distribution of plants and animals between these continents, including a seminal scholar of monstrosity, Geoffrey St. Hillaire (Ramaswamy 22).

Degenerates of the Future

My reading of the Morlocks (and the Eloi, though to a less sinister extent) as animals is hardly necessary for readers to recognize that Wells' future humanity is portrayed as *devolved* rather than *evolved* from the humans of the nineteenth century. This implication of evolutionary regression or atavism exposes the connection to another contemporaneous social theory, closely related to that of eugenics, that influenced Wells: degeneration theory. Degeneration theory, like eugenics, was concerned for the future of humanity and insisted on immediate interventions to prevent the degradation of the human race; both recognized the category of the human as not only tainted by past animality but also unstable in its current form. While it differed from eugenics in some critical respects, these differences were often almost indistinguishable in practice and the considerable gray areas between the two disciplines tended to blur even for the theorists and practitioners of each respective field. The complex imbrications of eugenic theory and degeneration theory demonstrate the difficulty of defining eugenics as a field or discourse when it was so overwhelmingly indebted to and intertwined with other, related fields and discourses; in many ways, eugenics merely offered a seemingly rational substantiation to the existing cultural fears degeneration theory represented. With several discourses available to them through this semipermeable disciplinary boundary, eugenicists drew easily and unremarked upon whichever narrative best substantiated their preexisting affective convictions about undesirable bodyminds, a slippage characteristic of the metagenre of disability. Eugenics was therefore not the impartial scientific discourse it claimed to be, but rather a product of a society already afraid that the golden age of human civilization had come and gone, and that all the future could promise was decline.

This fear is illustrated in the most famous tract on degeneration, where German thinker Max Nordau writes of the *fin-de-siècle* spirit in terms that call to mind nothing so much as a Biblical—or Wellsian—apocalypse:

“One epoch of history is unmistakably in its decline, and another is announcing its approach. There is a sound of rending in every tradition, and it is as though the morrow would not link itself with to-day. Things as they are totter and plunge, and they are suffered to reel and fall, because man is weary, and there is no faith that it is worth an effort to up hold them ... Meanwhile interregnum in all its terrors prevails; there is confusion among the powers that be; the million, robbed of its leaders, knows not where to turn; the strong work their will; false prophets arise, and dominion is divided amongst those whose rod is the heavier because their time is short ... Such is the spectacle presented by the doings of men in the reddened light of the Dusk of the Nations.”

(Nordau 5–6)

In *The Time Machine* Wells repeatedly refers to the year 802,701 as the “sunset of mankind,” even titling a chapter with this epithet; but in the year 1892,⁹ Nordau was already anticipating a “Dusk of the Nations” brought on by the collapse of tradition, faith, and compassion throughout the Western world. The most obvious distinction between eugenics and degeneration theory is that the former relies more heavily on Darwinian evolution, which took place slowly and mostly at the level of population, but the latter is much more indebted to earlier Lamarckian concepts of evolution, which considered evolution as occurring more rapidly and at the juncture of the parent/child relationship. This theory, pioneered by French zoologist Jean-Baptiste Lamarck,

⁹ While the German volumes were published over the course of 1892-93, the English translation of *Degeneration* appeared in the same year (1895) and from the same press (William Heinemann) as did *The Time Machine*.

suggested that traits acquired during the lifetime of a parent influenced the physical nature of the child (which has since been found to be correct to a certain extent, though his application of the theory extends beyond what would be supported by the findings of modern epigenetics). For example, if a man fathered a child, gained significant muscle mass, and then fathered another child, Lamarckian theory would hold that the second child would be more muscular than the first due to the acquired changes in its father's physique between the first and second conception. This example is a positive one, but degeneration theorists were far more concerned with the inverse, cautioning the public that degenerate moral habits could cause children to be born frail, weak of will, and with propensities towards the same (and worse) destructive indulgences that their parents practiced. Dangerous habits that could be inherited by children included deviant sexual behaviors like homosexuality, masturbation, or promiscuity and the abuse of substances like alcohol and drugs. What's more, this degradation could be brought on by single instances of indulgent behavior, not just entirely degenerate lifestyles—degeneration theorist Cesare Lombroso writes in *The Man of Genius* that “even habitually sober parents” may conceive children who are “epileptic or paralytic, idiotic or insane, often microcephalic, or with remarkable weakness of mind which at the first favorable occasion is transformed into insanity” if they conceive them in a state of drunkenness (Lombroso, *The Man of Genius* 144). Therefore, because “a single embrace, given in a moment of drunkenness, may be fatal to an entire generation,” every individual had to be constantly vigilant against slips in order to defend the integrity of the coming generation (144).

Unlike eugenicists, degenerationists seemed to have relatively little time or hope to devote to establishing a positive trajectory for human evolution; rather, their efforts were focused on preventing what they saw as the immanent decline of Western man. In Darwinian terms as

defined in *The Variation of Animals and Plants Under Domestication*, “atavism” refers to the “tendency in the child to resemble its grand-parents or more remote ancestors instead of its immediate parents” (473). Degeneration theorists, on the other hand, used the term “atavism” to portray the decline they perceived in general human quality as a form of evolutionary backsliding. In a memorable moment of “Illustrative Studies in Criminal Anthropology,” Italian criminologist and degeneration theorist Cesare Lombroso describes the testimony of a criminal who claims that extensive tattooing “is for us thieves what the black dress coat and the decorated vest is for the rest of society,” and details how prostitutes *offer* money instead of demanding it when heavily tattooed criminals visit them (an ethnographic finding of questionable credibility indeed!). A scandalized Lombroso sums this account up by writing, “if all that is not atavism, atavism does not exist in science” (Lombroso, “Illustrative Studies in Criminal Anthropology” 195). This is clearly a quite different definition than the one we find in Darwin, far more concerned with what we would today recognize as socially inscribed preferences and behaviors, and far more liable to diagnose these preferences and behaviors as signals that cancerous underclasses and ideologies were infecting society.

Even our time-traveling guide in the year 802,701 is not immune to succumbing to baser instincts of his own, particularly in regard to Weena, an Eloi that the Time Traveller rescues from drowning and who subsequently becomes a human pet or minor love interest to him. It is unclear what form the Time Traveller’s tenderness towards Weena takes due to her highly infantilized portrayal on one hand, and her insistent feminization on the other. The evidence seems ambivalent, with several of the forms of attention she lavishes on the Time Traveller after he saves her from drowning legible as either romantic or filial demonstrations: kissing his hands, presenting him with flowers, and following him everywhere as often as he allows (Wells, *The*

Time Machine 35). In two separate descriptions within the space of a few lines when introducing Weena, the Time Traveller describes her as “exactly like a child” and states that her “friendliness [affects him] exactly as a child’s might” (35). A few lines later, he even refers to her as a “little doll of a creature,” referring to her with two terms (“doll” and “creature”) that demote her below human status to that of a coddled plaything or pet (36). However, the connection between them has erotic resonances as well: the Time Traveller (disparagingly) refers to their relationship as a “miniature flirtation,” sleeps with her head pillowed on his arm, and describes Weena insistently as female throughout the text despite significant indications that he is uncertain of her gender, as though attempting to render the depth of their relationship appropriate (either to readers or to himself) by assigning her the opposite gender from his own (36). Yet he cannot be certain of his assignation because by the year 802,701, ready marks distinguishing biological male from female have disappeared, leaving all the Eloi with a “hairless visage” and “girlish rotundity of limb” (36). This leveling of gender differences has skewed distinctly towards the feminine and the juvenile, leaving the ascription of the female gender to Weena highly suspect. The Time Traveller even admits to his uncertainty, referring to her as “my little woman, as I believe it was” (35); this uncertainty, however, is immediately discarded and he proceeds to refer to Weena with feminine terms and pronouns for the rest of the novel.

This unstable signifier of a character forms what the Time Traveller would surely regard as an inappropriate romantic interest by one catalog of her possible embodiments (male/nonbinary, child, nonhuman), but generically conventional almost to the point of stereotype on the other (the damsel in distress rescued by the hero upon his advent to a new world who subsequently devotes herself to him with idolatrous adoration). It is impossible to disentangle either what the Time Traveller feels for her or the extent to which that feeling is a

subversive one by the metrics of his own time, and that unmoored meaning sends ripples throughout the text. If an Eloi might present an acceptable love interest (as subsequent filmic adaptations of the Time Machine have heartily concurred, though Weena is almost always represented as recognizably feminine, human, and with a stature and intelligence that much more closely approximates that of a woman of our own evolutionary plane), it might imply an acceptance of mutual humanity that undermines the inhumanity thus far ascribed to the creatures—perhaps even including the Morlocks. It also might imply that the cannibal Morlocks not the sole taboo-breakers in the year 802,701, since the Time Traveller could be contemplating or engaging in a relationship that the moral standards of his own day would consider multiply perverse: simultaneously queer, pedophilic, and bestial. What does it say about the Time Traveller, apparently an unparalleled eugenic specimen due to his genius in inventing the time machine, that his sexual proclivities draw him towards such a dysgenic partner? Just as the most sympathetic and appealing character in the year 801,702 is characterized as inescapably dysgenic, however, even those inhabitants of the future that Wells casts as the most inhuman reflect apparently *eugenic* aspects of the humanity of the Time Traveller's native era. Even as the Time Traveller uses animalistic language to reject association between himself and the Morlocks, for instance, readers are never permitted to forget the congruencies between the Morlocks and themselves. Kelly Hurley suggests that the Morlocks represent “exemplary Victorians”: “they are intelligent, shrewd, and industrious; they operate complex machinery; they are actively employed in the production of useful goods ... they are energetically masculine, like the Time Traveller himself ... and finally, they are *white*” (87, emphasis original). Hurley may not have in mind the working-class origins of the Morlocks when she argues that they are comparable to an idealized Victorian; but it is a compelling suggestion that some the qualities

most idealized by *The Time Machine* are simultaneously represented as particularly susceptible to the backslide into inhumanity that the novel stages to such shuddersome effect. As mentioned early in this chapter, it is not an adversary composed of purely negative qualities that most horrifies the Time Traveller, but one in which he can see reflected some of his own most eugenic traits.

The “miniature flirtation” with Weena and the Morlock’s perversion of valued qualities of Victorian industry is a prime example of horror fiction’s lurid gloating over the very taboos it rejects and forecloses. Just as we are invited to linger with horrified fascination over the thought of the Morlock’s feasting on human(-ish) blood, our uncertainty of Weena’s place in the tale invites us to revisit to its contemplation every time we read, to remain in a place of uncertainty about what their relationship might be while Wells remains safely noncommittal on that count. The fact that she dies, either in a fire inadvertently set by the Time Traveller’s own hands or the horde of Morlocks swarming through that fire, safely obviates the need for any clarity on the matter. Since she is already gone, we never get to witness any agonizing the Time Traveller may have done over how/whether to leave her behind when he returns to his native past, neatly foreclosing the question of what form their relationship might take in the long term or in the Time Traveller’s own period. Readers may enjoy the dreadful suggestions of an Eloi romantic/sexual partner or a non-monstrous Morlock without the pangs of conscience, since that prospect is safely sealed away by death and the turn of the Time Machine’s lever.

Class, Nature versus Nurture, and Selective Narrativization

As the above readings of degeneration theory have begun to imply, the influences of modern society and heightening civilization were considered to be imbricated in the decline of

human quality. In a brief opinion piece entitled “Human Evolution, an Artificial Process” that appeared in the 1896 edition of *The Fortnightly Review*, Wells argues that “the evolutionary process now operating in the social body is one essentially different from that which has differentiated species in the past and raised man to his ascendancy among the animals” (Wells, “Human Evolution” 590). He asserts that the human race has persisted, largely unchanged, since the Paleolithic period and is likely to remain that way “for (humanly speaking) a vast period of time” (590). This is because civilization (as opposed to the epoch of early, primitive/savage humanity) is characterized by “careful preservation of all the human lives that are born into it—the halt, the blind, the deaf and dumb, the ferocious, the atavistic” (592). The artificial preservation of lives that nature might have pruned away, and the greater opportunity for these individuals to breed, perpetuates their traits into the species and prevents natural selection from causing significant alterations.¹⁰ By this, Wells points out that “civilisation—any form of civilisation—alters the qualifications of fitness” (110). Wells’ argument here aims at the difficulty of parsing the respective influence of nature and nurture on life outcomes. His analysis, while extreme in its articulation, is right to acknowledge the social character of survivability and reproductive access in human society—but it undersells the reality that the social narratives surrounding reproduction, not just the innovations of civilized society, alter the qualifications needed for survival and make it harder for some (particularly racialized or disabled bodies, as well as persecuted gender, sexual, religious, and social minorities) to survive and reproduce than others. The preservation of human life in “civilized” society is not as evenly distributed as Wells’ essay might imply.

¹⁰ The list of “preserved” human lives Wells provides is compelling, for it includes both types that would have been placed at a special disadvantage in more “primitive” societies in which the threat of violent death is more common (“the halt, the blind, the deaf and dumb”) and types that are disadvantaged by “civilized” life—one can only imagine that “the ferocious” and “the atavistic” would have fared quite well in “primitive” society.

Not only is biological survivability influenced by dominant social narratives, but the distinction between nature and nurture itself is often a matter of interpretation, and one that eugenicists were prone to interpret in favor of nature. This is partly because the tools to improve the human race that they considered most available and efficacious were biological ones, influencing reproduction, rather than social hygiene or policy measures that would alleviate inequality and improve quality of life for the already-living (this is the case in Anglophone eugenic circles, though other national eugenics, like those of South America, emphasized hygiene measures more heavily). To demonstrate this, I will consider the famous case of the Juke family. This family (whose name is a pseudonym meant to protect their anonymity as well as to conveniently refer to a family whose members span across several surnames) would become the subject of one of the first and the most enduringly famous sustained analyses of a single family line, a genre which proliferated due to eugenic interest in compiling the records of family histories to help them determine eugenic or dysgenic status. The Jukes first came to the attention of American merchant and carceral reformer Richard L. Dugdale in July of 1874 while he was conducting a tour of thirteen New York county jails (Dugdale 3, 7). In one of these prisons, he encountered six prisoners or detainees whom he found were all of the same family, and upon further inquiry found that “out of twenty-nine males, in ages ranging from fifteen to seventy-five, the immediate blood relations of these six persons, seventeen were criminals, or fifty-eight per cent” (8). Dugdale traces the family line through six generations, conducting a statistical analysis of the prevalence of “harlotry,” criminality, and pauperism¹¹ among these generations and using it to draw various conclusions about the relative influence of environment and heredity on these

¹¹ Dugdale uses the word “harlot” to refer to women “who have made lapses through imprudence or even passion” and “prostitute” to refer to “the professional debauchee” (18). He appears to identify paupers by whether or not they have sought relief at the public alms-house (28, 30) and criminals by an official record of felonies or misdemeanors (41).

outcomes. He collected his findings into a book entitled *The Jukes: A Study in Crime, Pauperism, Disease, and Heredity*, which became extremely popular and influential—first published in 1877, it went through seven editions by 1902. This text is not itself explicitly eugenicist; in fact, it actually advocates for greater acknowledgement of the social conditions leading to crime and reform to mitigate the influence of these conditions. However, it is remembered in association with the eugenics movement because it was eagerly taken up by eugenicists as proof of the necessity of preventing such “dysgenic” families from continuing to multiply—a 1911 review of the fourth edition of *The Jukes* published in *The Eugenics Review* refers to this book as practically required reading for the field (“Review of The Jukes” 180).

Because of the fervor with which eugenicists hailed *The Jukes* as an example of the family records whose nonexistence they so lamented, it is interesting to note the crucial role that narrativization plays in its findings. I do not only refer to the process of superimposing a narrative over collected data; *The Jukes* specifically exposes the mere act of defining a “lineage” or “family” for analysis as a manipulable act of narrativization. Dugdale selects as the progenitor of the Juke line a man he names “Max” (another pseudonym). Max lacks obvious qualifications as a patriarch, as he is neither the first of his lineage to settle on US soil nor in any particular town. Dugdale proceeds after very cursory description of Max’s life to two of Max’s sons and their marriages, to two of six sisters. For the rest of the text Dugdale defines the lineages he follows in *matriarchal* fashion, defining each line and each individual by their maternal ancestor. Even more strikingly, he focuses his analysis not just on the two sisters married to Max Juke’s sons but all five sisters who left descendants Dugdale could trace (pseudonyms “Ada,” “Belle,” “Clara,” “Delia,” and “Effie,” corresponding to the first five letters of the alphabet) (15). Three out of the five individuals upon which center the analysis Dugdale ultimately presents, then, have

no blood or marital relation to the “Juke” family at all. Further complicating the already splintered notion of a family tree in Dugdale’s analysis, illegitimacy is so rampant among the families he analyzes that paternity becomes an extremely muddled concept, even for married women, many of whom enter into the married state with illegitimate children, the result of their previous “harlotry,” in tow (15). Max Juke and his sons seem to be introduced mostly as a nod to patriarchal accountings of lineage, but Dugdale clearly finds it easier or more fruitful for his analysis to trace the lines by the mothers. A matriarchal focus, in fact, seems much more congruent with his stated goal of disentangling the respective influences of nature and nurture, since the mother is both the parent whose blood relation to their children can be most confidently determined and the primary caregiver to their children—and therefore the greatest determiner of their environmental situation—in this (and our) time period. The fact that Dugdale retains the (albeit pseudonymous) Juke family name as the center of his constellation of evidence despite his clear preference for the matriarchal demonstrates the pivotal role that interpretation and narrativization play in that most basic practice of eugenic classification: the act of defining a lineage.

The sensation surrounding *The Jukes* (and its inclusion in this dissertation) resulted from the prominence of a eugenic interpretation of the text, which took significant liberties that Dugdale did not intend for his book and explicitly wrote against. Too cautious a scholar to draw conclusions from scanty evidence, Dugdale ultimately gives up disentangling the respective power of nature and nurture as an impossible conundrum, and instead recognizes their mutually constructive nature, writing, “where there is heredity of any characteristic, it would seem there is a tendency, and it might almost be said, a certainty to produce an environment for the next generation corresponding to that heredity, with the effect of perpetuating it” (55). However, the

prefatory materials to the fourth edition clearly reveal the gulf between the content of Dugdale's text and the narratives that interested parties would extract from it. Franklin H. Giddings, a professor of sociology at Columbia University, writes correctly that "an impression quite generally prevails that 'The Jukes' [*sic*] is a thorough-going demonstration of 'hereditary criminality,' 'hereditary pauperism,' 'hereditary degeneracy,' and so on. It is nothing of the kind, and its author never made such claim for it" (Giddings iii-iv). However, just a few pages after Giddings' attempts to correct this misconception about Dugdale's text, Elisha Harris uses the forward to reiterate it, writing that "habitual criminals spring almost exclusively from degenerating stocks" (Harris 3). He uses language to describe criminals that alienates them from other citizens, sensationalizes their threat, and raises doubts as to the possibility of reform, calling criminals "dangerous classes" and "ruined generations" (4). This is doubly remarkable since Elisha Harris writes as the Corresponding Secretary of the Prison Association of New York, which Sandra Opdycke refers to as "an organization of private citizens interested in corrections reform" (Opdycke). In fact, Dugdale himself occupied the role Harris writes from, and is credited on the title page of *The Jukes* with the title. Harris, rather than demonstrating the caution and compassion Dugdale brought to the role, seems to side more closely with the preventionist stance that characterizes eugenic thought, calling "correctional discipline" "vastly more expensive and unsatisfactory than the application of preventative measures would be" (3).

This position echoes one evinced by the author of the above-cited review of *The Jukes* from *The Eugenics Review*: "But even granted, which we are far from willing to do, that Mr. Dugdale is right [about the relative influence of environment in life outcomes], we would ask the pertinent and practical question is [*sic*] such a troublesome and difficult reformation worth the trouble; would it not be wiser to breed from better stocks and save all this energy?" ("Review of

the Jukes” 179). Not only does this analysis evince serious skepticism of Dugdale’s environmentalist stance, but, incredibly, dismisses its import even if true. Biological prevention measures (such as sterilization and segregation¹² of those considered unfit for reproduction) are presented as less “troublesome,” less costly of time and energy, and the ethical ramifications to such interventions are not considered. *The Jukes*, which became a major force for eugenic policy, was in fact not eugenic enough for the author of this review. The position evinced by Harris and the writer of the review in *The Eugenics Review* is congruent with the general eugenic stance towards class, which regarded class as heritable not only in a legal and practical sense, but in a sense that verges on the biological. Some thinkers merely *treated* class as if it were intrinsic and heritable, but others explicitly argued that it was. In his earliest writings on eugenics, Galton actually names class as a heritable quality, including “proclivity to pauperism” among a list of hereditary vices (Galton, “Hereditary Talent” 320), and while eugenicists often paid lip service to the idea that no class had a monopoly on biological fitness, they had little doubt that the truly fit or unfit would find their way to the classes which reflected their biological desert, making class a reliable marker of eugenic status after all (Soloway 74). As the review of the Jukes demonstrates, the disregard of the social in favor of biological determinist understandings of life outcomes was especially visible in regard to what solutions eugenicists were willing to pursue. While social reformers (including Dugdale) sought to prevent poverty through social change, eugenicists sought to alleviate the “social burden” of the poor by curtailing their breeding, tackling an essentially social problem with a biological solution.

¹² The term “segregation” is not used here in the more common sense of separating certain groups, usually along racial lines, in ways that are primarily social and which demand the acquiescence of the groups in question (no matter how unwillingly given or how motivated by fear of punishment). In eugenic terms, segregation entailed incarcerating the dysgenic individual in prison or a mental health institution against their will, separating them physically as well as socially from the possibility of reproducing and perpetuating their undesirable genetic material.

The Time Machine reflects the eugenic narrative that regarded class status and reproductive desirability as related, if not interchangeable, as well as calling to mind the arguments from “Human Evolution, An Artificial Process” (as indeed, we are invited to do, since Wells is credited on this piece as “Author of *The Time Machine*, *The Wonderful Visit*,¹³ &c., &c.”) (595). The Time Traveller explicitly speculates that the evolutionary disjoint between the two species may have social origins. His explanation (which he confesses “may be entirely wrong” but which he considers to be “the most plausible one” at the time of telling his story) considers the bifurcated evolutionary trajectory to be the result of “the gradual widening of the merely temporary and social difference between the Capitalist and the Labourer” (Wells, *The Time Machine* 40). Over the course of years, the physical and reproductive isolation of the two groups caused them to diverge into two breeding pools, each evolving in their own direction: the leisured upper class turned into the “hectically” beautiful, frolicsome surface-dwelling Eloi, and the indentured working class living underground became the bleached and light-blind Morlocks. In *The Time Machine*, then, as in Dugdale’s conclusions about the Jukes, social conditions become ones that alter heredity, and heritable differences perpetuate social conditions tending towards the same outcomes.

Critically, the changes that have made two separate species of the human race in the year 801,702 are rooted in social realities already existing in the Time Traveller’s native period, and those social realities were ones that eugenicists were deeply concerned about. British eugenic thinking (with which Wells would have been most familiar) in particular was interested in eugenics as an answer to a social problem with which they had already long been concerned: the

¹³ *The Wonderful Visit* is another novel by Wells published in 1895, detailing the misadventures of an “angel” attempting to navigate life in Victorian England.

plight of the urban poor. Pauline Mazumdar has argued that “in particular, British eugenics was to concentrate on applying the laws of inheritance to the social problems of poverty and pauperism,” and that this distinct national character grew out of a Victorian passion for social reform (Mazumdar 7). Part of this attention to the lower classes sprung from the eugenic conviction that the dysgenic were more proficient breeders than the eugenic, and therefore highly likely to proliferate “hereditary” vice and poverty; as such, the lower classes were prime targets for reproductive management interventions (Galton, *Inquiries* 207).

Also among eugenicists’ class-based concerns was the worry that over-breeding could weaken the germ plasm (their term for genetic material) of desirable stock. This was not the degenerationist concern that formerly desirable breeders would become degraded through careless living, but a concern that selective breeding could unintentionally result in a “delicacy of constitution” that would increase to the point of frailty, as in the case of “overbred” horses and dogs (Galton, *Inquiries* 199). In *Inquiries into Human Faculty and Its Development*, Galton describes the difficulties of achieving a highly bred human species, writing that “each individual is the outcome of a vast number of organic elements of the most various species, just as some nation might be the outcome of a vast number of castes of individuals” (199). Not only does this descriptor hearken back to Norris’ formulation of evolution as a palimpsest, which portrays our bodies as teeming with a multitudinous animal ancestry, but does so in specifically classed terms. Galton goes on to argue that the “banishment” of all “humbler castes” (or, following his simile, undesirable ancestral traits) would swiftly bring a nation (or human bloodline) to ruin (199). Here, Galton explicitly compares eugenic qualities to high-class citizens, and dysgenic ones to more common folk, figuring the human body as a nation and its citizens as its constituent genetic material. This comparison reveals an instability in the eugenic project predicted as early as its

foundational text; even while denigrating the courser strains of our ancestry, Galton cautions that unwary breeding of the “fittest” members of a species alone may render them unable to replicate themselves, inadvertently dooming the very bloodlines eugenicists most desired to proliferate by their attempts to proliferate them. This outcome is precisely what occurs to the Eloi in *The Time Machine*—their leisured existences turn them into insipid, feeble vestiges of the eugenes they once were and ultimately, into the prey of the inferior classes they formerly enslaved.

Anticipating the skepticism of his listeners towards his social explanation of the divergence of the human race, the Time Traveller points out, “yet even now there are existing circumstances to point that way” (40). He also uses terms popularized only a few decades before his own day (“Capitalist” and “Labourer”) to characterize the two classes that form the basis for the Eloi and Morlocks’ parentage.¹⁴ Furthermore, as John Huntington points out in his analysis of class in *The Time Machine*, the Eloi are characterized in class-based terms long before the Time Traveller draws the connection between the social classes of his time period and the eventual split between the Eloi and the Morlocks (Huntington 225). While the Time Traveller’s first impression of the Eloi is their beauty, the particular type of beauty he ascribes to them has deep associations with both class and eugenic status. By calling the first Eloi individual he sees “frail” and identifying him with “the more beautiful kind of *consumptive*—that *hectic* beauty of which we used to hear so much,” the Time Traveller associates the Eloi’s beauty with that of the aesthete, a high-class degenerate who idled away his life in aesthetic and hedonistic pursuits and

¹⁴ Wells almost certainly employs these terms in a Marxist sense, as he was a devoted socialist throughout his life. He was a prominent (and incendiary) member of the Fabian Society, a socialist organization which Norman and Jeanette Mackenzie describe as “the most genteel of all revolutionists, seeking to achieve a socialist society without abrogating any of the social conventions;” Wells’ talents a propagandist were welcome there, though he would later become a divisive figure in the society due to his vocal criticisms and attempt to wed the society’s socialist ideology with a call for the abolishment of the nuclear family (Mackenzie and Mackenzie 184, 185, 206). Later in life, he was even a frequent correspondent of Maxim Gorky and made a highly publicized (and criticized) trip to Russia after the communist revolution there to meet Pavlov, Chaliapin, Zinoviev, Chicherin, and even Lenin (326).

was associated with various species of sexual immorality, particularly homosexuality—an association that would have been quite vivid to *The Time Machine*’s early readers, as Oscar Wilde’s arrest for gross indecency occurred the month before the novel’s publication and his highly publicized trial took place soon after (20, emphasis added). The aesthete (and its close counterpart, the decadent) was, essentially, the realization of Galton’s fears for the results of overbreeding humans, which he anticipated would lead the highest human stock into the constitutional frailty, infertility, and sexual indifference characterizing overbred dogs (Galton, *Inquiries* 199).¹⁵ Associating the Eloi with the figure of the aesthete therefore demonstrates that, from his earliest glimpse of the humans of the future, the Time Traveller had both eugenic status and class in mind, and that the two were not easily disentangled in his thinking.

Even more strikingly, the association of the Eloi’s degeneracy with a form already operant in the Time Traveller’s own time, as well as the way he dates the split between the Eloi and Morlocks with a class divide that predates his voyage, instils the story with a sense of unavoidable futility, suggesting that any interventions we might make will always already come too late. While they may require hundreds of thousands of years to flower, the seed of humanity’s destruction has been sown long before the Time Traveller sets out on his voyage. The novel ends with the loss of the Time Traveller and the Time Machine in an unknown misadventure in the past or future; all that we know is that he never returns from his final voyage, and the power of time travel is lost with him (Wells, *The Time Machine* 71-71). However, even before the loss of the Time Machine, no character seems willing to undertake any action to avoid the degradation of the human species. The Time Traveller himself seems far more

¹⁵ It is worth noting that Galton retained this caution towards overbreeding throughout his life and study, as a quite similar passage appears in *Essays in Eugenics* (53-54). This book was published in 1909, twenty-six years after the publication of *Inquiries into Human Faculty and Its Development* and only two years prior to his death.

concerned with explaining how the degeneration of humanity could *happen* than imagining how it might be *avoided*; nor does the novel concern itself with the temporal paradoxes or the ruptures of the time-space continuum almost ubiquitous in time travel narratives today. If there is any indication that this future may be prevented, the lack of urgency displayed by the story's audience destroys any hope that that prevention will occur. As I described in the introduction, horror stories offer us the power to manage fear by simply closing the book, turning off the TV, dismissing the campfire story as made-up. The Time Traveller's audience uses this method to manage any horror they may have felt at the state of future humanity, passively consuming and then discarding the tale, and with the Time Traveller dies any hope for preventative action. The narrator seems to be the listener who verges closest to believing the incredible story, but we are never permitted to hope that his belief will spur change, since some of his final lines intentionally shelve the problem of human futurity. He writes, "I, for my own part, cannot think that these latter days of weak experiment, fragmentary theory, and mutual discord are indeed man's culminating time" (71). His own sense of the nobility in man is affronted both by the inferiority of the Eloi and the Morlocks, but also the inferiority of contemporary man. The narrator chooses not to give full credence to the story because to do so would be to admit that mankind as he knows it, as inferior as it is to his aspirations, represents the apex of human potential. He opts for the coping strategy of the proverbial ostrich, concluding that even "if that is so, it remains for us to live as though it were not so"—obviating the need for painful reflections or the sacrifice of his aggrandized view of human potential, but also foreclosing the possibility of preventing this dismaying evolutionary outcome (71). This glimpse into the future offers no hope for the *avoidance* of that future, only a sense of dim anguish and dismay for the fate of our species.

The Time Machine's Genre Reassignment

The narrator's avoidant resignation appears in marked contrast to Wells' own urgency, demonstrated in the way that, as the novel progressed through successive revisions, the horrific elements specifically and emotionally engaging elements generally take on greater prominence. This indicates that Wells chose to further highlight the Time Traveller's visceral repulsion towards the degenerate future humanity, especially the Morlocks, as part of his editing process. This portrayal of the Morlocks (and perhaps more saliently, the Time Traveller's instinctive sense of loathing towards them) is what makes this text an essentially eugenic one rather than simply a demonstration of evolution's potential to produce results we might perceive as negative or regressive. Wells made several attempts at writing *The Time Machine*, beginning with a few drafts of a fragmentary tale entitled *The Chronic Argonauts*; the only major similarities to persist into later iterations are the time travel concept and the explanation of time as a fourth dimension of space. The most substantial intermediary, which I will take as my point of comparison to the finalized novel, was an untitled, unsigned, and unfinished story published serially in seven installments in the *National Observer* in 1894 (Arata, "Preface" ix-x). The version that graced the *New Review* the following year bears much greater resemblance to the published novel, which was finally published by Heinemann in novel form in 1895 (Arata, "Preface" vii-viii). In the *National Observer* version, the Philosophical Inventor (a term the *Observer* version uses for the Time Traveller and which I will use to distinguish between the two), travels to the year 12,203 rather than to 802,701—apparently, between revisions Wells determined that such a dramatic transformation of the human race would require a more extended timescale than he initially allotted for it (a choice that aligns with his assertions from "Human Evolution, an

Artificial Process” that civilization slows human evolution by preserving those that nature would cull). While admitting to some surprise, the Philosophical Inventor reacts to the inferiority of the surface-dwelling humans of the future¹⁶ with far more equanimity than the disappointment and borderline contempt that the Time Traveller displays (106). The Philosophical Inventor even experiences a sense of “fatherly exaltation” in response to the little people’s reverencing him as a god, an event that causes the Time Traveller only dismay at the decline in intelligence that could allow the heirs to humanity to believe that he “had come from the sun in a thunderstorm” (never mind that his handle on the Eloi’s meaning, conveyed through charade, seems a little too dubious to justify his disgusted dismissal) (106, 22). Even the Morlocks incite far less disgust—though the Philosophical Inventor does refer to the realization that the Morlocks were another branch of humans as “so very grotesque that I really hesitate to tell you,” this revelation is immediately deflected to a protestation about a minor scientific incongruity in the Philosophical Inventor’s story, as though the Morlock’s human ancestry is less interesting to the assembled audience than the intensity of the sun’s heat and light in the year 12,203 (111). Rather than actively threatening, the Philosophical Inventor seems to consider the Morlocks as disquietingly eerie at worst; most notably, the murder and cannibalism practiced by the Morlocks of the final novel are nowhere to be found amongst the Morlocks of this version. The Philosophical Inventor’s most intense fear reaction is inspired merely by the feeling of their “soft cold hands,” and we never get a clear idea of what might have been their intent in attempting to drag him back into the darkness of their caverns (115, 114). In the finalized version of the novel, on the other hand, we witness not only the Time Traveller’s murderous instinct towards the Morlocks but much more extreme

¹⁶ The Eloi have no name in the *Observer* version, though the word “Morlock” appears in this version to refer to the subterranean branch of humanity.

exclamations of disgust, such as: “you can scarcely imagine how inhuman they looked—those pale, chinless faces and great, lidless, pinkish-grey eyes!” (43) and “it was indescribably horrible in the darkness to feel all those soft creatures heaped upon me” (59).

The fact that Wells heightened the Time Traveller’s (and thereby the reader’s) sense of revulsion towards the Morlocks between one version and the next contributes to the transformation of genre that takes place between the *National Observer* version, which reads like a thinly veiled scientific lecture, and the final published novel. In his note on the text for his Norton Critical Edition of *The Time Machine*, Stephen Arata aptly describes the *Observer* version as “essayistic for long stretches;” in it, Wells dedicates substantial space to lectures on the science behind the state of Earth and its inhabitants in the year 12,203, mostly couched as asides to his interrogative listeners (Arata, “A Note on the Text” ix). He expostulates on evolutionary principles, on contemporary notions of entropy, the extreme age of the universe, and other scientific realities in addition to the famous explanation of time as a fourth dimension of space. In the finalized version of the novel, which is substantially expanded from its predecessor, a far smaller ratio of the tale is dedicated to such explications, since the exhausted Time Traveller warns the guests twice that he will abide no interruptions and they obey (16). Sometimes the stream-of-consciousness narrative does divert to the same scientific principles preoccupying the Philosophical Inventor, but in addition to dwelling more often on his personal emotional experience of the year 802,701, the final novel is also narratively much more eventful than the *Observer* version. It incorporates a footsore trek to a museum eighteen miles away from his landing site (Wells, *The Time Machine* 47); a near escape from a forest fire the Time Traveller inadvertently sets (59); Weena’s violent death at the hands of a seething Morlock horde in the flames of that same fire (60); and a claustrophobic pitch-dark climb into the Morlock

tunnels, where the Time Traveller realizes that the Morlocks consume the Eloi for food (43-45). Generically, then, between the *National Observer* draft and the finalized novel, *The Time Machine* transitions from a scientific lecture masquerading as a sci-fi novel to a more appropriate member of the categories of “fiction” and “novel.” It will also be noted that a substantial number of these alterations are easily recognizable as verging the novel into the territory of horror, playing on much more biological fears—swarms of revolting monsters, fire, claustrophobia, and cannibalism—in addition to the more intellectual horrors of human degeneration. *The Time Machine* is not a relatively neutral exploration of how human evolution might progress along a trajectory we would find distasteful by certain culturally situated standards, as the *National Observer* version might be read; rather, it is a representation rendered intentionally upsetting and even horrific, portraying this unwanted trajectory as a form of devolution or degeneration in ways meant to incite reactions of distress in readers—and thereby helping align them with the eugenic ideology that shared this distress.

If Wells intends to make us frightened of this future but also causes our narrator to be paralyzed into inaction, then there seems to be another anxiety at work here: the fear that unbelief will prevent a cautionary tale from having any effect. The unbelief of the Time Traveller’s selected audience is critical partly because the party, which seems assembled specifically to listen to and spread the Time Traveller’s tale, is composed of precisely the types of individuals that would have populated the Eugenics Society. At his first party, besides the narrator, a Psychologist, a Medical Man, and a Provincial Mayor are in attendance to witness the embarkation of a scale-model Time Machine on its endless journey (Wells, *The Time Machine* 9–10); and at his second an Editor and a Journalist join the Psychologist, the Medical Man, and the narrator to welcome the Time Traveller back from his maiden voyage through time (13). As

Pauline M. H. Mazumdar explains, the Eugenic Society's membership was never large, but composed largely of middle-class individuals, most of them scientists or statisticians but may with other forms of socio-political and bureaucratic influence (8-9). It seems that the Time Traveller assembled his guests for precisely this type of influence; we know he intends to return from his time-travel voyage directly to the dinner table, since he leaves a note for the Medical Man with instructions for starting dinner and promising to "explain when he comes" if he arrives late (13). His assembled audience includes many respected professionals whose credence might invite the belief of others, and the fact that he invites two literary types to the second party after not inviting them to the first indicates that he was seeking to publicly spread the tale of his time-traveling adventure. Since none of those whose support he seeks—and who represent the constituency of active proponents of eugenics—believe in his story, his glimpse into the future is rendered utterly impotent to change that future, confined to the circle of a skeptical audience.

Thus, the failure of this cautionary tale becomes in itself a cautionary tale: If those with influence do not seek to actively direct human evolution, the text seems to indicate, the consequences of current socioeconomic and ideological conditions may very easily result in the degradation of the human species witnessed by the Time Traveller. Reading *The Time Machine* as a cautionary tale opens the possibility that Wells means to inspire the readers with a feeling of urgency, inviting them to step into the active preventative role abdicated by the characters. *The Time Machine* is a frame narrative, with the story's narrator relaying the Time Traveller's recounting of his adventures in the future. Of the sixty-six pages of the novel, fifty are dedicated to the Time Traveller's tale, while the unnamed narrator occupies only sixteen. Formally, this places us as readers in a similar position to that of the Time Traveller's intradiegetic audience, listening to the story rather than participating in it, not even permitted to interject questions. I

argue that we, like the Time Traveller's audience, are invited to consider our collective human future when contemplating the Eloi and the Morlocks. If horror offers us a sense of control by letting us safely shut away things that have terrified us behind a wall of fictionality, the control that eugenics offers is guidance on what we might do to prevent the evolutionary outcomes we have been made to fear; therefore, even if Wells did not intend to galvanize his audiences to belief or participation in eugenic movement, it seems safe to argue that many of his intended effects (disturbing notions of a teleological human evolution and planting the idea that the conditions leading to humanity's demise are even now achieving ascendancy) are easily mobilized on behalf of the eugenic agenda.

As the work of a eugenicist on the topics of human evolution, degeneration, and our intervention in those processes, it is possible to read *The Time Machine* as a one-way mirror. It offers us a glimpse of a future that Wells rendered horrifying, with the effect of impressing upon readers the fearful reality that the trajectory of human evolution is not guaranteed to be one we might regard as "upward." However, in doing so, it also casts a revealing reflection of the underlying ideologies of its eugenicist creator. *The Time Machine* offers us a glimpse not just of how eugenic thinking wants us to be afraid, or even what eugenicists themselves were afraid of, but into the anxieties and contradictory stances they held—their inability to fully accede to the harder-to-swallow aspects of Darwin's evolutionary theory, their entanglements with even less scientific discourses than their own, and their willing misreadings and misapplications of research that did not conform to their preexisting conclusions, all characteristic of the bewildered blending of narrative frameworks and affective responses common to the metagenre of disability. In not just the content of the novel, then, but in Wells' crafting of this horror story, that we can witness parallels to the narrative and affective engagements eugenicists brought to their

interactions with their founding principles and with the evidence available to them as they pursued their researches.

Chapter 2 Interspecies Violence, Hybridity, and Intersectional Dysgenics in the Fairy Stories of Arthur Machen

Introduction

Gaining influence, even management, over sexual practices was central to the eugenic platform because by the time the children in/for whom they wished to create a better reproductive future were born, those children's genetic material—which eugenicists considered a graven account of their future lives—were already beyond the reach of correction. Biological determinism and evolutionary meliorism, the two central pillars of eugenic ideology, were in many ways diametrically opposed to one another; if life outcomes were inexorable and encoded in the genes, how can the promise of evolutionarily improving the species be possible? In his seminal monograph *In The Name of Eugenics*, Daniel Kevles writes that in the early years of studying heritable disease, “if a malady was hereditary, the prevailing attitude had it, it must be neither treatable nor preventable” (Kevles 177). Trying to improve the lives of those living with inferior genes was therefore discarded as doomed from the start by American, German, and other eugenicists practicing primarily negative interventions.¹⁷ As such, eugenicists focused their interventions on influencing what children were permitted to be born by applying pressures to the living. If it was not possible to fix a child who already existed, the only solution was to try to prevent that child's existence in favor of that of a superior, more eugenic child. To the vexation

¹⁷ The national character of eugenics differed from state to state, meaning that certain the eugenic practices of some nations (those in Latin America, for example) had more patience and compassion for the needs of those living with chronic illness and disability than those that were more invested in surgical solutions.

of eugenicists, though, the boundary-blurring and barrier-breaking nature of sex continually eluded their discipline. Eugenicists were therefore engaged in an effort just as desperate and pivotal as it was doomed, and just as doomed as it remains lingeringly influential: to instill values about what sex should be and how it should be practiced.

This chapter examines eugenic anxieties about reproduction—which are at the heart of all eugenic fears and interventions—through readings of the early work of Arthur Machen. Machen (real name Arthur Llewellyn Jones) was a Welsh writer, and twining through many of his early stories is what S. T. Joshi refers to as his “Little People mythology”—an internally consistent lore inspired by the wild, mercurial, violent, entrancing, and monstrous fairies from the mythology of his native land (in marked contrast to the diminutive, ethereal, benevolent, butterfly-winged pixies that the term “fairies” was only just coming to represent during the Victorian era, but which has since been popularized by media like Disney’s *Peter Pan*). Machen’s Little People mythology appears in a cluster of stories all written within a handful of years of one another, among them Machen’s most enduringly influential works (*The Great God Pan* and “The White People,” from which contemporary horror masters like Stephen King and Guillermo del Toro have taken direct inspiration). In all but one story of the five I have identified as belonging to the mythology, he deploys fairies for horrific effect in explicitly reproductive or sexual terms. The stories I have selected to examine here (*The Great God Pan* [1894], “The Shining Pyramid” [1895], and “The Novel of the Black Seal” [excerpted from *The Three Impostors*, 1895])¹⁸ all involve an intimated sexual assault by a fairy aggressor on a human woman, and in two of the three cases a hybrid fairy/human child results from this forced union.

¹⁸ The stories from the Little People mythology that I have elected *not* to include are “The White People” (published 1904, though it was written in the 1890s) and “The Red Hand” (1895).

In accordance with the central argument of this dissertation, which explores how stories are narrated to produce certain affective responses culminating in an experience of disability common to both eugenic theory and horror fiction, this chapter examines how the excessive significations contained in monstrous-fairy embodiment are powerfully reflective of the ways that interpretations ascribed to dysgenic bodies shifted in response to the multivalent fears and narratives surrounding dysgenic status.

The previous chapter began to show how the metagenre of disability is characterized by definitional fluidity when supposedly central narratives do not match with overpowering emotional responses; in Machen's hyper-affective portrayal of his dysgenic monsters, signification loses all mooring, with his monsters suturing the features of a wide range of minority statuses encompassed by the dysgenic label and sometimes co-occupying multiple "dysgenic" identities at once. Machen's fairies represent a prime instance of the way that horror texts, and particularly monsters, are prisms through which meaning refracts in a dazzling array of unpredictable ways, as Jack Halberstam describes in *Skin Shows*: "multiple interpretations are embedded in the text and part of the experience of horror comes from the realization that meaning itself runs riot" (Halberstam 2). The meaning of monstrosity is highly elusive, transforming with every attempt to pin it down—a flexibility that works to the advantage of eugenic rhetoric and the metagenre of disability more generally, since its logics are easy to write over with any meanings the writer desires to convey while the monster's overpowering affects retain their potency. When meaning shifts its shape, interested rhetors can be certain to find proofs of deviancy and justification for marginalization in the slightest hint of difference. As such, we can understand the assaults in Machen's stories not just interspecies-as-interracial sexual violence, but witness through them how gender, disability, and queerness take part in the

anxieties surrounding inferior couplings, the furtive pleasures of aberrant sexuality, and the impulse to manage the offspring such couplings might produce.

Dealing with multiple stories by the same author always offers an opportunity to triangulate the author's personal investments, and stories occupying the same narrative space even more so, since they represent themes or worlds that the author is repeatedly drawn back to.

¹⁹ In search of whether those investments might, as the texts suggested to me, be related to the same fears of degeneration that spurred eugenic anxieties, I spent time in archives of Machen's papers (at Yale University's Beinecke Library, the New York Public Library, and the University of Texas' Ransom Center). I found nothing in them to indicate Machen had the connections to eugenic discourses, but found an even more interesting lack of indication that Machen considered the overlap between these stories as occasioning comment. Despite his extensive writing on his own writing and the rapid-fire production of these tales suggesting a serious, if not abiding, preoccupation with the theme, Machen simply does not talk about his fairies very much. Though all these stories take place in a cohesive fictional world, that world seems to have been sketched out in surprisingly vague strokes. Even more strikingly, once I noticed this gap in the archive, I began to notice a corresponding gap in the stories themselves. In them, too, Machen simply does not talk about fairies as much as, or in the ways that, one might expect that he would given the fairies are the primary source of the story's horror. The stories' antagonists are rarely physically present—in only one instance, in "The Shining Pyramid," does a character actually witness a full-blooded fairy in person—but they are also described in nebulous terms, reported at

¹⁹ Machen's "Little People" stories are further united by an apparent overlap in their cast of characters. The sleuthing Dyson of "The Shining Pyramid" appears to be the same as the primary character of *The Three Impostors*, in which "The Novel of the Black Seal" appears. "The Shining Pyramid"'s puzzled landowner, Mr. Vaughan, happens to have the same last name as Helen Vaughan, the fairy hybrid of *The Great God Pan*. While Helen's guardian is pseudonymized as "Mr. R" rather than "Mr. V," it still seems notable that two stories written so close together would possess such an overlap; perhaps there is a connection after all?

secondhand, and largely understood through conjecture and unsubstantiated hypothesis. We learn most of what we know of fairies by encounters with their hybrid children, who are concealed within human society like changelings. This mythological figure, a fairy baby swapped with a human one in order to trick human mothers into raising fairy young or to conceal the theft of a human child, has strong ties to disability history, as it was sometimes used to explain the behavior or appearance of “abnormal” children. And like changelings, these hybrids’ inhuman nature inevitably reveals itself. They are represented as imperfect impressions of both fairy and human existences, and never receive the chance to narrate their own stories. Instead, they are only narrated by others who fear them, as the dysgenic were narrated by eugenicists while their autobiographical writing was discouraged, repressed, or considered unworthy of inclusion in the historical record. The human mothers of these hybrids are also unable to witness to their trauma, even though that trauma represents the fulcrum on which the narrative turns.

This chapter, then, digs self-consciously into the gaps I could not fail to perceive in Machen’s writing on fairies, into the content I expected and failed to find in the archive and in the stories themselves. Reading these texts as a modern scholar, with investments and attentions so estranged from those Machen held, naturally means that I am drawn to different details than the ones Machen dwelt upon. To Machen, a man of his times, the easy connections he draws between a variety of differences and the deployment of these differences as sources of horror are apparently not only intuitive, but natural, often when such assumptions are at their most *unnatural* in the eyes of a modern reader steeped in social constructivist ideology. This chapter approaches its readings of eugenic texts in much the same manner, by probing into slippages and ambiguities, and I have found a compelling number of congruities between the topics that Machen and eugenicists explore and obsessively re-explore while simultaneously refusing to

speak of them openly. If the metagenre of disability is characterized by narrative and affective responses that overlap to the point of indistinguishability, this chapter is about the semiotic slippages that run rampant when narrativization is only selectively applied or omitted entirely from portrayals of the dysgenic. In it, we will explore what sketches of eugenic investments and aversions we can draw from these missing narratives—the moments in which it is not only the *readers* of horror and eugenic theory choosing to turn away from inassimilable narratives or emotional responses, but the *creators* as well.

In my readings, I have done my best to portray the mutually constructive nature of the various forms of difference that Machen borrows from to construct his monstrous fairy antagonists, including ability, race, sexuality, class, etc. However, such complexly imbricated discourses cannot be adequately represented using the linear framework of a dissertation chapter. Moreover, while this chapter attempts to engage meaningfully with many types of difference, I will argue from the standpoint (elucidated in the introduction of this dissertation) that eugenics was singularly antagonistic towards disability, and that even while the eugenic desirability of other forms of difference received defenses from certain quarters, disability did not. This is why, while a segment dedicated to disability does not appear in this chapter, I consider it foundational to my explorations, forming the groundwork underlying the pathologization of every type of difference that this chapter examines in more explicit terms. Machen's fairies may be Asian and therefore "underevolved," desecrators of white female bodies left vulnerable to debasement by the very gender and sexual mores that understood their value in purely sexual terms; the fairies may be queer and fluid and therefore threats to the structures of consent underlying the ordered sexual system eugenicists sought to shore up. But above all, fairies are disabled, and also and strong and immoral enough to force helpless eugenics to perpetuate their uncanny

embodiments—the cardinal sin of any eugenic worldview. I will argue in this chapter that the primary horror Machen associates with fairies is the threat they pose of siring children that have no right to exist in his ideal of a healthy and ordered universe, and that many forms of difference, with disability chief among them, converge in complex ways to characterize fairy hybrids as uncanny and unwelcome in a sane and wholesome human world.

Turanian Fairies—Evolution, Primitivism, and Race

The mixed-species/race status²⁰ of Machen’s fairy hybrids is one of these differences, and it is where my analysis begins. To illustrate how disability, as a universally rejected category, justified eugenic measures taken against those belonging to other identity categories, consider the example of “miscegenation.” According to the 1864 satirical pamphlet that coined the term, miscegenation—“from the Latin *Miscere*, to mix, and *Genus*, race,”—“is used to denote the abstract idea of the mixture of two or more races” (“Miscegenation” 2). Despite the satirical nature of the pamphlet, which attempted to frighten away support for the Republican party by misrepresenting their advocacy for the rights of African Americans as the promotion of interracial marriage and reproduction, “Americans adopted the term ‘miscegenation,’ with such alacrity that it would frame public debate over race, sex, and marriage for the next century” (Pascoe 28). This term was so eagerly adopted partly because a foremost argument of racist science at the time was that the children of mixed-race unions were inferior to those of either of

²⁰ In writing this chapter, I have wrestled with terminology, unsure whether to separate fairies from humans along the line of race or that of species. It is ultimately impossible to disentangle the realities of Machen’s fictional world from allegory to our world, or to extricate what Machen said from the subtext of what he said; I have settled uneasily on the species side of the debate, because I believe that is where Machen wishes us to settle, but am aware that in doing so I may be perpetuating a conservatism towards the relationship between the monstrous and the human that I do not (or try not to, as far as is possible for a person growing up in a culture hostile to difference) subscribe to personally.

their parents' races. In the second volume of *The Variation of Animals & Plants Under Domestication*, Charles Darwin uses the example of "men of complicated descent" to support his argument that cross-breeding results in reversion, which tends to render hybrids more "wild" than their pure-blooded parents (26). As proof, he cites "statements, so frequently made by travellers in all parts of the world, on the degraded and savage disposition of crossed races of man," strikingly phrased in a quote from Livingstone's *Expedition to the Zambesi*: "God made white men, and God made black men, but the Devil made half-castes" (26). However, a contradictory accusation than that alleging the "wildness" and "savagery" of mixed-race individuals was also leveled; a 1869 proclamation from the Georgia Supreme Court (quoted in Peggy Pascoe's *What Comes Naturally*) states, "Our daily observation shows us, that the offspring of these unnatural connections are generally sickly and effeminate, and that they are inferior in physical development and strength, to the full-blood of either race" (7). White supremacist rhetoric did not hold that white ancestry could improve upon the supposed inferior stock of other races, an incongruity that comes clear when we recognize that the goal of this rhetoric was not to shore up a racial hierarchy with white people at the top, but to discourage racial admixture.²¹ The idea that people of mixed-race descent were physically and morally enervated, weak, prone to degrading temptations—in essence, disabled—was often cited not only as a rationale for deterring for mixed-race unions, but as proof that such unions were "unnatural" or "immoral."

²¹ This is not to say that eugenicists did not acknowledge the inevitability of racial admixture. Galton's 1901 Huxley lecture concludes with the argument that "to no nation is a high human breed more necessary than to our own, for we plant our stock all over the world and lay the foundation of the dispositions and capacities of future millions of the human race" (Galton, "Possible Improvement" 665). High breeding of the British "race" is presented as of extra importance here perhaps in order to offset the deleterious effects of interracial pairings.

While the first story I will analyze, “The Shining Pyramid,” does not feature a hybrid child, it is an ideal story to dive into the “Little People mythology” because it clearly demonstrates how the language Machen uses to represent fairies—and by extension, the sexual aggressors among them, and the mixed-species children resulting from their violence—is charged with a veritable battery of discriminatory connotations regarding race and ability. This story follows the investigations Mr. Dyson makes into a series of unusual occurrences around the country estate of his friend, Mr. Vaughan. In the path near the wall of his kitchen garden, Vaughan has begun to find strange patterns worked in flint arrowheads which change from one day to the next. Dyson’s deductions eventually connect this strange occurrence to the recent disappearance of a local girl. He reveals that the arrowheads and the drawings on the wall represent an invitation left by fairies to guide their kindred to an orgiastic ceremonial rite for which the missing girl was abducted, and of which the titular “Shining Pyramid” is the fiery culmination.

Among the three stories selected for this chapter, “The Shining Pyramid” is the only one in which we are permitted to actually witness a full-blooded fairy in the course of the action, and it presents fairy bodies as repugnant in ways that clearly draw on both ableist and racist stereotypes. When Dyson and Vaughan witness the rite that the arrowheads described, the beings involved are described as “things made in the form of men but stunted like children hideously deformed” (Machen, “The Shining Pyramid” 94). The fairies’ short stature is exaggerated against that of children and rendered sinister by an association with dwarfism and deformity; when Dyson calls them “stunted like children hideously deformed,” he uses disability to render their natural stature, which he comfortably compared to that of a child when making deductions about the height of the arrowhead artists, “unnatural” and inferior to that of a human child. The text

also describes “faces with the almond eyes burning with evil and unspeakable lusts”²² and “the ghastly yellow of the mass of naked flesh” (Machen, “The Shining Pyramid” 94). “Almond eyes” and “yellow flesh” associate the portrayal of fairies here with stereotypes about Asian bodies, an association that is furthered when Dyson relates the fairies to “Turanians.” Here is the remarkable feat of deduction by which he realizes that the strange drawings and arrowhead arrangements were made by fairies:

“And the hint came of the old name of fairies, ‘the little people,’ and the very probable belief that they represent a tradition of the prehistoric Turanian inhabitants of the country, who were cave dwellers: and then I realized with a shock that I was looking for a being under four feet in height, accustomed to live in darkness, possessing stone instruments, and familiar with the Mongolian cast of features” (Machen, “The Shining Pyramid” 98).

“Turanian” refers to the inhabitants of Turan, a region in central Asia, which *The Student’s Manual of Oriental History* (1877) refers to as “one of the oldest in the world” (Lenormant 63). The writer of this manual, French archaeologist François Lenormant, describes the Turanians as a nomadic race scattered across a vast landmass, including Europe; he writes that “the skulls discovered in France, England and Belgium, in caves of the close of the quaternary epoch, appear, from their characteristics, to belong to a Turanian race” (63). Dyson draws a connection between these prehistoric cave-dwellers of Asian descent and the “little people” mythology of his country—a connection that apparently represents Machen’s own, since he wrote in an essay entitled “Folklore and Legends of the North” (and in a sentiment he reiterated several times in his writings), “Of recent years abundant proof has been given that a short, non-Aryan race once

²² It is worth noting that this quote and the aforementioned one referring to the fairies as “hideously deformed” occur in the same sentence, demanding an intersectional reading of the type I am performing here (Machen, “The Shining Pyramid” 94).

dwelt beneath ground, in hillocks, throughout Europe...much in the old legends may be explained by a reference to this primitive race” (Machen, “Folklore and Legends of the North” 517). Earlier in the same paragraph, Machen references the Turanians by name, leaving no doubt that the “primitive race” he refers to is the same Dyson deduces the fairies to be. In a leap that (hopefully) takes him past the limits of Machen’s credulity, however, Dyson concludes that these beings must have persisted into the modern day to leave behind the cryptic drawings and arrowhead arrangements.

In fact, Dyson draws this connection largely because he finds the alternative explanation of the drawings—that an English child made the drawings and arrowhead patterns, a deduction based on the supposition that the drawing’s 3.5-foot height on the wall must be an indication of the height of its artist²³—untenable for an explicitly racial reason. Dyson muses, “there is something singularly unchildlike about those two lines, and the eyeball itself, you see, is almost an oval” (Machen, “The Shining Pyramid” 86). The “unchildlike” feature of the drawing is its suggestion of Asian, not European, features; Dyson cannot fathom where an English child would have gotten the familiarity with the “Mongolian eye” required to draw it (86). This snag in the theory unsettles and confuses Dyson enough to make him abandon the “child’s drawing” explanation in favor of a much more extreme one: the contemporary survival of a prehistoric race of fairies (98). The above descriptions, in addition to aligning the fairies with an unflattering racial portrayal, also hint at the paternalism and ableism imbricated in and used to shore up racist

²³ Dyson concludes that this 3.5 height suggests a child “about ten years old” (Machen, “Shining Pyramid” 86). This does not seem a very accurate assessment, even given the shorter average height at that time period than today—a 1959 study from the *Yearbook of Agriculture* found that American children at age 10 around the turn of the century were averaging heights over four feet (Hathaway 184). Today, according to statistics from Stanford Medicine, a height of 3.5 feet corresponds most closely to that of a five-year-old child (“Normal Growth”). Even making allowances for differences between American and British averages and those of the 1890s and 2020s, this does not inspire great confidence in Dyson’s sleuthing skill! However, his misapprehension about the age of the child might somewhat explain Dyson’s reluctance to adopt the theory that a child drew the eyes, since the hypothetical child he contemplated was much older and presumably more artistically accomplished.

thinking. The men's dialogue makes it indisputably clear that the drawing is a poor one. Dyson refers to the drawing as "an *attempt* to draw the human eye," and Vaughan responds that "it is *meant* for an eye, no doubt;" both these characterizations suggest that correctly identifying the drawing is more a triumph of the viewer's interpretive skill than the artist's ability (85-86, emphasis added). Incredibly, the drawing is poor enough to suggest that it was *not* a child who drew them. This, alongside the fairies' use of flint arrowheads to communicate, conveys an impression of fairies as primitive beings, inferior in intellect and artistic skill to even the young children of "civilized" white Englishmen.

This idea of fairies as survivals of a primitive race is essential to Machen's conception of fairies, as is demonstrated in "The Novel of the Black Seal." If "The Shining Pyramid" affords us the only glimpse Machen allows of a full-blooded fairy, "The Novel of the Black Seal" provides us with his most complete explication of the existence and nature of fairies.²⁴ This story, narrated by Miss Lally, the governess to the niece and nephew of regarded ethnologist Professor Gregg, details the events leading up to the disappearance of her employer. While on sabbatical, Gregg moves his household to the countryside in pursuit of a long-held theory about the existence of fairies, which is corroborated by inscriptions in their language on the titular Black Seal. There, he hires Jervase Cradock, a local boy with mental disabilities who suffers from epileptic seizures, and brings him into the household ostensibly as help, but truly for his own sinister purposes. In the note Gregg leaves for Lally in the case of his disappearance, he reveals that Jervase is, in

²⁴ The contents of *The Three Impostors* must, admittedly, be approached with a measure of suspicion because of the nature of the text. This novel is presented as a series of stories told by the titular "three impostors" who meet the main characters, Dyson and Philips, in a variety of disguises in order to seek information about a young man who has stolen from their master, Dr. Lipsius. The stories in the volume, then, are crafted specifically to extract information from the listeners rather than to convey truth, and their veracity is therefore cast somewhat in doubt. However, the striking levels of concordance between "The Novel of the Black Seal" and Machen's other "fairy lore" stories give me the confidence to include it among the others as an authoritative text in this oeuvre.

fact, half-fairy, born of a sexual assault Mrs. Cradock suffered shortly after the death of her husband. Gregg witnessed (or perhaps instigated) a transformation of Jervase's body to reveal his fairy ancestry during one of his seizures and, bolstered by this proof, Gregg heads to the wilderness in search of the beings. As may be presumed by his disappearance, he found them, and with them a fate "desperate and terrible beyond the remotest dreams of man" (Machen, "The Novel of the Black Seal" 164).

Gregg's ethnographic theories provide a (supposedly) scientific perspective on the existence of fairies, which in "The Shining Pyramid" was demonstrated only in the form of a grotesque spectacle. Gregg theorizes that "a race which had fallen out of the grand march of evolution might have retained, as a survival, certain powers which would be to us wholly miraculous" (Machen, "The Novel of the Black Seal" 166). To Gregg—and the rest of Machen's fairy lore seems to concur—magic is a kind of vestigial organ which humans have shed on their upward evolutionary trajectory but which fairies, who are evolutionarily stagnant, retain. Critically, this reading implies that fairies are not creatures in which magical power happened to coincide with an unfortunate but unrelated primitivism; rather, their failure to evolve past this state of primitivism is the very source of their magical ability. Connecting magic to evolutionary stagnation also links it with the same negative associations carried by primitivism, atavism, and lower life forms explored in the previous chapter of this dissertation. In an analogy explaining how evolutionary inferiority could result in apparently superhuman powers, Gregg explains that "the amœba and the snail have powers which we do not possess; and I thought it possible that the theory of reversion might explain many things which seem wholly inexplicable" (Machen, "Novel of the Black Seal" 166). While this analogy is an effective one and bolsters the scientific pretensions of the "arrested evolution" theory, the comparison to such simple and slimy life

forms is hardly a flattering one, nor one likely to inspire a sense of wonder or envy for the abilities of fairies. As I have shown elsewhere, monstrosity is capable of transmuting even apparent signs of superiority into further signs of disability; because these powers are interpreted as sinister or used to further ends injurious to humans, they are also taken as a sign of brokenness or inferiority when they would not be if an otherwise normate human possessed them (Puckett 3–4). For Machen, too, fairies’ arcane powers do not render them superior to humans, but inferior to them—their ability, in other words, is rendered as both the source and evidence of disability.

The final story I will examine in this chapter—*The Great God Pan*, likely Machen’s most enduring and influential work of horror—accords with the idea of magic as a primitive feature which humans have evolved past. The novella begins with an episode entitled “The Experiment,” in which Dr. Raymond performs a neurosurgical operation on his ward, Mary, that he believes will allow her to see into a spiritual world ordinarily hidden from mortal sight. The experiment succeeds but leaves Mary “a hopeless idiot” from the trauma of what she sees and suffers beyond the veil (Machen, “The Great God Pan” 7); the majority of the novel details the destruction trailing in the wake of a child, Helen Vaughan, born nine months after the operation, presumably as a result of a sexual assault Mary suffered at the hands of the god Pan himself. Helen’s friends in childhood tend to insanity and her lovers as an adult tend to a particularly appalling method of suicide, and her true form as revealed in the novel’s famous and climactic final episode is a binary-blurring protean mass that cannot fail to call to mind the slimy and viscous edges of Gregg’s amoeba and snail: “changing and melting...from woman to man, from man to beast, and from beast to worse than beast” (50).

The operation Raymond performs on Mary, unleashing this chain of events, indicates that human inability to perceive magic is a result of evolutionary *progress*, just as fairy magic is a

result of evolutionary stagnation. The incisive nature of the surgery, severing brain connections rather than attaching or rewiring them, implies two things: that the human brain is naturally equipped with the perceptual capability to see the “real world,” and that we have evolved a physical neurological structure that shuts that world from our perceptions—leaving the original perceptive ability intact behind that shutter (Machen, “The Great God Pan” 2).

Lesioning this structure removes the obstruction, and the person glimpses a world that, in Raymond’s words at the novel’s conclusion, “no human eyes can look on...with impunity” (50). Fairies, then, are not only violent and uncanny creatures lurking in the wilderness just beyond the boundaries of civilization, but survivals from a primitive and lethal past that humans have survived only through an evolutionarily acquired ignorance so deep that it has become part of our embodiment, materialized in the very structure of our brains.

The readings I have just performed do not merely illuminate the evolutionary underpinnings of Machen’s “fairy lore,” though it is striking that he should use evolution to account for both the continued existence of fairy magic and human estrangement from the magical world the fairies occupy. Rather, it reveals the fairies’ evolutionary pathway to be one shared by humans. The human body’s palimpsestic retention of its earlier, “inferior” existences, which I examined in detail in the preceding chapter, returns here in force; the viewpoint that humans evolved past magical ability—and even past the ability to perceive magical realities—suggests that at some point humans did possess the abilities Machen deploys as evidence of fairy inferiority. After all, the Turanians with which Dyson associates the fairies are, according to the anthropological history he draws from, a race of humans. François Lenormant even refers to Turanians as racially interstitial, “intermediate between the white and yellow” either from racial admixture between the two groups or “a stoppage of development during the progress from the

primitive human type to the complete perfection of the civilized white man” (63-64). With non-white existence and lesser evolutionary progress presented as interchangeable, the Turanians, like Machen’s fairies, are rendered as a race that has “fallen out of the grand march of evolution,” either due to their nature or from irresponsible reproductive choices, perpetually uncivilized and perpetually caught in between the “white” and the “yellow” races. However, whether their degradation is due to racial admixture or evolution, their connections to “civilized white man” are undeniable—either they descend from white people, or they were arrested upon the course to becoming white people. Might fairies, which Machen represents as so repulsive and monstrous, have also been arrested on the course to becoming human, merely travelers waylaid on the same evolutionary course that humans once trod?

Also critical to this sneaking suspicion of congruity between human and fairy bodies is the sexual assault underpinning all three of these “fairy lore” narratives.²⁵ *The Great God Pan* and “The Novel of the Black Seal” prominently feature a child of hybrid fairy-human ancestry, both of whom were conceived as a result of sexual violence against a human woman by a fairy—Pan himself apparently raped Mary after her eyes were opened to the magical world, and Jervase Cradock’s mother apparently conceived him through an assault she suffered while traveling through fairy-inhabited hills after her husband’s passing (Machen, “Novel of the Black Seal” 169–70). The fact that these sexual assaults were not merely violent acts, but generative ones resulting in the birth of a hybrid child, further suggests a common ancestry and ongoing

²⁵ One of the two other significant stories in Machen’s “fairy mythology” is arguably also haunted by the anxiety of reproductive compatibility between humans and fairies. “The White People” is a dreamlike ramble through the childhood of a pubescent girl whose nanny raises her immersed in the occult realities of the magical realm and who is beginning to wander onto the fringes of that world; it ends with the revelation that she took her own life “in time” (Machen, *White People* 97), which readers have interpreted as meaning “in time” to escape marriage to a supernatural being or to prevent the birth of a hybrid horror with which she has already been impregnated (Joshi vii-ix). While “The Red Hand” does not feature fairies as a sexual menace, it is still firmly tied to the same “fairy mythology” as the other stories, for its protagonist is once again the same Dyson who features in “The Shining Pyramid” and *The Three Impostors*.

similarity between human and fairy bodies. Reading these stories together may even suggest a kind of sinisterly fecund quality to the fairy/human union, since in both a single sexual encounter was sufficient to impregnate the human victims—the human body is horribly vulnerable not just to assault, but to monstrous hybridization, at the whim of fairy lusts.

The reproductive compatibility between human and fairy bodies that allows for the birth of hybrid children raises the same anxieties as the ones confronting scientific racists in the early to mid-nineteenth century. The realities of interracial reproduction flew in the face of *polygenism*, the idea that the various human “races” were created or evolved separately from one another. This theory was used to justify racial hierarchies already operant in society that white hegemony found convenient and lucrative—if black people were subhuman, owning and abusing one could be construed as no more morally execrable than owning and abusing an animal (a justification that seems far less compelling by today’s moral standards). However, the very existence of the mixed-race child demonstrates a necessary congruity between the white body and bodies that, through the rhetorical and socio-political processes of racialization, have been rendered abject, inferior, and drastically other. The constitutional superiority of the idealized body (here, the white body) and its distinctness from the body of the racialized other is therefore threatened by the very rhetoric intended to shore up that difference—it is impossible to argue against interracial sex in order to protect the purity of the race without simultaneously admitting the common humanity that renders such protection necessary. In order to avoid this conclusion, scientific racists resorted to pushing back against the idea of mutual reproductive potential as a defining marker of species identity. For instance, Samuel George Morton’s article “Hybridity in Animals, considered in reference to the question of the Unity of the Human Species” is mostly an exhaustive list of fruitful pairings between disparate animal species, some as well-

documented as that of the domestic horse and the donkey (Morton 40) and others as suspect as that of a cow and an elk or a cat and a marten (43, 49). The list leads him to the conclusion that “the mere fact that the several races of mankind produce with each other, a more or less fertile progeny, constitutes, in itself, no proof of unity of the human species” (212).²⁶

Morton argues that, rather than infertility, species distinction is protected by a “*natural repugnance* between individuals of different kinds” (210). In a remarkably transparent feat of substituting affect for logic in the pursuit of scientific substantiation, for Morton and other thinkers like him, there was no greater proof of the “unnaturalness” of an interracial union than their own repulsion towards the idea of such a union (never mind that the existence of the “more or less fertile progeny” he already acknowledged is proof that mutual sexual repugnance between white people and people of color is a fiction). As Elise Lemire points out in her study of American attitudes towards interracial sex, this belief elevated sexual preference to a form of innate instinct rather than a matter of individual or socially inculcated taste (113-114). Relocating sexual preference into the realm of biological instinct meant that any desire for sex or reproduction with members of another race violated supposed laws of Nature (Lemire 4) and could perhaps even be interpreted as verging upon a form of insanity or bestiality. The strict policing of normalcy by this method proved highly effective, but also fragile, instituting affect as the primary line of defense against “unnatural” sexual desires and behaviors—and making stories like Machen’s, where readers were permitted to indulge in fantasies of fraternizing with the beast safely cloaked under the guise of horror, all the more enticing.

Capitalizing on the various prejudices surrounding mixed-race people, one of the hybrid children of Machen’s fairy lore “passes” as a mixed-race person (first by the evaluation of others

²⁶ This polygenistic belief of human types as separate species remained dominant from 1800 until 1859, when it was eroded by the splash created when Darwin published *On the Origin of Species* (Jackson and Weidman 55–56).

and later by her own choice) in order to conceal her true, much deeper difference. An otherwise abbreviated account of Helen Vaughan's childhood misadventures takes care to note that "her features were strongly marked, and of a somewhat foreign character" (Machen, "The Great God Pan" 10). She is twice referred to as having "olive" skin (a distinction shared by Machen's other fairy hybrid, Jervase Cradock), and is described as possessing an "almost Italian appearance" (12). Later in life, Helen co-opts and perpetuates this impression of herself as biracial and specifically Italian, claiming to be "the child of an English father and an Italian mother" (16). This account of Helen's "history" comes to us from her husband, Herbert, and critically, his initial notice of and attraction to Helen is also articulated in terms of her Italian (fairy) heritage. At a party he hears "a voice which seemed to thrill to [his] heart...singing an Italian song," and within three months he is married; in a year, he has become by her influence "a ruined man, in body and soul" (16). Machen's choice of music as a seductive lure into the world of destructive magic clearly connects to common fairy folklore, but his choice of Italy for the ethnicity Helen claims is also significant. Italy held a dual perception in the minds of the British at the time Machen wrote; as historian John Dickie explains, the unification of the Italian Peninsula in 1861 resulted in vastly different stereotypes of Southern and Northern Italians, with Southern Italians being characterized as more as volatile and even atavistic in contrast with their more genteel and culturally vibrant counterparts in the north, heirs to Roman civilization (Dickie 1). Helen's claiming Italian ancestry, then, becomes its own form of tantalizing obfuscation, which Machen seems to hint that Herbert should have read as a warning instead of an invitation; despite Helen's claim to be from the north, in Florence, Herbert has no guarantee that his half-Italian bride does not descend from the more "atavistic" strains of Italian stock, and so should have been wary of instead of attracted by her Italian siren song. While "passing" as biracial is a tactic Helen uses to

cloak her hybridity as interracial rather than interspecies, explaining her visible differences while forestalling investigation into her true, more profound foreignness, the text still seems to cast Herbert's attraction to her as a form of perversity. The human guise of hybrids, like that of the changelings of fairy lore which they might be read as representing, inevitably fails to conceal their true nature—a metaphor Galton borrows to describe the ascendancy of genetics over environment, writing in *Hereditary Genius*, “if the ‘eminent’ men of any period, had been changelings when babies, a very fair proportion of those who survived and retained their health up to fifty years of age, would, notwithstanding their altered circumstances, have equally risen to eminence” (38). A woman who first appeared as almost appropriately racialized and nationalized as a white woman of half-British parentage can never maintain the façade indefinitely, and is revealed to be not only dangerously polluted by an undesirable ancestry, but ultimately polluting to Herbert, who is white and relatively well-off, landed and heir to an “excellent position in Dorsetshire” (15).

Jervase Cradock, the fairy hybrid found in “The Novel of the Black Seal,” is not primarily presented as racially Other, though he does possess some possibly racialized features; instead, he is more often “othered” by an association with disability. A boy of “about fourteen,” Cradock is characterized in terms of two disabilities presumably imparted by his fairy ancestry: he is “mentally weak” and suffers from “fits” (153). His mental “weakness” apparently renders him an object of suspicion to the narrator of the tale, the governess Miss Lally, since others feel the need to reassure her (repeatedly) that his intellectual disability does not equate to danger. When Professor Gregg, her employer, brings Cradock into the household under the pretext of hiring him to help maintain the household (but truly in order to monitor and study a fairy hybrid), he reassures her that Cradock “is not in any way dangerous, you know, merely a little weak”

(153). Mere paragraphs later, Morgan the gardener also “assure[s] [her] he was perfectly harmless” (153). Though there is not much evidence in the text to clarify what kind of danger Miss Lally anticipates from Cradock, physical or sexual violence seem the most likely candidates. As Allison C. Carey notes, the “feeble-minded” were often marginalized and even criminalized by a link, newly established in the eugenic era, between mental disability and criminological (particularly sexual) deviance. This link, which demanded that all mentally disabled individuals be regarded as latent criminals, helped justify disciplinary control over the disabled population as a whole, regardless of individual character or capabilities (Carey 417–18).

While Cradock’s weakness of mind may be most open to ableist stereotypes of concern to eugenicists, of the two disabilities, his seizures are the one most strongly connected to his fairy ancestry. His seizures seem to draw him into some form of proximity with his fairy embodiment, a phenomenon most clearly demonstrated by the second of two seizures described in the text. This seizure exposes the heretofore concealed fairy aspects of his embodiment, lifting what Miss Lally earlier refers to as a “mask of humanity” (Machen, “Novel of the Black Seal” 155). Gregg discovers the true face beneath this “mask” as he witnesses Cradock’s “body swell and become distended as a bladder, while the face blackened before [his] eyes” (172-173). After Gregg performs a rite described by the Black Seal,²⁷ the relic that originally helped him learn the

²⁷ Gregg’s motives for performing the rite remain somewhat in doubt, but his behavior certainly raises the suggestion of mad science, or at the very least a dangerous level of medical paternalism. In his letter to Miss Lally, he writes that during the seizure he incited Cradock’s transfiguration by doing “what was necessary according to the directions on the Seal” (Machen, “Novel of the Black Seal” 173). However, it is unclear from the text *why* Gregg regarded the ritual as “necessary” in response to Cradock’s state, or what the result of this rite actually is. Does Gregg perform this ritual in order to purge Cradock from the painful influence of whatever aspect of his fairy embodiment is forcing its way from his human exterior—and would that truly be an ethical and helpful choice? Or does he call forth the “tentacle” for his own scientific interest, in order to observe the reality of fairy magic and embodiment? Adding to the unsettling nature of this episode, Cradock effectively drops out of the story after the events of this night. It is as though, once his relevance to Gregg’s research has been exhausted, he loses all value to the story and to Gregg, and to Lally. Only Gregg’s assertion that the “snail” drew its horns in again offers any reassurance that Cradock was ever restored to his standard embodiment after Gregg’s interference in his seizure.

existence and language of fairies, “something pushed out from the body there on the floor, and stretched forth, a slimy wavering tentacle, across the room,” strong enough to leave convenient evidence of its presence by moving about a bust too heavy for any of the household’s humans to lift (173). Gregg likens the apparition to “a snail pushing out his horns and drawing them in,” suggesting that his human body is akin to the “shell”—a natural aspect of his body, perhaps, as is the exoskeletal shell of the snail, but one that fails to represent the true or complete nature of the organism (173). It is likewise unclear whether the “tentacle” is physical in the strict sense of the term; in a retrospective on *The Three Impostors*, Machen writes that the idea that the Little People’s “limbs can be extruded and withdrawn in the fashion of the horns of the snail...was suggested to me by a hypothesis of Sir Oliver Lodge’s as to some of the feats of Eusapia Palladino” (Machen, “On Re-Reading” 538–39). Palladino was an Italian medium known for generating what Machen refers to as “extruded matter ectoplasm,” a semispiritual substance produced by the body of a medium during the course of a séance and which the ghosts present were said to inhabit or animate (“On Re-Reading” 539, Delgado). In her reading of ectoplasm as a negotiation of female physiology and agency, L. Anne Delgado describes the extreme variety in the accounts of ectoplasm’s appearance and qualities, appearing as “paste,” “threads,” “fabric,” or a “gelatinous substance,” and possessing both organic and spiritual qualities (Delgado). When ectoplasmic extrusions were pinched, mediums cried out in pain, but those extrusions were also liable to melt away if exposed to light, leaving their status stranded somewhere in the borderlands between the corporeal and the spiritual (Delgado). Whether the extrusions Gregg witnesses are physical or spiritual, it is of interest to note that the metaphor of the horns of a snail remains consistent between the novel and Machen’s retrospective years later. The metaphor could perhaps be extended to argue that the human body represents a natural

method of concealment or protection for a more vulnerable fairy side, whether that side is tangible or intangible.

While this seizure episode makes for the most horrific and spectacular reading between the two that occur in the story, the seizure Cradock suffers the day before is by far the more fascinating of the two for my purposes, so I quote it here at length:

“I was sitting on a bench in the garden, watching the boy Cradock weeding, when I was suddenly alarmed by a harsh and choking sound, like the cry of a wild beast in anguish, and I was unspeakably shocked to see the unfortunate lad standing in full view before me, his whole body quivering and shaking at short intervals as though shocks of electricity were passing through him, and his teeth grinding, and foam gathering on his lips, and his face all swollen and blackened to a hideous mask of humanity. I shrieked with terror, and Professor Gregg came running; and as I pointed to Cradock, the boy with one convulsive shudder fell face forward, and lay on the wet earth, his body writhing like a wounded blind-worm, and an inconceivable babble of sounds bursting and rattling and hissing from his lips; he seemed to pour forth an infamous jargon, with words, or what seemed words, that might have belonged to a tongue dead since untold ages, and buried deep beneath Nilotic mud, or in the inmost recesses of the Mexican forest. For a moment the thought passed through my mind, as my ears were still revolted with that infernal clamor, ‘Surely this is the very speech of hell,’ and then I cried out again and again, and ran away, shuddering to my inmost soul.” (Machen, “Novel of the Black Seal” 155)

There are several notable aspects of this description—not the least of which is its protracted length, making a spectacle of what is surely a moment of terrible violence and vulnerability for Cradock, and turning us readers to some extent into voyeurs. Of greatest interest to us is the

dizzying confluence of ideas invoking race and disability, humanity and animality, nature and culture, inherited and acquired traits, all centered around the words that pour out of Cradock in the midst of his seizure.

Many of the terms used to describe Cradock's *movements* during the seizure, like those used to describe the seizure in which his body transforms, are drawn from the animal kingdom. Miss Lally reports that Cradock's cries during his seizure are like that of a "wild beast in anguish" and his body writhes "like a wounded blind-worm," suggesting that he is dehumanized by losing control of his body, voice, and behavior (155). However, despite presenting him in these animalistic terms, his *words* remain recognizably human; somehow, Miss Lally is immediately able to identify the "inconceivable babble of sounds bursting and rattling and hissing from his lips" as a language (155). Even more, she identifies this language in precisely localized and perhaps even racialized terms, calling it a tongue long "buried deep beneath Nilotic mud, or in the inmost recesses of the Mexican forest" (155). Miss Lally's characterization of the language not only emphasizes its age but assigns it specific cultural origins, locating it in Africa and Central America, where once-mighty but "primitive" civilizations have long since been obliterated by Greco-Roman and Spanish (read: European) colonialization. This passage, then, represents Cradock's disability as both debasing his body into the realm of animality and racializing his speech—intertwining discourses of race, animality, and disability that are all deeply and firmly rooted in exclusive notions of humanity and capacious notions of subhumanity.

This conflation of racist and ableist discrimination is hardly unique to Machen, or to fiction. Disability has been deployed almost routinely in order to justify (or even promote as virtuous) marginalization and paternalistic behavior towards minorities. For example, Matthew

Thomson details how psychiatrists “tended to conclude that there was a fundamental biological difference in the brain, perhaps akin to that of the mental defective, that helped to account for intellectual inferiority” of Indigenous populations (Thomson 123). This “fundamental” flaw justified treating them as inherently untrustworthy, whether this meant stripping their right to make decisions for themselves and their nations or labeling them as dangerous. The reverse is also true; disability has been explained in racial terms. The most extreme example of this is in the history of Down syndrome. As Mark Jackson notes in his study of the deployment of racial stereotypes in early formulations of Down syndrome—referred to by its first major researcher, John Langdon Down, as “Mongolism” in his 1862 paper on the subject—the concepts of racial difference and disability are co-constitutive, and a similar disciplinary impulse motivated both colonial practices and the confinement of disabled people into asylums and institutions, what Jackson refers to as “purpose-built ‘colonies’ for defectives” (167-168). It is surely no coincidence that Machen calls his fairies “Turanians” while Down terms individuals born with trisomy 21 as “mongoloid idiots”—both terms invoke not just stereotypical physiognomic differences between people of Asian descent and the white people that Machen and Down considered the human standard, but also stereotypes of behavior and cognition that represented Asians as less advanced along the evolutionary scale.²⁸ Both Machen and Down used racial difference as a shorthand to portray what they regarded as evolutionary inferiority, a connection that eugenicists would eagerly exploit to dismiss all nonwhite individuals as dysgenic and therefore unfit marital or sexual partners for white people.

²⁸ In an ironic twist, Down’s research, though racist as well as ableist, presented a challenge to the polygenist theories of Morton and other scientists. He regarded “mongolian idiots” as atavistic throwbacks, or resurgences of former (and inferior) evolutionary states; therefore, the physical resemblance he perceived between those with Down syndrome and the “Mongolian” race implied that the “Mongolian” existed somewhere along the evolutionary track the white race had tread, and they had not evolved separately after all (Jackson 171).

The most interesting detail of this scene is the fact that Cradock's state of debility seems to *enable* this racialized form of speech—while enduring a seizure he becomes able to speak the fairy tongue, so these episodes expose a fairy *cultural* identity as well as a fairy body. In other words, his particular (disabled, hybrid) embodiment brings him into proximity with a cultural identity from which he might naturally be estranged by being raised in human rather than fairy society. Language is, of course, a cultural object, both situated within and generating social realities, but Machen represents Cradock's fairy language as somehow inherent and inherited alongside the attributes of his concealed fairy physiognomy, since it is highly unlikely that he learned it in any conventional way. It is somewhat conceivable that he could have learned the fairy language directly from the fairies themselves since Gregg learns that Cradock “had more than once encountered his kinsmen in lonely places in that lonely land” (Machen, “Novel of the Black Seal” 172). However, it seems far more likely that fairy modes of expression were somehow ingrained in him from birth; not only does the previous quote suggest that Cradock's meetings with his fairy relatives are too infrequent to develop much fluency in fairy language, but Morgan the gardener reports that Cradock used to “frighten the other children into fits with the noises he would make” “when he could scarcely walk,” long before rambles on the hills would bring him into contact with his father's kinfolk (154). This further complicates a superficial reading of Cradock's seizure-driven transformations as purely physical, or as navigating a firm boundary between his human “half” and his fairy “half.” Indeed, the notion that there is a half to distinguish, either physically or genetically, is deeply suspect here given the arguments I have made regarding the implication of a possible common origin between humans and fairies, as well as our observation that binaristic thinking is a fallacy common to the metagenre of disability.

The uneasy distinction here between Cradock's race and ability, as well as the situation of cultural identity within the realm of the biological, echoes my previous chapter's findings about eugenicists' tendency to overestimate the influence of genetics, and attribute to it differences that we now recognize to be largely social. The idea that there is a firm line to be drawn anywhere in the gray areas between biological and social determiners of difference, much less that there was an identifiable heritable basis for all realities of a person's life—and the tendency to overestimate how much could be attributed to nature—was one of the most pervasive fictions in eugenic thinking, and one most poorly practiced by eugenicists themselves. Race, disability, and culture mingle so inextricably in Machen's portrayal of Jervase Cradock because attempts to distill all sources of difference to biology, instead of simplifying narratives, only left categories and ascriptions hopelessly muddled. Machen deploys that very muddiness for horrific effect, representing Jervase as automatically possessing a threatening and monstrous quality to his character due to his ancestry; his mere existence as a mixed-race individual threatens the category of the natural not just by being the result of an unnatural pairing, but by oozing across the boundaries between nature and nurture.

In fact, this misattribution of social determiners to the realm of the biological ultimately contributed to eugenicist's loss of credibility both to historians and contemporaries in scientific and popular spheres. As understanding of the mechanisms of heredity increased, the persuasiveness of eugenic logics crumbled rather than being reinforced. There was a considerable gap between eugenics' rise to prominence and the rediscovery of Mendel's experiments on heredity in 1900, and a much longer one until any workable understanding of those laws was achieved. The Galton Laboratory at University College London under Karl Pearson as well as the Eugenics Record Office in Cold Spring Harbor, New York dedicated their

resources to collecting and analyzing great masses of biometrical data intended to help uncover the mechanisms of heredity; however, data that eugenicists (particularly the Eugenics Record Office) could contribute to the rest of the scientific community was frequently so subjective in its collection methods or so idiosyncratic to eugenic interests that it lacked credibility and usefulness to others (Kevles 199). It might seem that the goals of genetic researchers and eugenicists would have significant areas of overlap, but in reality, eugenicists' collections of data were flawed simply because these goals were not truly aligned. Eugenicists' investments in advancing knowledge of heredity were mostly contingent upon the findings slotting into a narrative which they had already determined: that there was a genetic basis for all life realities and that deeper understandings of genetics would allow human intervention into their mechanisms. This, in turn, would ultimately allow the creation of a perfected version of the human race. When emerging findings contradicted these narratives, exposing the genetic basis of race as a fiction and proving the near futility of selective breeding to eliminate recessive traits, it undercut support for the eugenic agenda (Kevles 165). At the end of the day, eugenic logics thrived on the ability to chalk unanswered questions about why people are the way they are, and how to go about preventing or correcting perceived deviance, up to a mechanism of inheritance so poorly understood that any power could be ascribed to it without possibility of, or even serious motivation for, refuting that ascription. Once this ascription was exposed as a farce, support for eugenics—at least as it had heretofore been constituted—waned both in the scientific and public imagination.

Mothers of Monsters

Of the stories I explore in this chapter, by far Machen's most influential, commercially successful, and enduringly loved is *The Great God Pan*. In a 1925 letter, Machen recounts that even Oscar Wilde called the book "*un grand succès, un grand succès*" at their final meeting in 1895, but Machen seems less optimistic; he refers to the success Wilde congratulates as the novel's "supposed success" (Machen, *Letter to Munson Havens* 7). Machen's ambivalence towards Wilde's compliment proceeds partly from the stormy reception *The Great God Pan* received thanks to its oblique hints at the catastrophic lure of a violent, morbid, and bestial sexuality, a reception that is partly attributable to Wilde's own highly publicized trials for sodomy and gross indecency and the shift in literary taste that it incited. "There had been some ugly scandals in the summer of '95," Machen writes of the failure of *The Three Impostors*, "which had made people impatient with reading matter that was not obviously and obtrusively 'healthy'" (115). The majority of the British readership (or at least a loud minority) in the wake of the Wilde trials clamored for literature containing explicitly articulated morals, and vociferously rejecting any that hinted at the seductive subversiveness of Wilde's set. In the introduction to a 1916 reprinting of the novel, Machen includes snippets of twelve reviews that appeared after the novel's publication, in which *The Great God Pan* is alternately condemned as indecent and gruesome and as boring or ridiculous where it intends to be bloodcurdling (Machen, "Introduction" xix-xxii). Machen professed a form of perverse delight in these reviews, and in 1923 recounted the most "exquisite," the "remark of a literary agent whom I met one day in Fleet Street. He looked at me impressively, morally, disapprovingly, and said: 'Do you know, I was having tea with some ladies at Hampstead the other day, and their opinion seemed to have been

that such a book as “The Great God Pan” [*sic*] should never have been written” (Machen, *Bibliography* 19).

Only twenty years later, though, the tide had shifted considerably; Machen’s 1926 biography recounts a friend telling him “genially” the other day, “I have just been reading that ‘Great God Pan’ [*sic*] of yours over again, and I really don’t see that there’s much in it to make a sensation of” (Machen, *Things Near and Far* 98). A mere thirty years after the novella’s publication, the thickly veiled hints of disordered sexuality that once mortified the Victorian public had become mild, unremarkable. This may be attributed at least partly to the role that the eugenics movement played in the introduction of discourses about sex into the public sphere. Eugenicists regarded sexual education and research as critical to educating the public to make informed sexual decisions, so it became (perhaps surprisingly considering the conservatism of much eugenic ideology) a major aspect of the eugenic public outreach platform (Kevles 66). In fact, eugenics scholar Alexandra Minna Stern argues that these discourses established “conceptual architecture and lexicon that underpins contemporary epistemologies of gender and sexuality” (185); this is ironic because this contemporary epistemology has grown to encompass sexualities that had little place in the mainline eugenic schema except to be excluded from reproductive life. Traditional family and gender roles—man and wife, if both exceptional, procreating as prodigiously as possible, with the wife subsequently dedicating herself to raising the children healthily and wholesomely—were the cornerstone of the eugenic movement. Sexual education was encouraged in order to help individuals make sexual decisions that conformed to eugenic standard, and their surprisingly frank discourse on the topic of the female orgasm and their encouragement of wives to take more control in the sex lives they shared with their husbands was meant to encourage frequent and fulfilling intimacy within marriage (Stern 201,

Kevles 65). Desire to deviate from those roles was seen as proof of degeneracy, and therefore a disqualification for acceptance into a eugenic reproductive paradigm. Any seeming liberality in eugenic frankness regarding sex, therefore, was often used to reinforce rather than subvert existing sexual mores.

Despite this ideological hostility towards liberal attitudes about sex and marriage, some sexual radicals and queer individuals at the time did actually see an opportunity to disrupt the homogeneity of traditional norms in the eugenic movement—in fact, Daniel Kevles asserts that “eugenic enthusiasm was highest among social radicals” in its early days (Kevles 21). The most well-known and active subset of sexual radicals participating in the eugenics movement were feminists, which is perhaps hardly surprising given the crucial role that women, as the mothers of the coming generation, would have to play in any eugenic scheme for the future. Sexologist Havelock Ellis dedicates three full chapters out of twelve in his monograph on eugenics, *The Task of Social Hygiene*, to the “woman question,” writing, “the realization of eugenics in our social life can only be attained with the realization of the woman movement in its latest and completest phase as an enlightened culture of motherhood” (46). Eugenicists and feminists were also united by their mutual concern with the birth control debate, which “ultimately proved to be a key point of connection between them;” by the 1940s eugenic and birth control discourses were so intertwined as to make untangling the respective influences and motives of the two an impossible task (Klausen and Bashford 110, 102). Margaret Sanger—feminist, birth control activist, and (famously) eugenicist—operated at the intersection of feminist and eugenicist platforms, advocating for the use of birth control and sexual education particularly to curb the fertility of the unfit (Klausen and Bashford 110). Mainline eugenicists, on the other hand, feared

the licentiousness that might result from divorcing sex from its reproductive function and so opposed this measure even though it could prevent the birth of dysgenic children (Kevles 87-88).

Female eugenicists, to a somewhat surprising extent, were forced to navigate contradictory imperatives to determine whether their intellectual and activist work on behalf of the movement or the traditional feminine labor of homemaking would be a greater contribution to the eugenic cause; women represented “fully half the membership of the British eugenics society” and “about a quarter of its officers,” and held about one-third of staff positions in the Galton Biometrics Lab under Karl Pearson (Kevles 64). Some feminists, like Charlotte Perkins Gilman, tried to reconcile the two imperatives by suggesting emancipated women would make for fitter mothers (Lamp and Cleigh 178). (It must be noted that those for whom eugenics was a viable path to liberation in the economic and sexual realms almost universally benefitted from white, heterosexual, and able-bodied privilege. Any gains achieved in career or relational realms were either very unequally or not at all extended to women of color, queer or trans women, and disabled women.) However, amongst many eugenicists, there was strong antifeminist sentiment, with many eugenicists arguing that “women’s reproductive capacity was too important to the race/nation to be left to women’s charge” (Klausen and Bashford 109). They objected to giving women greater economic, intellectual, and social freedoms, anxious that a stronger presence in civic life would diminish a woman’s investment in the domestic sphere (a presentiment that received support from the relatively lower rate of marriage and childbirth among career and college-educated women) (Kevles 89). Feminists without eugenic ties, in turn, were skeptical of eugenic morals and method, some worried that association with eugenics (which was highly radical in its own way, despite its significant conservative investments) would harm the respectability of their cause (Klausen and Bashford 108).

Eugenic demands on women rested on a fundamental misconstrual of the female experience that was even espoused by feminist eugenicists. More fundamentally than her role as a homemaker, the primary role of any woman in the eugenic scheme was to manage sexual access to her own body, ceding it only to the worthiest of fathers, and ideally only if she herself could be counted as a worthy mother. In essence, women were to serve as a vanguard of reproductive futurity, the final line of defense to prevent unworthy children from entering the world through their own bodies. This demand, antifeminist by today's standards due to its reinscription of patriarchal valuation of women solely on the basis of their reproductive capacity, was echoed by feminist eugenicists, who saw in women's biological monopoly over reproduction an opportunity to claim a place of high honor (and even superiority to men) in the society eugenicists aimed to create (Lamp and Cleigh 177). Edith Lees Ellis wrote that "one of the chief points in the great circle of women's progress is for women to realise that, in them, lies the responsibility for the health and the sanity of the nation through their refusal to add to the misery of the world by bringing into it human beings who are badly handicapped even before birth" (E. L. Ellis 55). Ellis connects preventing disabled existences with progress for women and a diminishment of the general stock of human misery, which is not only upsettingly ableist but also demonstrates the complexity of contemporary feminist attitudes towards the competing demands of the reproductive and socio-economic gains that feminists sought to achieve. Feminist eugenicists did not cease advocating for social and economic freedom for women—indeed, they argued that socioeconomic constriction, especially in the debilitating capitalist machine, made less fit mothers (Lamp and Cleigh 178-179). However, this liberation was not paired with liberation from the expectation of reproduction, as we might reflexively anticipate today. Instead, socioeconomic freedom enabled better stewardship of a reproductive capacity regarded as

equally sacred by conservative fundamentalists and this particular branch of feminist-eugenicist progressives.

The expectation that women should refuse to conceive unworthy offspring, however, can only be made by overlooking or ignoring the ways that familial control, social expectations, and sexual violence impede women's ability to make autonomous sexual decisions, and how intersecting experiences of oppression can diminish a woman's access to power and independence even further. These impediments to sexual decision-making are clearly illustrated by the experiences of the female victims of sexual assault in the Machen tales under consideration here. There are three: Mrs. Cradock, mother of Jervase Cradock by an unknown fairy assailant; Mary, mother of Helen Vaughan by the god Pan; and Annie Trevor, abducted and assaulted in the course of an apparently orgiastic fairy ritual. All three women are in stages of life assumed to be sexually inert for women at the time, either young virgins (Mary and Annie) or a widow (Mrs. Cradock), and show no indications that they would have been otherwise given the choice. However, the choice was robbed from them through a variety of complex and overlapping factors that mirror the experiences of women in the real world.

It should be noted that in many respects the analysis I am about to perform of the victims of sexual violence (and the analysis that I will later perform of the perpetrators) is contrary to the impulse of the texts themselves, which veil the assaults in oblique language and relative narrative obscurity. In two out of the three stories explored here, the fairy assailants go completely without description, which interestingly renders the *act* of rape a marginal source of the stories' horror even while the *concept* of interspecies union looms darkly over the narrative. For *The Great God Pan* and "The Novel of the Black Seal," horror is found not in the lusts of fairies, but in the existences of their hybrid children. Only in "The Shining Pyramid" is the actual act of rape the

primary source of fear, which is why the story describes fairy bodies (entirely absent in the other two tales) in such visceral detail. To the reader, who witnesses only glimpses and knows very few details, the horror inspired by the suggestion of fairy sexual violence remains conceptual, and hopelessly entangled with the horrifying nature of the hybrid children, whom we witness much more clearly. In my focus on how the mothers of those children suffer at the hands of their fairy assailants, I am therefore feeling out the edges of a gap in the narrative more than analyzing a presence, tracing that presence by the shape of its absence.

The most obvious way that women's sexual autonomy can be compromised is through the use of physical force to obtain access to a woman's body without her consent; though this point hardly requires explanation, I will provide a reading later on of how the physical and psychological consequences of assaults in these three stories unjustly punish the victims for failing to protect themselves. More subtly, however, what details are provided about these three assaults suggest that their family structures failed to shelter women from the dangers of sexual assault, or even actively cast them in harm's way, by combining exacting social and moral standards with severe restrictions on their freedoms.²⁹ Annie and Mrs. Cradock's assaults occur in strikingly similar ways, in the course of a visit to relatives over the hills: Annie on her way to visit her widowed aunt and Mrs. Cradock, a cousin. This is easily legible as an allegory representing women's inability to move freely through the world outside their homes without fear of harm (a reality which persists to this day), but also represents the inadequacy of what protections they do possess. The experience of widows like Mrs. Cradock, whose husband's

²⁹ It does not seem to me that Machen intended to present a proto-feminist representation of sexual assault along the lines of the feminist reading I will conduct here (though to his credit he nowhere renders these women's assault a spectacle or source of excitement, only as a chilling catastrophe). To a modern reader, though, it is almost impossible to feel appalled merely by the sexual elements of the scene without a corresponding horror at the social realities that permit and perpetuate the suffering the women endure.

passing leaves her the head of her household but without the full rights and freedoms of that position due to being a woman, would experience the stings of these contradictions even more sharply. She ventures into the hills to visit a cousin, likely seeking condolences or legal or financial assistance in the wake of her husband's passing. In this scenario, she is ironically forced to expose herself to the risk of physical/sexual danger in order to avoid the risk of financial or legal danger; the very dependence on male or married female family members, ostensible meant to protect her, casts her into harm's way.

Further, Mary's case exposes the ways that domestic sexual violence, including spousal rape, evades regulation within the patriarchal system. The physical act of rape may have been committed by Pan, but her adoptive father, Dr. Raymond, is the one who exposes her to sexual predation in the first place, revealing the family structure as not only a deficient safe haven but a possible site of active harm. While the purpose of Raymond's experiment is ostensibly to enable Mary to see the reality of the magical world, the ultimate result is that he offers Mary up to Pan's abuse both by bringing her to Pan's attention and by stripping her of the capability to defend herself, an illustration of the way that women's imposed dependence on male family members gives those family members strong influence over their sexual decision-making process that undermines the eugenic imperative that women regulate their own sexual lives. There are even indications that Raymond was aware that the beings Mary would see once her sight was opened would have sexual designs upon her but chose to proceed with the operation anyway. Clarke, the witness to the procedure, attempts to object with (among other things) a pair of oblique references to some information Raymond previously communicated to Clarke via letter, which Clarke connects to Mary's attractiveness (Machen, "The Great God Pan" 6). While it is unclear what exactly Clark means by saying things like, "She was so beautiful that Clarke did not

wonder at what the doctor had written to him,” it is clear that there are grounds for Clarke to object to the procedure on the grounds of Mary’s attractiveness and what would be “requisite” of her because of it, suggesting a possible sexual threat (4). In a well-rehearsed theme of patriarchal fatherhood, sexual access to daughters (usually through marriage) is traded for desired advantages (usually monetary or social, but here related to scientific/career ambitions).

Even more appalling is Raymond’s utter dismissal of any sense of responsibility for or even emotional attachment to a woman he has raised from childhood. When Clarke attempts to warn Raymond of the emotional consequences he may experience if the untested operation goes awry, the doctor responds, “As you know, I rescued Mary from the gutter, and from almost certain starvation, when she was a child; I think her life is mine, to use as I see fit” (4). Here, safety previously offered becomes the justification for withholding present safety, and the argument that she might have been dead already used to dismiss the present threat to her life. Mary’s intersecting experiences of marginalization as an adopted woman of low-class origin render her life and her reproductive future literally expendable, in the sense that Raymond feels he may pay it out as the price for advancing his scientific ambitions. Even though Mary consents to the operation, then, her marginal status in Raymond’s heart and household forces the reader to question the validity of that consent. When she instinctively struggles against the anesthesia Raymond administers, she intentionally masters the impulse “with the feeling of submission strong within her” and crosses “her arms upon her breast as a little child about to say her prayers” (7). Even though Raymond is careful to procure verbal consent to the procedure and names Clarke his “witness,” the infantilized characterization in this description as well as the implication that Mary must master her aversion to make herself submit suggests that she may have been raised in such a way that withholding her consent has become impossible (7). Mary’s

situation reveals the complicated status of consent and reproductive agency for women under a patriarchal system, which compromises their ability to make decisions for themselves by attacking the very root of their identity formation.

Eugenic demands for women to manage sexual access to their bodies may have been unreasonable given the harmfulness of ostensibly protective family structures and the subsequent erosion of consent, but the punishments for failing to succeed in this impossible task were also extreme. Consider the case of the most infamous sterilization case in American history, that of Carrie Buck. Buck was the plaintiff in the 1927 United States Supreme Court case which ruled compulsory sterilization constitutional (*Buck v. Bell*). After she gave birth to a daughter, Vivian, while unwed at the age of seventeen, Buck's adoptive family committed her to a colony for feeble-minded and epileptic individuals and petitioned to have her sterilized. According to Buck's testimony, which was never brought to trial by her state-appointed lawyer, she conceived Vivian in the course of a rape committed against her by her adoptive mother's nephew, suggesting that her adoptive family callously traded Buck's personal freedom, reproductive choice, and future quality of life to save face for themselves—or worse, to rid themselves of her. As Paul A. Lombardo summarizes the case, “Carrie Buck was betrayed by her foster parents and her lawyer; her story was manipulated to protect the doctors who were charged with caring for her” (Lombardo 277). Allegations of feeble-mindedness and degeneracy, both “evidenced” by Buck conceiving a child through rape, justified medico-juridical invasion of not just Buck's body but that of tens of thousands of other Americans whose sterilizations were justified by the legal precedent set by her case.

Though they are helpless to protect themselves, Mary, Mrs. Cradock, and Annie are forced to endure dire consequences as a result of these nonconsensual sexual encounters. The

most extreme consequence, afflicting Annie and Mary, is death, and another, suffered by Mary and Mrs. Cradock, is the loss of sanity and mental health. Annie Trevor is consumed by the fiery finale of the fairy ritual for which she was abducted and in which she was assaulted, which either kills her or bears her beyond the human realm forever (ostensibly to suffer future torment) (Machen, "The Shining Pyramid" 94). Mary's assault at Pan's hands (or the mere sight of the magical world) leaves her a "hopeless idiot" (Machen, "The Great God Pan" 7)—a term that would be later employed by American psychologist and eugenicist Henry H. Goddard to describe patients with disabilities who had been assigned a "mental age" of one or two years old, the youngest/mentally weakest on his scale. She dies as a direct consequence, a few days after delivering the child Pan forced upon her (50). Unlike Mary, Mrs. Cradock survives her assault, but her survival is one deeply and indelibly marked by the resultant trauma. In the immediate aftermath of the assault, she must shoulder the burdens of mourning her husband, carrying and delivering the child of her rapist, and recovering from the physical trauma and mental breakdown she suffers as a result of the rape. Afterwards, she raises her rapist's child, who has extra care needs due to his "weak intellect" and "fits," without the benefit of a partner and struggling for resources and opportunities, and with her economic choices doubly limited and strained since she lacks both the relative freedom afforded a childless woman and the security afforded a married woman.

Interestingly, Machen chooses to shelter both Mary and Mrs. Cradock from any social consequences from the rapes they suffer, though their children might easily constitute undeniable proof of extramarital sexual relations. Only Dr. Raymond is aware of Mary's assault and impregnation before her death, and it seems that Mary would have had few social contacts to be scandalized in any case. Mrs. Cradock is saved from disgrace by the proximity of Jervase's

conception to her husband's passing; Jervase is born somewhat early (by human standards), a few months after Mrs. Cradock's ill-fated trip over the hills, which leads the villagers to assume that Jervase is the son of his mother's late husband (Machen, "Novel of the Black Seal" 170). Annie is the only victim to suffer any consequences from her fellow humans for falling victim to fairy violence, but that consequence is as severe as may be, and unmistakably a eugenic one. In some of the final lines of the story Dyson describes the course of his deductions (where Annie's abduction figures, distressingly, only to suggest to him that fairies might be involved). He concludes: "But there is one thing I must add: I don't regret our inability to rescue the wretched girl. You saw the appearance of those things that gathered thick and writhed in the Bowl; you may be sure that what lay bound in the midst of them was no longer fit for earth" (Machen, "The Shining Pyramid" 99). Dyson and Vaughan make a conscious decision not to attempt Annie's rescue, and that decision is motivated not by fear for their personal safety confronting the fairy hordes but by the conviction that she is not worth the risk of saving. The abuse she has suffered at the hands of the fairies may have left her injured to the point of death, but calling her "no longer *fit* for this Earth" also seems to suggest that something about her treatment has cast her from human society. Determining who and who is not fit to exist in society is essentially eugenic work, and the eugenic resonances of their decision are all the more resounding because of the suggestion (never explicitly articulated, but heavily implied by Vaughan's characterization of Annie as a "remarkably handsome" "village beauty" and by the descriptions of the rite of the Shining Pyramid) that the damage that left her unfit for the world is sexual in nature (79). In fact, the name of this dissertation comes from the moment in which Dyson and Vaughan witness the culmination of the rite of the Shining Pyramid: "he peered into the quaking mass and saw faintly that there were things like faces and human limbs, and yet he felt his inmost soul chill with the

sure belief that no fellow soul or human thing stirred in all that tossing and hissing host” (Machen, “The Shining Pyramid” 93–94). Though Dyson means to refer to the humanoid forms of the fairies, the line becomes even more chilling when we realize that there is, in fact, a human there, and that Dyson has excluded her from the category. Annie’s brutalization at the hands of the fairy horde is interpreted as re-rendering her body, which excludes her even from the category of human “things” and thereby from fitness for this Earth.

Being sexually assaulted has re-rendered Annie’s eugenic status, leaving her previously wholesome and desirable body tainted not just by the theft of its virginity but by its contact with an undesirable Other. As Brigitte Fiedler explores in a reading of *Othello*’s Desdemona, the idealized female body can be re-racialized by interracial sex, so that racial markers are imagined to transfer not only from parent to child but “horizontally through sexual encounters between partners or even in backward genealogies from child to mother” (45). Annie (as well as Mary) is entirely expelled from the human world once they have had sexual contact with another, condemning them to obscurity both in their storyworlds and in the narratives they occupy, just like the fairies who lurk obliquely between the lines of each of these tales. Mrs. Cradock is permitted to survive, but her survival proves that the “re-racialization” from sexual assault runs deeper than a mere social repugnance. Mrs. Cradock behaves thus after being discovered and returned home after her assault: “All the night she never ceased her crying, mixing her lament with words of some unintelligible jargon, and when the doctor arrived he pronounced her insane” (Machen, “Novel of the Black Seal” 170). In “The Novel of the Black Seal,” the word “jargon” is used only four times, and (although the four uses are spread across two separate characters) refers exclusively to the fairy language. It is extremely curious and disturbing to suppose that Mrs. Cradock would have picked up some words of fairy language in the course of her assault,

and that these words would be the only distinguishable ones that she produces perhaps for weeks afterwards. As we have already discussed fairy language as a site where the social and biological collide for Jervase Cradock, her son, it seems compelling to suggest that something bordering on the biological is also occurring to Mrs. Cradock as she raves in fairy language. If a woman's body becomes "re-racialized" after bearing mixed-race children, then unwise reproductive choice is a compound threat, risking not only the birth of undesirable offspring and a loss of control over the family line, but the disqualification of valuable eugenic breeding partners from reproductive life by rendering them dysgenic instead, reproductively disabling the once reproductively fit. Although Machen, writing in the 1890s, was far removed from the eugenic practices of segregation and sterilization that would peak in the 1930s and 1940s, the anxieties his texts display about white women's "ruin" through interracial sexual assault reveal these practices as the logical culmination of a longstanding fear. Perhaps this could serve as an explanation for why these female characters, once "ruined," are banished to the outskirts of the story. Reconstituted from their previously pure and desirable status by the experience of interspecies sexual assault, they no longer represent a source of identification or pathos for the reader and must be shuffled out of sight. Or perhaps, as so often has been the fate of women in literature, having given birth—albeit to monstrosities, introducing horror to the narrative rather than hope—their sole function has been fulfilled, and they are no longer needed.

Consent and Corruption

In undertaking a reading about the fairies who *commit* sexual assault, I again find myself with a surprising lack of material to work with, especially given that fairies are ostensibly a source of terror in the three stories with which this chapter is concerned. The lack of detail may

be at least partly motivated by generic concerns; Machen's fairy stories are masterful examples of what would come to be known as cosmic horror, a subgenre populated by terrible yet dimly understood forces or beings whom the protagonists survive mostly by being beneath their notice. Obscuring the nature of the antagonists is a tried-and-true method for generating the atmospheric mood characterizing the genre (which was formalized by H. P. Lovecraft but pre-enacted by many of his influences, including Algernon Blackwood and Machen himself). However, the rapid *exeunt* of female characters from the stories once they have been tainted by contact with fairy men, which contributes just as much as the absent fairies to the marginal role of rape as a source of horror, is less obviously dismissed by this explanation. Women seem to occupy a paradoxical role in the text, both present primarily to bear the hybrid offspring from which the story's true horror springs and narratively and socially expendable once their reproductive desirability is compromised. In both, the victim is ushered offstage as soon as the violence occurs, and in neither tale are we invited to shudder at the sight of the horrific fairy who violates the women the way we are invited to shudder at the hybrid offspring that results. While neither the events of "The Shining Pyramid" nor *The Great God Pan* would exist without the rapes they suffer, Annie and Mary are obviated as characters the instant the assaults occur; Mary need only linger in a near-vegetative state long enough to deliver Helen before she makes her exit.

Even as Machen continues to skirt around the act and experience of sexual assault, (and perhaps even due to this evasiveness) what we *do* experience of sexual assault becomes decidedly queer. As vicious bespoilers of previously eugenic white women, fairy rapists might at first appear as easily legible allegories for dysgenic men—siring offspring who are sickly both physically and mentally and who are abhorrent and even dangerous to the humans of pure lineage around them. As my earlier analysis of the racial and disability coding of fairies will

support, men of color, men of low social class, and disabled men were reviled as potential contaminants of the germ line at best and a threat of uncontrollable reproductive violence at worst. These dysgenic men, possessing sexual urges they either could not or refused to keep under the rigid control demanded by eugenic schemes for family planning and powerful enough to force themselves (and their inferior germ plasm) upon unwilling partners, needed to be controlled and contained in order to preserve an orderly reproductive schema. In the real world, this impetus to control and contain led to the expansion of carceral institutions and in sterilization programs that eliminated the possibility that those diagnosed as unfit could perpetuate that unfitness, but in Machen's stories, the fairy perpetrators are beyond the reach of any such control or containment, since the existence of fairies is suspected only by country folk and a handful of outré scientists.

The only assailant in our three stories of whom we have any substantial knowledge is (at least outwardly) a woman, and herself the product of assault: Helen Vaughan, the human/fairy hybrid forced upon Mary by Pan. The latter part of *The Great God Pan* centers around the mystery of a rash of suicides afflicting affluent London men as though by contagion, the cause of which is later revealed to be late-night encounters with Helen (under her alias as Mrs. Beaumont, a fashionable London salon-mistress). There is no explicit admission that these encounters are sexual in nature, but we know that she has before used sex to fatally corrupt her husband, Herbert; he describes her "sitting up in bed" on the "night of the wedding" to expound on "things which even now [he] would not dare whisper in the blackest night, though [he] stood in the midst of a wilderness" (Machen, "The Great God Pan" 16). Apparently, Helen substitutes (or culminates) the consummation of their marriage with an induction into the eldritch mysteries that would later wreck Herbert's sanity and livelihood and ultimately cost him his life. The

scandalous timing of the suicide victim's visits to her rooms is also highly suggestive that sex plays a major role in Helen's hunting strategy, as is the inclusion of "furious lust" in the list of the "infernal medley of passions" on the face of one of her victims on his way home to take his own life (38).

Helen's female gender presentation alone is enough to alienate her actions from traditional understandings of sexual violence, but her story is rife with ontological uncertainties that further this alienation. Not least of these is Helen's own body/being, revealed in the novel's climax to be not only gender-fluid but also species-fluid and perhaps simply *fluid*. Appropriately for Machen's evolutionary theory of magic, Helen's shivering between man and woman, human and beast and "worse than beast," is described as "all the work by which man had been made repeated before my eyes"—it is an atavism, her evolutionary ancestry all somehow contained within her and occupied by her simultaneously (Machen, "The Great God Pan" 50, 46). Also defying conventional definitional boundaries is the sexually stimulated suicide she somehow induces her victims to commit, which is an undeniably sexual form of violence but one which does not conform to any definition of sexual assault that might readily come to mind, destabilizing definitions of assault by raising questions about the way that power is negotiated during sexual encounters through conformity to or inversion of expected gender roles, and how these conformities and inversions impact the sanctity of consent. Helen is the only (explicitly) female-presenting fairy I have been able to locate in Machen's work, and—surely not coincidentally—her method of entrapping her victims is also unique, both in the way *Helen* executes it and the way *Machen* represents it. Her seductions are rendered in far more enticing terms than the rapes committed against Annie and Mrs. Cradock; those rapes, committed by dysgenic men against vulnerable white women, are hinted at with an almost imperceptibly light

touch, and Machen seems to regard them with repugnance. Helen's seductions, on the other hand—committed by a seemingly respectable woman who reveals herself to be not only sexually aggressive but wise in mysteries both occult and sexual—are presented as temptations to readers as well as her victims, a textual tease that reveals enough to entice but refuses to show as much as readers would wish.

Enticement plays into the unstable notions of assault and consent in the novel. More traditional, masculinized sexual assaults perpetrated by the racially and disabled-coded hypersexed male fairies of this and the other stories examined in this chapter do not concern themselves with the desires of the victim, instead relying on brute force to deprive the victim of her ability to withhold her consent—and, as I have explored above, giving the lie to the expectation that sexual access to a woman's body is entirely within her own control. The violence performed by the female(-presenting) Helen, on the other hand, corresponds more closely to the feminized mode of a seduction, which encourages the victim to succumb to their own desires, whether preexisting or intentionally inspired by the seducer. In other words, seduction manipulates the victim into ceding consent that was previously withheld.

While seduction fundamentally relies on the participation of the victim, receiving consent does not guarantee protection from violence, since lies told or information withheld may render the consent extracted *uninformed* and throw the status of consent into a state of uncertainty. How much are Helen's victims to blame when they could not have known what she was? Given the impossibility of determining consent in these cases, seduction has been experienced as a form of sexual violence by both male and female victims, and was often interpreted as such by eugenicists. In their terms, the sexual pathology of dysgenic men could be represented as either undersexed or hypersexual; however, dysgenic women were universally understood to be

“sources of debauchery, licentiousness, and illegitimacy,” and they were thereby understood to represent dangerous sexual enticements to eugenic men (Kevles 107). Eugenics historian Daniel J. Kevles notes the “circularity” of this analysis—“immoral behavior was taken ipso facto as evidence of feeble-mindedness, which in turn was claimed to produce immoral behavior” (Kevles 107). Worse, in addition to being sexually voracious, dysgenic seductresses were considered dangerously difficult to identify as such. Mathew Thomson writes that according to prominent eugenicist Henry Goddard and his ilk, “the highest grade of mental defective—the feeble-minded—could readily pass as normal (unlike the physically disabled), and thus there was widespread belief that the scale of the problem had been underreported and that many of the major social problems of the day might be accounted for in this way” (Thomson 119). These “high-grade” feeble-minded individuals’ ability to pass for “normal” not only made them difficult to locate and diagnose, thereby resulting in undue social burdens of crime and pauperism, but they could also seduce “normal” partners into reproducing with them, thereby perpetuating their weaknesses (Kline 23).³⁰

Given that the details of the assaults Helen commits are as scanty as those committed by other fairies (perhaps even more so, since Machen balks at even the admission that sex is at all involved in the suicides, whereas the existence of children makes it impossible to deny the other rapes), it is useless to seriously attempt to answer the question of how much blame to assign to her and how much to her victims. It is more interesting to explore instead how the secrets concealed from readers of *The Great God Pan* and revealed fatally to Helen’s lovers reveals the

³⁰ This viewpoint is problematic on several registers, even beyond the reduction of these “high-grade feeble-minded” individuals to scheming nymphomaniacs or deliberate saboteurs of fit bloodlines. Disabled people continue to be represented as dangerously and/or violently hypersexual even today, but in fact people (particularly women) with disabilities are at a much higher risk of *suffering* sexual abuse than their nondisabled counterparts. Furthermore, representing disabled people’s sexuality as essentially pathological denies them the human right to enjoy mutually consenting sexuality.

instability of the foundation of the very concept of consent. While we are entirely ignorant of what Helen actually *does* to her victims, it seems safe to assume that the men who fall prey to her cannot have consented in full knowledge of what a sexual encounter with her would entail, and not just because of the surprises her fairy physiology would have presented to them once she unveiled it. Helen's sexuality is decidedly queer, and more than in the sense that her body "waver[s] from sex to sex, dividing itself from itself, and then [is] again reunited," even "descend[ing] to the beasts whence it ascended," to the utter obliteration of all preconceptions about what sex might look like (Machen, "The Great God Pan" 50). Her nonconformity to biological gender also throws the rigid structures of gendered power—and the consent that hinges upon those structures—into chaos. For men, especially in 1894, succumbing to the seduction of a woman was/is not typically to cede the position of power he holds in the relationship between them; even in surrender, he retains many advantages (physical, social, economic, etc.) that shield him from potential harm. Helen's victims consent to a sexual encounter that they believe to be both understandable and bounded by gender and human norms but find that they gave their consent under a misapprehension. Far from the measured risk her victims expect it to be, a night with Helen costs them their sanity and ultimately their lives. As Samantha Morse writes on the concept of consent in the novella, "*The Great God Pan* thus shows how consent is terrifyingly ambiguous and fails to protect the consenting subject from bodily violation" (Morse 498). When the very concepts that undergird the consent given are in flux, consent can provide no protection from harm, only the impression that the victims are to blame for the harm they suffer.

Wary of any ambiguity in their conservative sexual ethics, most eugenicists certainly would have found a great source of horror in Helen's fluid body and sexuality, and the category

chaos she introduces to other concepts such as power and consent that are so crucial to eugenic family planning schemes. In the ideal world of these eugenicists, people that posed threats to the traditional sexual order would never intrude upon their utopian visions at all, obliterating their “unnatural” sexual urges and living quiet, ideally childless lives. However, among the ranks of eugenicists there were some queer individuals and allies attempting to theorize a positive place for queer people in a eugenic world. Consider Havelock Ellis, author of the first serious medical treatise on homosexuality and professed eugenicist. Ivan Crozier writes that “Ellis’ position contains the spectre of the idea that homosexuals should be allowed to have whatever same-sex activities they wished, so they would not ‘contaminate’ the germ line” (Crozier 190). Essentially, Ellis hinted that it would be best to let queer people engage freely in their preferred sexual practices, since these practices ran no risk of resulting in children that might inherit their parent’s (or parents’) homosexuality; forcing them into traditional marriages against their inclinations would only result in an undesirable perpetuation of homosexuality in their offspring. Havelock’s wife, Edith Lees Ellis, argued this openly, writing in an essay entitled “Eugenics and Spiritual Parenthood” that “to be induced to enter a loveless marriage as a cure ... is to twice curse—to curse the partner in the fraud, and their offspring” (E. L. Ellis 62). Despite being a lesbian herself, openly conducting several relationships with women during her (love-filled, though their communion appears to have been mostly spiritual) marriage to Havelock, Edith did not advocate for the rights of queer people to parenthood. Like most eugenicists, she regarded homosexuality as a disqualifier for eugenic fitness but seems to have envisioned alternative roles for queer folks in a eugenic utopia, writing, “the work of the eugenicist is not only to prevent the waste and ruin of lives, but to help and to stimulate existing powers, *however curiously manifested*, into channels of service and joy” (57-58, emphasis original). She saw a place for “abnormals” in

developing a morally edifying environment for children to grow up in, since “a perfect body is not necessarily a perfect equipment for a divine essence, unless mothers, doctors, and schoolmasters combine to educe the more complex personality out of the mere primitive savage” (58-59). As the Ellis’ philosophies demonstrate, however, even the more radical allies amongst eugenicists interpreted the connection between queerness and eugenic goals in ways that might seem convoluted or problematic by current standards. Above all, eugenic philosophies can never be divorced from the romanticization of the Child that Lee Edelman has so famously critiqued in heteronormative society, which not only glorifies reproductivity as the *raison d’être* of sex but also constantly defers the well-being of humans currently alive in the name of improving the lives of humans who do not yet exist (Edelman 3). This philosophy, in fact, almost precisely overlaps with the definition of negative eugenics, leaving any attempt to productively integrate nonnormative and nonreproductive sex into a eugenic paradigm always already stillborn.

Far from Edith Lees Ellis’ lofty ideals about a society with constructive and fulfilling roles for all and for the good of all, many eugenicists considered sexual nonconformists dangerous due to the contagious nature of their corruption. Just like suicide ravages the London elite like a plague trailing in Helen’s wake, queerness was seen as a catching and corrupting influence threatening the sexual and gender mores required to uphold eugenic plans for a curated reproductive future. However, contained within the fear of a spreading homosexuality was yet another consideration of consent, the harrowing suggestion that “corrupted” heterosexual people already contained a preexisting (and unpredictable) disposition towards the vice. In order to *be* corrupted, did they had to have already *been* corrupted all along, already disabled, already dysgenic? Was there some existing strain of degeneracy that drew Helen’s victims into her clutches? Her first victim’s, Lord Argentine’s, passionate enjoyment of dining and determination

to thoroughly enjoy the riches to which he ascended later in life are portrayed as benign epicureanism, but might there be in it a fatal germ of gluttony or hedonism (Machen, “The Great God Pan” 31–32)? If so, to what extent was he (and other fallen men and women) culpable for succumbing to it? In a way, Helen’s victims do seem undeniably involved in their deaths, since not only do they kill themselves but three out of five choose to do so using a method that requires a hideous level of determination: he “tied a cord securely to one of the short bed-posts, and, after making a running noose and slipping it round his neck, the unfortunate man must have resolutely fallen forward, to die by slow strangulation” (33). This method of suicide requires unwavering commitment to death since the victim must intentionally and continuously apply the pressure required for strangulation; no involuntary adrenal response or sudden revival of the will to live can have interfered with their operation or they would have survived it. Whatever contagion Helen implanted or awoke within them becomes inextricable from their own willpower, or otherwise suggests that she exerts a terrifying level of control over her chosen victims.

Any analysis of Helen must confess to raising more questions than answers, for while she is the only fairy aggressor we can claim to know any substantial information about, “substantial” is a rather generous term to describe what we know of Helen Vaughan. She holds an interesting dual status in the narrative; I have claimed that fairy hybrids represent the primary source of horror in the text and that the aggressors in interspecies sexual assaults occupy a surprisingly marginal place in the narrative, but Helen represents both the product and the perpetrator of interspecies sexual assault. As such, she is omnipresent but also always absent. Even though she represents the primary antagonist of the tale, she never appears in the novella in person, only in the forms of drawings and secondhand accounts. Her victims, as I have claimed of Mary, Mrs.

Cradock, and Annie, come onstage only to be immediately dismissed to death and narrative obscurity; we only know the names of two out of five suicides, and biographical details of only one. At the end of the novella, Helen is safely neutralized by being forced to commit suicide by the same method her victims use—a conclusion that, while satisfyingly symmetrical, leaves the nature of Helen’s motivation in equal obscurity as that of her victims (why would the threat of involving the human police drive a being like her to desperation?).

We may not meet Helen, but we do meet her mother, Mary, whom Helen favors so strongly that Clarke to at first mistakes a portrait of the daughter as depicting the mother. In addition to physical similarity, their stories begin in largely the same way, as orphans cast upon the care of a neglectful (if not actually abusive) father. From there, however, the two embark on very different paths. Mary dies a piteous and blameless victim, and Helen, steeped in fairy influence not only physiologically but also culturally thanks to childhood rambles with her fairy kinfolk, reenacts sexual violence like that which resulted in her conception and dies as a monster hunted from her hiding places, coerced into committing suicide by the same method that claimed the lives of her victims. There is a fine line, it seems, between the mother’s martyrdom and the daughter’s malignancy. The difference—and the horror—is to be found, as any eugenicist would affirm, in the debilitating germ plasm of a degenerate father.

Unauthorized Research

I will conclude with one final reading of what story Machen is *not* telling. In a rare moment of reflection on his horror stories found the introductory author’s note to the 1906 volume *The House of Souls*, which collected his best-regarded fiction from the 1890s, Machen writes, “in ‘The Great God Pan’ the dangers of unauthorized research are terribly and clearly

indicated” (Machen, “Note” xii). He describes this as self-evidently the point of the tale, remarking that “only a very thoughtless reader will fail to note the moral” (xii). I suppose that must make me rather thoughtless. In my opinion, suggesting that *The Great God Pan* is a cautionary tale against mad science seems like suggesting that *Dracula* is a cautionary tale against solicitors taking on eccentric foreign clients; there is certainly an element of such a warning present, but it hardly does justice to the subsequent drama, or the deeper anxieties underlying the novel’s events.

I am unsure whether Machen’s representation of his story reflects a genuine unconsciousness of, or a squeamish evasiveness about, the sexual nature of what I would identify as the novel’s true horror. But I do know why I cannot personally subscribe to the assertion that *The Great God Pan* is about the horrors of unnatural science: in my mind, this reading necessitates at least a modicum of compassion for Helen which I can find nowhere in the novella. If the true horror at the heart of the tale is mad science, does it not stand to reason that the narrative should inspire in us some pity for the unwilling victims of that mad science—even for Helen, who later becomes a villain in her own right but who bears no responsibility for her own existence, no matter how monstrous that existence may be? I cannot even discern much pity from Machen for Jervase Cradock, who would ostensibly be a much easier target for compassion than Helen since he harms no one and seems more a victim of his own fairy nature than an agent of its evil. Though he is multiple times referred to as the “poor” or “wretched” boy, all but one of these instances were spoken or written by Gregg (Machen, “The Great God Pan” 155, 157, 158, 172). This renders the empathy shown less than creditable since Gregg’s pity is all performance, as he admits when faced with the chance for “unauthorized research” (“When I ... found him in a seizure speaking or hissing the ghastly jargon of the Black Seal, I am afraid that exultation

prevailed over pity”) (172). There is no character with whom we are meant to identify that demonstrates even a modicum of compassion for Jervase. Even Machen’s use of the term “unauthorized research” seems telling of his attitude towards the victims of his mad science. By whom should this research be authorized in order to be legitimate, and what value does that authorization convey? Would it change the research done, or simply the attitude with which that research is regarded? Does it protect innocents like Mary from falling victim to the quest for knowledge, or does it simply convey a sense of nobility to their suffering instead, rendering them a necessary sacrifice offered upon the altar of scientific progress?

In a reading of Machen alongside eugenic history, it is difficult not to compare the incision of Mary’s brain to the incision of vas deferens and Fallopian tubes to perform eugenic sterilizations. Both were, in fact, apparently authorized procedures—Mary and Raymond, her guardian, both consent to her operation, just as the laws of the dozens of American states and handful of other countries where eugenic operations were performed authorized the procedures. In most cases, consent was even sought and obtained from the victims of sterilization and their guardians. However, as my above analysis has shown, consent can become quite a flimsy concept when the consenting subject is raised to obey rather than to protect herself, or when strategies like taking advantage of language difference or illiteracy are used to extract signatures authorizing sterilizations from unknowing subjects or guardians, as was the case for hundreds of cases in California’s prolific sterilization program (Stern 130–31). Many a sterilization victim went under the knife believing they were submitting to a cesarean section or appendectomy and found out only years later that what had been taken from them was actually their reproductive capacity (229, 226).

Mary's surgery not only troubles issues of consent but occupies a strange liminal status similar to that of sterilization (as it was theorized by eugenicists, in contrast to how it occurred in practice). Is it an experiment ended in disaster or a corrective surgery? A disabling event, or an enabling one? After all, humans have evolved to be born with neural blinders shuttering their senses from the magical realities around them. In removing those blinders, does Raymond *enable* her sight or *disable* a protective adaptation? This quandary only deepens when we consider the madness that Mary suffers as a result of seeing. Is she killed slowly by the loss of her mind, or is this disconnect from reality the only means of preserving her life past that initial debilitating moment of witnessing?

This operation may seem like the inadvertent reverse of the goals of eugenic sterilization, since Mary's brain surgery instigates a perverse chain of events *leading* to monstrous miscegenation and sexual chaos rather than *preventing* it, as sterilization was intended to do. However, we can see motivating both surgeries the impulse to inflict a physical disability to match a social disability, materializing the valuation that society has already imposed upon a body by altering it to match what they have already determined it is. Raymond considers Mary his own to do with as he wills, and this perceived ownership reshapes her very self—her physiology, her psychology, her future, her death, even her offspring—in conformity to his will. The targets of eugenic sterilization were poor, racialized, immigrants, and the disabled, and because eugenicists considered them unfit to reproduce, they turned this unfitness into literal infertility through surgical means. It seems ironic that eugenicists wielded infertility as a vital tool of their practice, since in its naturally occurring form they regarded it as a sign of degeneracy and constitutional weakness; but perversely, they saw it as “enabling” the victims to live normal lives outside of institutional incarceration and practice (what they considered)

healthy sexuality without posing a threat to the dream of a carefully curated gene pool. This authorized procedure, then, is largely ethically indistinguishable from the “unauthorized research” that Raymond performs on Mary, since both wield authority over the definition of ability and disability, and the right to inflict that status, over the bodies of already marginalized people. The only substantive difference is that Raymond operates in secret and solitude, while eugenicists were able to bend the law and public opinion to endorse their abusive researches.

Havelock Ellis once wrote, chillingly, “The superficially sympathetic man flings a coin to the beggar; the more deeply sympathetic man builds an almshouse for him so that he need no longer beg; but perhaps the most radically sympathetic of all is the man who arranges that the beggar shall not be born” (H. Ellis 401). If Machen has any sympathy for Helen as a victim of Raymond’s “unauthorized research,” it is of this kind. It is the sympathy that Dyson bears for Annie, that permits her to die in what he perceives as the only gesture of humanity he can extend in the face of her debasement. It is the sympathy, indistinguishable from disgust, that eugenicists felt for the misery of the dysgenic. Even in those countries whose eugenic practice primarily took the form of hygienic interventions, there was no extricating eugenic philosophy from the belief that some people were better off unborn. Seeing people suffering under the weights of what we would now identify as poverty and systemic inequality, eugenicists concluded that the ideal solution was not to eradicate poverty and inequality, but the victims of these evils; the only kindness they could offer was to usher these unfortunates towards nonexistence, one sterilization at a time.

Chapter 3 Immigration, Economic Citizenship, and the Able-bodied Imperative: “The Repairer of Reputations” and *The Beetle*

Introduction

“The Repairer of Reputations,” the first story in Robert W. Chambers’ 1895 short story collection *The King in Yellow*, opens with an extended description of a utopian near-future America. In the year 1920, America has recently emerged victorious from a war with Germany; excellent returns on colonial holdings in Cuba, Hawaii, and Samoa provide a flush of wealth; “a sudden craving for decency” is leading to the replacement of “existing [architectural] horrors;” the state subsidizes opera and theatre; and National Mounted Police patrol the national parks (Chambers 6). Rounding out this wide range of improvements to national circumstance comes the following account:

“We had profited well by the latest treaties with France and England; the exclusion of foreign-born Jews as a measure of self-preservation, the settlement of the new independent negro state of Suaneë, the checking of immigration, the new laws concerning naturalization, and the gradual centralization of power in the executive all contributed to national calm and prosperity. When the Government solved the Indian [*sic*, Chambers refers to Native Americans] problem and squadrons of Indian cavalry scouts in native costume were substituted for the pitiable organizations tacked on to the tail of skeletonized regiments by a former Secretary of War, the nation drew a long sigh of relief. When, after the colossal Congress of Religions, bigotry and intolerance were laid in their graves and kindness and charity began to draw warring sects together, many

thought the millennium had arrived, at least in the new world which after all is a world by itself.” (Chambers 6)

Achieving the “national calm and prosperity” upon which this utopia is founded, it seems, was merely a matter of homogenization—checking immigration, especially for certain groups like Jews; making it more difficult for foreigners to become American citizens; and patriating Americans of African descent into a country of their own (the land of which may have been sacrificed by the United States, but may have also been colonized on behalf of the nascent Suanee state). Native Americans are apparently allowed to avoid repatriation away from their own ancestral lands, but only in a form that verges on a caricature of them as warlike and primitive, deployed as “calvary scouts” dressed “in native costume” (6). After reading of such discriminatory solutions to the “ills” facing society, it is laughable to hear the narrator close the paragraph by concluding with deep satisfaction that “bigotry and intolerance” have been “laid to rest in their graves” (6)!³¹

As this excerpt from “The Repairer of Reputations” shows, the art of curating an ideal body politic was not solely a matter of managing reproduction. It entailed managing both interiors and borders, both controlling the existing citizenry and carefully selecting those allowed to become citizens, with access to citizenship mediated by the contributions (usually financial) that the potential citizen could be expected to make to national prosperity. In this chapter, I will examine the bidirectional impulse to police citizenship both internally and externally through

³¹ In fairness to Chambers, I must say that I find it impossible to discern from the text to what extent he presents this utopia in satire or in seriousness. However, several of the short biographies available about Chambers indicate he was not a particularly broad-minded man. Contemporary reviewer Frederick Tabor Cooper certainly seems to regard the “ridicule” Chambers levels towards the current status of “American culture, American architecture and American social standing” in his 1899 novel *Outsiders* to be reflective of his own beliefs (81), and Wendy Bousfield notes that his “grossly stereotyped characters and insensitive humor at the expense of ethnic types makes this body of work offputting [*sic*] to readers of the late 20th century” (121). Personally, I suspect that the Lethal Chambers (soon to be explored) is the sole dystopian element of a society Chambers would have otherwise regarded as an improvement over his contemporaneous America.

two stories: “The Repairer of Reputations” and *The Beetle: A Mystery* (1897), a novel by Englishman Richard Marsh. Though I will not argue that these novels are perfectly representative of eugenic thinking in their respective nations, working with an American story and a British novel will allow for helpful contrasts as I seek insights into the values motivating and concerns preoccupying the eugenic imagination in each nation, illuminating a variety of nationalist values and xenophobic anxieties operative in each country’s thinking during the age of eugenics.

In particular, my argument examines how in the eugenic era it becomes impossible to extricate notions of citizenship from considerations of economic productivity. At this time, nations like Britain and the United States became seriously invested in counting the financial rather than ideological or demographic opportunity cost of harboring citizens—or, more accurately, began to do so more vociferously and in public as each nation began to slowly take on qualities of a welfare state, which rendered the cost of maintaining nonproductive citizens a more immediate concern. Frequently, arguments couched in economic language were deployed to justify the exclusion of groups portrayed as dangerous or undesirable while sidestepping notions that were turning into political minefields, such as those surrounding racial or class hierarchy or gender essentialism. This tactic also effectively privileged the economic status of the nation over the welfare of any individual citizen in ways that complimented emerging ideas about what we would now term trickle-down-economics (Cerny 26). As a result, the decision whether to extend the rights of citizenship—both to those who would seek to become citizens and those who were citizens in law but not in practice all along, like women, newly emancipated African Americans, non-landholders, and disabled people—became a matter of measuring their

potential *contributions* to the state against the potential *costs* of their care should they become dependents on the state.

Central to this chapter is the essential role that the nation played in eugenic thinking. Despite the lofty claims of eugenicists about improving the human race, eugenics was always both a national project and a project of nationbuilding, to be undertaken by each government for itself and its own citizens. Douglas C. Baynton refers to the national level as a “middle ground” between “the right of the individual to be ‘well-born’ and the imperative that humanity progress,” but there were also practical reasons that eugenics slotted naturally into the realm of national policy (Baynton, *Defectives in the Land* 12). Practically, government was the only body existing at the time with the scope, reach, and authority necessary to meet the ambitions of eugenic research, much less implementation (our modern-day multinational corporations might fit the bill, but did not exist on the same scale at the turn of the twentieth century). For another example, where outside of the army could one find a study like the one Charles Darwin cites in *The Descent of Man*, in which the US army measured and recorded the home state of over one million of its soldiers in order to determine if “local influences of some kind act directly upon stature” (Darwin, *Descent of Man* 114)? Though it predated Galton’s formulation of eugenics, this 1869 study, with its “astonishing number of observations,” relied upon precisely the type of dataset that eugenicists would loudly agitate for the need to collect and whose absence in existing records they would bemoan. The creation of such a dataset was only possible due to the preexisting infrastructure and captive sample group to be found in the army (Darwin 144). In Galton’s time, the very field of statistics, true to its etymology, was used almost exclusively for data pertaining to the state, tracking trends in trade, population, manufacture, and the like (Kevles 13). Statisticians were trained and their tools developed for the work of government, and

expanding the work of their field to serve the ends of eugenics (as it would widely be, as many influential twentieth-century statisticians like Galton, Karl Pearson, and R. A. Fisher were practicing eugenicists) would necessarily carry with it residues of its origins in the values, strategies, and aims of statecraft.

This centrality of the nation to eugenics hinged on two discourses, complex enough alone but even more complex at their intersections: one of citizenship and the rights citizenship status confers, and another of civilization, modernity, and progress. My last chapter has already shown the complex ways in which ideological conservatism and practical liberalism melded in eugenic views on gender, and a similar dynamic holds true in their perceptions of themselves as advancing towards utopia by practical application of the most modern scientific principles. Despite national variations, eugenic theorists were united in the belief that their ideas represented progress, a more modern form of statecraft—a perception that extended the appeal of eugenic practices beyond scientific circles to capture the popular and literary imagination. Alexandra Minna Stern writes that “many eugenicists viewed population control as a vehicle for modernization, the introduction of liberal democracy, and, if properly pursued, world peace” (Stern 176). Improving national stock was not merely a simple good in itself, then, but a tool to cultivate the kind of citizenry that could realize utopic visions of national and, by extension, worldwide prosperity—as conceptualized through a paradigm that was, to its core, thoroughly Western and imperialist. Even as eugenicists were preoccupied with the question of how an ideal eugenic citizen might be identified, admitted, cultivated, and enculturated, though, they regarded the frenetic pace of civilizing progress as containing the seeds of its own destruction. As far back as Galton’s earliest writings on the subject of cultivating human excellence, before eugenics had been named or formally conceptualized, he described overcivilization as a disabling force liable

to wreck even the most eugenic subjects, who were of course at the forefront of progress. In *Hereditary Genius*, Galton writes that “the development of our nature ... has not yet overtaken the development of our moral civilization” a theory he contrasts with the conception of original sin (Galton, *Hereditary Genius* 349). It is “not that man was fallen from a high estate, but that he was rising in moral culture with more rapidity than the nature of his race could follow;” social evolution had begun to outpace the physical, leaving bodies incapable of sustaining the pressures of modern life (350). Achieving new heights of “civilization,” therefore, was both the aim and enemy of eugenic progress

The conception of citizenship I draw upon for the purposes of this chapter comes from the field of disability studies, which offers a convincing paradigm of citizenship as mediated by levels of independence, especially in the financial/economic realm. Disability scholar Tobin Siebers explains that “all known theories of human rights ... exclude individuals from the rights-bearing community if they do not possess the specific abilities required for membership,” including “minimal knowledge of the language of the host country, civil knowledge of laws and governmental forms, and economic sustainability through either independent wealth or employable talents and skills” (Siebers 178). By this reckoning, “mere” humanity is not sufficient condition for human rights, much less for citizenship—something is always demanded in return. Practically, this is often the ability to provide for oneself rather than depending on the state for assistance. According to Douglas Baynton’s history of American immigration restriction in the eugenic era, decisions about whether or not potential immigrants should be admitted were heavily contingent on the immigration officers’ assessment of whether or not they believed they would become “social dependents rather than contributors”—in other words, being able to provide for the state rather than draw upon it was a precondition to even being admitted to

America, much less becoming a citizen (Baynton, *Defectives in the Land* 80). Moreover, the very definitions by which we understand disability are bound up in the (dis)ability to perform work. The formation of the modern commonplace definition of disability has been correlated (as by Lennard Davis and Sarah F. Rose) to the transformations of capitalism at the end of the nineteenth century, when the rise of factories and urban centers resulted in an ever-increasing demand for more standardized, hyperspecialized, and interchangeable labor (Davis; Rose). Prior to this, as the work of scholars like Ittai Orr have demonstrated, it was possible to think of disability in much more expansive and flexible and less universalizing terms (Orr). As disability become increasingly synonymous with unsuitability for standardized forms of labor, it also emerged as one of few identity categories (alongside the elderly and children) in which nonproductivity was permitted, at least among those who were already citizens. However, this nonproductivity was allowed only in exchange for limitations to the exercise of full citizenship rights like the right to make decisions about their own medical care, marry, or vote. Even as the emerging disability rights movement and field of disability studies began to push back against damaging “commonsense” definitions of disability, they retained this awareness of disability status as mediated by economic participation. Even the social model of disability—a foundational framework which argues that disability is rooted in society’s structures and institutions rather than in the body of the disabled person and which has influenced practically all subsequent work in the field of disability studies—dates disabled people’s marginalization in the economic sphere to “the emergence of industrial capitalism and its specific organisation of economic activities” (Terzi 145). By any definition of disability, then, nonparticipation in the economic sphere places citizenship rights in a position of precarity. Citizenship can be denied to immigrants and asylum-seekers not on a logical basis, but on the instinct of the evaluator; more

insidiously, even if a person nominally continues to hold citizenship, they may live bereft of the rights and protections that citizenship is supposed to confer as those around them deem it somehow appropriate or advantageous to withhold those rights and protections. This withholding of rights is subsequently legitimated with new narratives retroactively applied, sometimes through reconstructions of the experience or even of the law, in order to give it validity. This is a prime example of the way that participants in the metagenre of disability tend to silently substitute emotional reasoning for logical reasoning in response to disability. This conception of citizenship, then, exposes it as a fabrication mutually constructed between a state and its citizens. The state articulates an idealized definition of a citizen through its laws and policies, and it is then up to citizens to present themselves as meeting that idealized standard in order to retain the full benefits of citizenship—or risk falling into disciplinary or paternalistic apparatuses that represent the alternative.

The stories I read in this chapter were paired together because they feature characters engaged in desperate and high-stakes acts of self-presentation in order to narrate themselves as ideal citizens—even to the readers, since both texts are written in the first-person confessional style—and center the horrific effects that ensue when this performance breaks down or becomes unsustainable. In so focusing my analysis, this chapter is a nod to horror studies’ “can’t quit you” relationship with Freudian criticism: it is invested in self-presentation as an act of sublimation and the (exaggeratedly disastrous) consequences of the return of the repressed. The most arresting quality of *The Beetle* is what the *St. James Guide to Horror, Ghost & Gothic Writers* calls its “glorious absurdity” (“Richard Marsh”); writing of Chambers’ early work, including *The King in Yellow*, Wendy Bousfield contends that the weaknesses characterizing all of Chambers’ oeuvre (“the blatant improbabilities of plot and disregard for human psychology”) “are,

paradoxically, what gives these stores [*sic*] their dreamlike power” (Bousfield 121). Even more so than the texts I have read so far, *The Beetle* and “The Repairer of Reputations” traffic in excesses of plot and affect bordering on camp, which are deployed to further the simultaneous homogenizing and voyeuristic impulses which I have argued are classic tools of the horror genre. In the first section of what follows, I will explore how disciplinary structures in the stories enforce an idealized standard, conformity to which entitles a character to citizenship and deviance from which disqualifies them from it. Next, I will explore the role that professional excellence and financial self-sufficiency play in preserving the characters from falling into these disciplinary structures. I conclude with a meditation on the role of the generic excesses of horror and popular fiction in these tales.

One Nation, All Alike

For many eugenicists, the feasibility of the eugenic project rested on homogenization, specifically of the most desirable populations. In his address “National Life from the Standpoint of Science,” Galton’s protégé and hand-selected inaugural appointee to the Galton Chair of Eugenics, Karl Pearson, describes homogeneity as a necessity for national survival on an increasingly competitive world stage. The goal of the complex system of the modern nation, for Pearson, ought to be forming a “homogenous, highly-organized whole,” since he considers such a body able to accomplish more than a less organized one (Pearson 11). Racial diversity, he argues, interrupts this homogeneity and is therefore inimical to national progress for a variety of reasons. It degrades both groups genetically, since the tendency of the two groups to “intercross” will “suspend the very process of natural selection on which the evolution of a higher type depends,” and even “if the bad stock be raised the good is lowered” (a focus that clearly displays

how the focus of eugenic improvements was not the human race as a whole, but only the groups they considered “superior”) (20). It also degrades both groups socially and morally, since two ethnic or racial groups occupying the same nation will “naturally sink into the position of master and servant” (20). Echoing the logic of Chambers’ American utopia, which was achieved partly through the establishment of “the new independent negro state of Suanee” to receive all America’s unwanted black citizens, Pearson asserts that “the only healthy alternative is that he [the white man] should go and completely drive out the inferior race” (21). He goes on to argue that not only is a racially heterogeneous society disadvantaged in the global struggle for the “survival of the fittest” nation, but we should even attempt to mitigate extreme differences in education or social status between members of a nation (48). Minimizing the opportunity for in-group/out-group antagonism allows a nation to maintain “tribal interest” over “personal and individual interest,” which Pearson views as enabling a higher level of cooperation and thereby a high level of success in various endeavors of national interest (48). Fostering harmony among the citizens of a nation through promoting greater equality may indeed be a worthy goal, but Pearson represents certain differences, like race, as inassimilable. Pearson’s answer to inequality is therefore not to do away with the social tax levied upon difference, but to exclude from citizenship those who do not conform to the standard upon which national homogeny has been founded.

“The Repairer of Reputations” displays a similar impulse to punish difference. The story details the machinations of Hildred Castaigne and Mr. Wilde (his multiply-disabled mentor and the titular “repairer of reputations”) to install Hildred as King of the “Imperial Dynasty of America”—an ascension which hinges on convincing his cousin Louis Castaigne, the current but unknowing holder of the title, to abdicate his birthright in favor of Hildred. The reader’s

appreciation of the depths of Hildred's madness gradually increases as the story progresses, and our narrator's trail of oddity deepens into atrocity. By the end we recognize him as not only delusional but homicidally ill, willing to resort to any means to secure his coveted title. He enlists an assassin to kill Louis' fiancée, grimly determined to prevent the conception of another heir to supplant his claim to the throne, and bloodies his own hands with the murder of Dr. Archer, the superintendent who (wrongfully, Hildred assures us, and even maliciously) committed Hildred to an asylum following a fall from his horse four years prior to the story's events.

In light of Hildred's pretensions to kingship of America, the utopian portrait he paints of that country in the story's opening lines takes on an even more compelling character. This seemingly incongruous paragraph bears little overt relevance to the plot, but opening the tale with this picture of the land Hildred believes himself to be king over colors all subsequent events. Tellingly, the single feature of Chambers' fictional u/dystopian 1920 that bears any significant relevance to the plot takes place at the intersection of disability, citizenship, and state disciplinary control: the institutionalization of suicide via the construction of "Government Lethal Chamber[s]" after years of "agitation for the repeal of the laws prohibiting suicide" (Chambers 7). The inaugural Lethal Chamber at Washington Square appears as a fixture in many of the story's most important events. Hildred witnesses the Lethal Chamber's opening ceremony on his way home from his penultimate visit with Dr. Archer, the superintendent of the asylum; later, he visits the park again after murdering Archer for "misdiagnosing" him and wrongfully incarcerating him. It is at midnight in the Lethal Chamber Park that Hildred reveals to Louis their supposed royal lineage and demands that Louis abdicate in favor of him, and it is by the Lethal Chamber that Hildred and Wilde's hired assassin ends his life after failing to kill Constance

Hawberk, Louis' betrothed. The Lethal Chamber thus stands sentinel over all of the worst violence of Hildred's madness, perhaps issuing to him a wordless invitation that he, with his delusions of grandeur, will never perceive, much less act upon.

In contrast to his more cursory explications of other aspects of 1920s American history, Hildred provides unusually detailed information about the Lethal Chambers' genesis, and our scattered glimpses of the Chamber itself make its purpose—and its target demographic—unmistakable. In the story's first scene, Hildred witnesses the speech given by the Governor at the Chamber's opening ceremony: "The government has seen fit to acknowledge the right of man to end an existence which may have become intolerable to him, through physical suffering or mental despair. It is believed that the community will be benefited by the removal of such people from their midst" (Chambers 9). It is up to "that class of humans creatures from whose desponding ranks new victims of self-destruction fall daily" to "accept the relief thus provided" by the Lethal Chambers (9-10). This is without doubt one of the over-the-top elements I mentioned as characterizing this chapter's stories; a government-run suicide center is by no means the sole or even logical outcome of decriminalizing suicide, which is already happening without the aid of a Lethal Chamber. The governor's speech, however, characterizes the Chamber—and by extension, the government—as offering "relief," as though it were somehow different in quality than that found in "privatized" suicide, a generous gift from the government to its people. In this twist of rhetoric are echoes of Michel Foucault's formulation of *discipline* in contrast to older forms of punishment. He argues that in modern society, constant observation and pressures to conform have turned the public sphere into a surveillance center similar to a prison where observation is always *possible*, but not reliably *perceptible*. In such an environment, the surveilled individual "inscribes in himself [*sic*] the power relation in which he

simultaneously plays both roles” of warden and prisoner, managing themselves out of a pervasive fear that nonconforming behaviors will be observed and punished (Foucault 203). Lethal Chambers seem to operate on a similar principle, encouraging the despairing, helpless, and struggling to self-monitor and self-select for annihilation, investing individual citizens with the responsibility for removing themselves from a society that disclaims any further obligation for their welfare than providing them easy access to nonexistence. The government retains oversight, even control, over the right to die that the laws criminalizing suicide previously provided.

Who, precisely, the government invites to die is also clear—the removal of undesirable community members is built into the very foundation stones of the first Lethal Chamber on Washington Square. The block it occupies “had formerly consisted of a lot of shabby old buildings, used as cafes and restaurants for foreigners,” which were “acquired by the government” and bulldozed to accommodate the Lethal Chamber and the ornate park surrounding it (Chambers 8). The new building is “severely classical in architecture” with “Ionic columns,” a bronze door, and statues of the Fates populating the park; at one point, the building is even referred to as the “Lethal *Temple*” (9, 37, emphasis added). Replacing the “shabby” haunts of “foreigners” with a pristine and opulent mausoleum in the style of ancient Greece, that revered seat of Western civilization, sends a clear message—better for foreigners to visit the new Lethal Chamber than to continue cluttering up Greenwich Village with their ramshackle lives. The statues of the Fates offer subliminal encouragement, soothing potential users that all will be as predetermined by destiny, unlike Christian religious motifs, more appropriate to the American religious tradition but which might remind the prospective suicides of the hellfire that awaits self-murderers in the Christian tradition. The Lethal Chamber is in many ways an ornate set

piece, the inverse of a traditional haunted house. Rather than the crumbling, ancient buildings populating horror literature, the Lethal Chamber is a pristine, new-but-ancient building, not yet—but, its creators hope, soon to be—teeming with ghosts. In one of Hildred’s (perhaps oddly) frequent and lengthy visits to the Lethal Chamber park, he is also approached by two beggars, one described as a “wretched, half-starved creature, who stood looking across the street at the Lethal Chamber” (33). The unhoused, too, seem to be drawn to the Lethal Chamber, perhaps viewing it as a more expedient end than the long suffering of starvation or exposure—or, troublingly, as the most accessible form of governmental aid. This reading exposes the Lethal Chamber as a more coercive apparatus than it first appears, though the unexpectedly strong military presence at its opening ceremony (including the “military aid to the President of the United States,” three commanders of New York-based garrisons, and an entire “squadron of hussars [light calvary] of the National Guard”) might provide a hint that the use of force is not only compatible with, but necessary to, the aims of the Lethal Chamber system (9).

The ubiquitous shadow of the Lethal Chamber over the story’s pivotal events seems to suggest that its villain-protagonists, Hildred and Wilde, fall into the category of those whose removal would benefit society at large, an impression cemented when they attempt to kill Constance to ensure that she will never bear Louis an heir to dispute Hildred’s claim to the throne. (As previously mentioned, the confrontation between Louis and Hildred where this assassination attempt is revealed even occurs in the Lethal Chamber park.) However, even if Hildred and Wilde *ought* to become users of the Chamber, they never will; the very delusions of grandeur that make them so dangerous to their fellow citizens, and perhaps eventually to the nation at large, ensure that they will never voluntarily remove themselves from society.

Even more sinisterly from a eugenic standpoint, Hildred and Wilde's madness (though perhaps equally severe) is unevenly legible. John F. Kasson describes the management of personal appearance as a skill that grew in importance as urbanization increased. With increased density of population, city-dwellers found themselves more consistently observed and observing others, with the result that concepts like embarrassment, honor, and shame underwent major transformations (Kasson 115). Douglas Baynton argues that disabled people were disproportionately impacted by this new ecology of shame, and experienced "increased stigmatization [...] based in part on a growing sensitivity and aversion to abnormal appearance" (Baynton, *Defectives in the Land* 112). Wilde would certainly have run afoul of this heightened sensitivity, since his appearance is portrayed as completely untamable to this normative standard: he was born without fingers on his left hand and is missing both ears, stands "scarcely higher than a child of ten" despite "magnificently developed" arms and legs,³² and has a head that two characters note as being phrenologically similar to "many of those unfortunates whom people imprison in asylums for the weak-minded" (Chambers 14). Hildred, on the other hand, passes as able-bodied so well that even the readers, with their intimacy with Hildred's mind thanks to the reader-narrator relationship, develop an appreciation of his madness only slowly. First, we learn of his delusion about inheriting the throne of the Imperial Dynasty of America; later we realize that audio-visual hallucinations render his portrayal of the world highly suspect; and finally we appreciate the depth of his ambition when he attempts to assassinate Constance (17, 27, 37). The threat Hildred poses to upstanding citizens like Louis, a dashing young military officer on the

³² This is in contrast to the most common form of dwarfism, achondroplasia, in which the individual's height difference is accounted for mainly by proportionally smaller limbs while the torso is of average size.

rise, and meritorious immigrants like Constance and her father³³ is the stuff of eugenic nightmares, since he is free to pose it despite a known history of mental illness and past incarceration. His presentation as sane (and therefore qualified for the freedoms citizens enjoy) is represented as so complete that it fools even those who know this history into regarding him as above suspicion of insanity, as is shown when Louis attempts to discourage the acquaintance between Hildred and Wilde by reminding Hildred that Wilde had “been in an asylum,” forgetting that Hildred shares the experience (21). Hildred is even able to fool his doctor with his guise of sanity, and was released from his confinement when Dr. Archer declared (erroneously, of course) that “there was nothing more to be cured in [him]” (7). The story seems to question not only the possibility of cure for mentally ill patients, but even the possibility of accurately sounding the depths of danger a person poses once diagnosed as mad, no matter how sane they may appear. Here Chambers translates into a horror narrative the eugenically-inflected belief that a diagnosis of insanity ought to represent a permanent disqualification from reproductive life, if not public life as a whole.

Since Hildred will not self-select for suicide and the need to control him does not become apparent until after his madness has grown lethal, carceral structures—in particular, the asylum, where the final line of the story informs us Hildred has died—emerge as a necessary counterpoint to the Lethal Chamber in the government’s quiet purgation of society’s undesirables, allowing the government to remove by force those who will not remove themselves by choice. In the period in which Chambers wrote, asylums and other carceral structures were not perceived as rehabilitation centers, but as segregation measures, meant to protect the general

³³ Wilde identifies Hawberk, Constance’s father, as the Marquis of Avonshire, who fled his homeland after “kill[ing] his wife’s traducer years ago” and settled in New York as a respected armorer (Chambers 13). Hildred considers Constance all the more threatening a mate for Louis by dint of being a member of the British peerage, since their marriage would “bring England into the question” of succession (33).

populace from the violence (physical or sexual) and inconvenience that the mentally ill might pose to “healthy” society. Once in, the disabled and dysgenic people who were incarcerated in these asylums were increasingly expected to live out the rest of their lives there. Hildred’s removal to the “Asylum for the Criminally Insane,” then, reveals that coercion underlies Lethal Chamber’s claim to provide a merciful service to the hopeless. In fact, it serves (what its implementers certainly would have termed) the citizenry at large, sifting the unproductive, desponding, weak, ailing, needy, and different from the public and preventing the harm they may cause there physically, reproductively, or economically by requiring “too much” charity. By extending to citizens the “offer” of relief, the Lethal Chamber replaces the responsibility of the government to offer support or rehabilitation to its most troubled and needy citizens with a much more time- and cost-efficient alternative: speedy and complete removal of those citizens, and any future expenses and trouble they might generate. And thanks to the portrait Chambers paints of his madman—homicidally dangerous but undiagnosable as such either on sight or even by a medical professional—even if such coercive and punitive measures become visible to the story’s readers, they are liable to regard them as not only permissible but laudable in the name of the “greater good” of public safety. For the safety of citizens whom readers more readily identify as “good” or “deserving” of protection, it is easiest simply to strip away the rights of a dangerous madman to the equal rights of citizenship, accept madness as essential and abandon all attempts at rehabilitation, and confine him where he can do no harm ever again.

The above analysis demonstrates how during the early twentieth century, especially in America, homogenization of the citizenry to an idealized standard was achieved partly through management of existing populations to ensure that the feeble-minded, insane, or otherwise

undesirable were not free to inflict harm to the populace or the germ plasm uncontested—but the management of prospective citizens through immigration was even more strictly controlled. As Douglas Baynton points out in his study of the relation between disability and immigration in early twentieth-century America, while eugenic tactics like institutionalization and sterilization affected a relatively small subset of disabled citizens, the exclusionary criteria immigration officers were able to apply to migrants could be much harshly implemented (Baynton, *Defectives in the Land* 13). With immigration centers like Ellis Island already installed as surveillance centers, pinch points that one needed to pass through in order to immigrate legally, immigration law and authorities were able to—and did—police every type of disability, even “disabilities” that were largely rhetorically constructed to justify exclusion beyond that would be supported by the letter of the law. The second text for this chapter, *The Beetle* by Richard Marsh, will allow us to explore the outsized role that disability plays in eugenic immigration exclusion. In particular, I will argue that *The Beetle* explores anxieties that dysgenic foreigners, beyond siring undesirable offspring, might prove disabling to the best among the British populace.

The Beetle was published in the same year as *Dracula*—another influential novel about a foreigner sabotaging the reproductive qualifications of idealized English citizens—and while lesser-known today, is often read alongside Stoker’s novel, which it initially outsold. In four parts, each narrated by one of the novel’s characters (Robert Holt, Sydney Atherton, Marjorie Lindon, and Augustus Champnell), it details the attempts of a gender- and species-fluid shapeshifting Egyptian scarab entity to take revenge on a Member of Parliament, Paul Lessingham, for murdering a priestess of Isis twenty years prior to escape the sexual slavery in

which she held him. The entity—which may or may not be the murdered priestess herself³⁴—terrorizes Lessingham and kidnaps his fiancée, the noblewoman Marjorie Lindon, with the intent to smuggle her back to Egypt and onto the altar of the fiery human sacrifices committed there in reverence to Isis. Amongst Marjorie’s rescuers are Sydney Atherton—genius inventor, childhood friend, and would-be lover—and Augustus Champnell, a private investigator Lessingham hires to help him cover up his involvement with the Beetle. Allied unwillingly with the Beetle is Robert Holt, a vagrant that the Beetle entraps into their service using their irresistible powers of mesmerism.

I will argue that the primary anxiety at the heart of *The Beetle* is concern for the uncontrollable power and attraction of sex that crosses the boundaries of class, race, and ability; however, rather than the possibility of diluting the eugenic population with the dysgenic germ plasm of a mixed-race union, I contend that *The Beetle*’s primary horror springs from the poisonous effects it alleges that dysgenic sexual unions have on the eugenic partner, thus destabilizing their own eugenic qualifications (all the while engaging readers as much through shock and fascination as anxiety). Since two of the Beetle’s three victims are men—upsetting the horror genre’s habitual fixation with the preservation of white female purity—and their female victim intended for the sacrificial altar, the risk of unwanted, racially “impure” offspring being forced upon British bodies is quite low. Instead, the Beetle’s sexual threat is most vividly

³⁴ It is my personal interpretation of the text that the Beetle is the Woman of the Songs, who entrapped Lessingham and whom he murdered to escape her captivity, though it is unclear whether they survived his assault or are some reincarnated form of the priest(ess). I am led to this suspicion by hints such as Lessingham’s query, “Weren’t the priests of Isis—or some of them—supposed to assume, after death, the form of a—scarabaeus?” (Marsh 78). While this reading is never strongly confirmed or denied, even if the Beetle is not the woman Lessingham killed, we do know that they are a priest(ess) of Isis and that they claim the murdered woman as “kin,” so it seems fair to assume that the Beetle possesses comparable powers and allegiances regardless of whether they are the same person (112).

illustrated by the mark their violent and damaging sexuality leaves on its three victims: Holt,³⁵ Marjorie, and above all Lessingham, who suffers not only the Beetle's sexual attentions but their³⁶ perverse affection. For my purposes in this section, I will focus primarily on the way that the Beetle's overflowing, gender-bending, and race-defying sexuality poses a threat to the sanctity of both idealized British virginity and masculinity, rendering the novel's male characters equally—or perhaps even more—their targets as Marjorie is.

Before undertaking a reading of the threat the Beetle's foreign sexuality poses to the readers, I would like to take a moment to establish just how unequivocally, to-the-point-of-caricature *foreign* the Beetle is represented to be. Remarks upon their appearance obsess over racialized markers (for example, their skin is “yellow as saffron” and their “thick and shapeless” lips and appearance of rapid aging are read as revealing “more than a streak of negro blood” in their ancestry) (Marsh 27, 106). Remarks upon their religion are nearly as ubiquitous, with Atherton referring to them as an “unbaptized Mohammedan” as an insult, though he has already concluded on sight that “there was something about him which was distinctly not Mussulmanic” (73, 106). While thus profiling blood quantum and even their obscure pagan religion on the basis of appearance might seem remarkable, the Beetle's racial presentation is portrayed as the sole

³⁵ It should be noted that Holt, in his state of homelessness and destitution, hardly represents an ideal eugenic subject to be despoiled, and is more of an easy-to-hand tool than a victim; however, he is prominently featured in my analysis for providing the only thorough firsthand account we receive of the Beetle's sexual overtures. From Lessingham, we have only a skimming overview of his captivity in Isis' temple, and of the outrages Marjorie underwent while under hypnosis we have no accounting at all due to her amnesia.

³⁶ A range of pronouns might be used for the Beetle, and indeed the novel's characters apply virtually all available to their vocabulary. On sight, most characters presume the Beetle to be a man, partly because they adopt traditionally masculine Arab dress (a “burnoose”). Atherton's glimpse of their naked body (and their scarab body) reveals female anatomy that lead the characters (and many scholars) to apply feminine pronouns, but even if this were a foolproof indicator of gender identity, the Beetle's shapeshifting ability leaves the persistence or primacy of this female embodiment in doubt (Marsh 117). The beetle form they also command is often referred to as “it,” as an animal might be. In this chapter I have chosen to use “they” despite the anachronism of applying this pronoun's modern singular usage to a character from 1897, a choice made in deference both to the entity's gender-fluid presentation and as a corrective to their consistent dehumanization in the novel through the use of “it.” However, in quotations I have chosen to preserve whichever pronoun the speaker uses to refer to the Beetle, as the characters' bewilderment and fixation on the topic of their gender is of major import to the story and my own analysis.

unmistakable and immutable quality about a character who is fluid in almost every other respect, including gender, age, and even species. Upon first laying eyes on the Beetle Holt “doubt[s] if it was anything human,” but even before seeing them, he says of their voice, “whether it was a man speaking I could not have positively said; but I had no doubt it was a foreigner” (18). When humanity itself is in doubt, foreignness (of which humanity might seem to be a precondition!) is still unmistakable, and none of the Beetle’s various transformations unsettle their identifiably foreign embodiment to even the slightest extent. The Beetle implies that such a transformation is beyond their capabilities when they exclaim with envy over Holt’s nakedness (“What a white skin you have,—how white! What would I not give for a skin as white as that”) (21). Even if gender and species are not essential to this being, then, race appears to be so.

Eugenic anxieties about foreigners typically took on one of two forms, both of which *The Beetle* exploits. Perhaps most frequently and publicly, eugenicists harped upon what they considered the imminent danger of desirable (white, middle- to upper-class) groups becoming minorities, their slow-growing numbers overwhelmed by the exponential reproductive rates of foreigners and other dysgenic groups. The differential birthrate between the groups considered most eugenic and those considered most dysgenic *was* real, and easily observable. As Richard Soloway details, in the 1880s Britain’s birthrate finally began to flag after decades of vigorous growth, falling to 28.5 per 1,000 at the turn of the century when throughout the century the rate had been 35 or 36 births per 1,000—a nosedive of over 21% (4). The decline was markedly more severe amongst the educated and economically successful classes (Soloway 10). Eugenicists imagined that this irresponsible failure of the “best” to reproduce as early and often as possible (something they attributed to superior self-control, foresight, and temperance that allowed the eugenic to refrain from or delay having children if they judged it might prove a financial burden

to the family) might soon deepen into full-fledged “race suicide.” In America, similar concerns about race suicide dominated debates about immigration, insisting that entry into the country needed to be managed keeping in mind not only the immigrants themselves, but the impact their “hyperfecund” reproductive tendencies might have on national demographics in the future (Baynton, *Defectives in the Land* 71). Concern for these differential birthrates, Soloway argues, contributed to the lively interest of early eugenicists (especially Galton himself) in positive eugenics to reinvigorate the flagging birthrate amongst the most eugenic (Soloway 64).

It is true that the Beetle seems to monopolize the novel’s sexual energy; as Kelly Hurley puts it, “sexual desire, figured by the text as monstrous and violent, is displaced from the romantic relationships and projected onto the depraved Oriental” (Hurley 137). Hurley points us to the sole moment in the novel where sexual desire is expressed by a protagonist, and notes that in it, sexual desire is not only immediately rejected as depravity but characterized as the Beetle’s *projected* depravity rather than that of Atherton, the desirous character. The Beetle attempts to entice Atherton into becoming their ally in their revenge against Lessingham by inflaming his jealousy, but since Atherton’s desire for Marjorie is nonreciprocal and she insists on a fraternal relationship between them (not even to mention that proverbial Victorian sexual conservatism), he is ashamed of his “fierce imaginings” of “the lower side of what the conquest of this fair lady would mean” (Marsh 109). In a textbook instance of the sublimation I have argued that horror allows, allowing us to experience scenes of inassimilable desire while rejecting any responsibility for the enjoyment we derive, the blame Atherton feels for enjoying such visions is immediately outsourced from himself to the Beetle’s hypnotic influence (a racialized influence, since Atherton says they possess “one of those morbid organisations which are oftener found, thank goodness, in the east than in the west”) (71). Even Atherton’s ability to escape from the

Beetle's mesmeric grip is fueled more by repulsion for the Beetle than a sense of the wounded nobility of his love for Marjorie: "What sort of a blackguard did I call myself," he asks, "that I should take a woman's name in vain for the sake of playing fool's tricks with such scum of the earth as the hideous vagabond in front of me,—and that the name of the woman whom I loved?" (110). In other words, what does it say about Atherton's character and the purity of his love if he chooses to involve this repulsive, hypersexual foreign magician with his pious and excellent Marjorie?

Concern for the differential fertility of certain classes and races rests upon an understanding of reproduction as primarily endogamous, but eugenicists were equally aware of and concerned about reproduction *across* lines of class and race. As the previous chapter explored in more detail, racial "hybridity" was regarded very negatively by eugenicists, who often described individuals of multiracial heritage as constitutionally disabled, inferior to both of their parents' "pure" races no matter how low they might rank on their racial hierarchy. True to the mores of Victorian literature, with its temporo-culturally situated values about what ought and ought not be represented in fiction, *The Beetle* represents sex mostly through its consequences; but as a work of horror fiction, it uses the intensity of the trauma left behind to suggest the magnitude of the sexual savagery that the Beetle enacts on its English victims, and symbolically through them, several precious strata of British society. Holt, Marjorie, and Lessingham might easily be read as representatives of the nation's working class, its aristocracy, and its meritocracy, that select group of citizens whose excellence promotes them beyond their birth to become publicly recognized drivers of national prosperity. The sexual assaults these three suffer at the hands of the Beetle threaten to foreclose the reproductive qualifications of three otherwise eugenic specimens, and the Beetle's queer and omnidirectional sexual interest

leaves no eugene safe from their abusive and deliberately destructive attentions. The novel hints darkly that the country's apparently eugenic personages may conceal a teeming host of dysgenic qualities—weak, feminized, and mentally and emotionally fractured—either instilled or exposed by abuse suffered at the hands of a powerfully destructive foreign Other, and in doing so reinforces eugenic anxieties about interracial sex and the free flow of immigration that would facilitate it.

Whiteness and interraciality more generally are unmistakably of sexual interest to the Beetle, not just Lessingham individually. This makes interracial and homosexual (or aggressive female, or nonbinary) desire one of the social taboos this novel invites us to enjoy while absolving us from the guilt of enjoyment by veiling the deviance in horrific terms, and partly by continuing to reinforce the desirability of white embodiment, albeit in unsettling ways. The Beetle's aforementioned exclamations of admiration and jealousy over Holt's white skin contains as much desire as envy, and that desire and envy are as much racial as sexual. These lecherous attentions are by no means a comfortable compliment for Holt to receive, and the Beetle meets his obvious aversion to drawing near them with gleeful queer coquetry, saying, "You, with your white skin, if I were a woman, would you not take me for a wife?" (Marsh 52). The Beetle's passion for Lessingham convolutes the matter of interracial desire further by integrating the colonizer/colonial relationship into that passion. When speaking of Lessingham, the Beetle describes him with "soft cadences" and a "savage, frantic longing" that shock Holt (especially since, at this point, he believes the Beetle to be male): "He is straight,—straight as the mast of a ship,—he is tall,—his skin is white; he is strong—do I not know that he is strong—how strong!—oh yes! Is there a better thing than to be his wife? his well-beloved? the light of his eyes? Is there for a woman a happier chance? Oh no, not one! His wife!—Paul Lessingham!"

(30). This fervid speech harps on his skin color and compares him to a ship like those of the famed British navy. Even more shocking, in saying, “do I not know that he is strong,” they swoon with admiration of, even desire for, the very strength that Lessingham used to murder the Woman of the Songs, the Beetle’s earlier incarnation. This implies an intimacy, bordering on sexual, forged between them through the embrace of strangulation, the act of murdering/being murdered (215). (If the Beetle is truly the Woman of Songs reincarnated, the murder was *un petit mort* indeed!)

As Lisa Lowe points out in her study of the history of Asian American citizenship, due to the fact that American citizenship was granted exclusively to white men until 1870, discourses around race and citizenship also mediate the status of masculinity: “Whereas the ‘masculinity’ of the citizen was first inseparable from his ‘whiteness,’ as the state extended citizenship to nonwhite male persons, it formally designated these subjects as ‘male,’ as well” (Lowe 11). In *The Beetle*, this assertion is taken to an extreme in the person of the titular villain, who is unanimously identified as male on first sight by all characters who behold them. However, those beholders just as unanimously evince an uncertainty on the gender status they impose on the Beetle, as though, in line with Lowe’s assertion that nonwhite masculinity was not certifiable as masculinity under racist laws of citizenship, the markers of masculinity cannot be trusted to certify their maleness. In addition to this gender illegibility itself, the text is concerned with the effects of this illegibility on the person attempting to read gender in the Beetle’s body. Faced with feminine markers that have entered into the Beetle’s countenance since he last saw them, Holt clings to his initial reading—“for, after all, I told myself that it was impossible that I could have been such a simpleton as to have been mistaken on such a question as gender” (Marsh 27). In this formulation, only the very stupid, even mentally weak, cannot mark gender on sight,

rendering the Beetle's gender illegibility a threat to the characters' conceptions of themselves as competent and able-minded people. This misattribution of gender may also be understood as a failure of colonial or racial superiority. Edward Said famously details in *Orientalism* the way in which the colonizing West fashions the Orient as an Other, constructing its own nature as the reverse of the one it ascribes to the Oriental; extreme irrationality was thus ascribed to the East in order to cast the West by contrast as fundamentally rational (Said 40). They could not deny the existence of logic of a kind (albeit unfamiliar to Western sensibility) structuring Oriental existences, but identified this logic as emerging not from "the result of his own efforts but rather the whole complex series of knowledgeable manipulations by which the Orient was identified by the West" (40). If the white Western man is expected to naturally contain and manage the irrationality of Oriental existence within a logical construction of his own, Holt distinctly fails in this respect. His floundering attempts to impose sense on the illogic of the Beetle's gender suggest that Oriental ontologies (understood as irrationalities) can overpower the logical faculties of the British man, and by calling into question his powers of epistemological imposition the novel also calls into question the "superiority" of his race. Sara Ahmed, in an argument already cited in the introduction of this dissertation, points out that logic is considered more "evolved" than emotion, so the way that the task of identifying the Beetle's gender leaves Holt not only confused but overwhelmed by bewilderment, disgust, and helplessness, reads as a terrifying reversal of colonial hierarchy—a problem indeed, since raising a race "better fitted to fulfil our vast imperial opportunities" was a goal of breeding a better British citizenry (Galton, "Eugenics" 3).

Worse, these fluid identity markers make for a particularly lurid and barrier-bursting sexuality that taints its victims with its own overpowering queerness, even for a genre so often

populated by villains of overpowering sexual appetites. The gender instability that Lowe attributes to the racialized noncitizen and which the Beetle displays in spades appears to be infectious; not only is the Beetle unidentifiable as a man or woman, but also destabilizes the gender identity of their victims. For one, if it is impossible for the characters to certify gender identity on sight, it is also impossible for them to gauge and deploy “appropriate” gendered norms, including levels of sexual distance and disinterest. As such, when Holt first falls into the Beetle’s hypnotic grasp, their shifting forms and chimerical behaviors consistently trouble Holt’s ability to banish the prospect of sexual congress between them despite interpreting the Beetle’s embodiment as triply sexually unsuitable for him (masculine, incredibly aged, and unmistakably foreign). In a handful of lines teeming with enough double entendre to be an anticipatory comic parody of psychosexual literary analysis, Holt narrates: “It may be that he read my story, unspoken though it was,—it is *conceivable*. His eyes had powers of *penetration* which were peculiarly their own,—that I know. ‘*Undress!*’” (Marsh 21, emphasis added). Holt shudders as the Beetle regards his nakedness with a “satyr’s smile,” “devouring [him] with his glances,” with “eyes following [him] as [he] moved” (21). From the references to a notoriously lecherous creature of Greek mythology to the unconcealed ogling with which the Beetle regards Holt’s nakedness, there is absolutely no mistaking the sexual nature of the Beetle’s interest despite an apparently shared gender identity, which Holt wishes to perceive as a bulwark against sexual interest. Holt’s own gender becomes unstable in turn. As Julian Wolfreys points out in his introduction to *The Beetle*, in the novel the mental penetration of mesmerism represents not only a stand-in for the physical penetration of interracial rape, but an even deeper violation of the self, “the psychic erasure of the boundaries which one imposes on oneself as the necessary limits of self-definition” (Wolfreys 13). One of the self-defining boundaries they threaten, it seems, is

gender. According to gendered and exclusionary concepts of which partner gets to experience the sexual encounter as a space of agency and enjoyment, being on the receiving, passive, and terrified end of mesmeric penetration casts Holt in a feminized role, leaving him feeling emasculated, weak, and unmoored from his sense of self.

This emasculation is not an imposition I make through my analysis, but an experience that the narrators are aware of having even as they endure it. While struggling to shake the Beetle's mesmeric control, Holt describes his agency in terms of manhood and its loss in terms of emasculation: "The monstrosity of his suggestion ... endowed me with the power to show that there still was in me something of a man; though every second the strands of my manhood, as it seemed, were slipping faster through the fingers which were strained to clutch them" (Marsh 32). He surrenders to their control in helplessly homoerotic terms: "For the time I was no longer a man; my manhood was merged in his" (20). The Beetle's primary target, Lessingham, also employs similar language when recounting how, as a youth traveling in Egypt, he was entrapped in the Temple of Isis and held in unrelenting mesmeric-sexual slavery for weeks. In recounting the event to Champnell, Lessingham describes his escape in terms of recovering his masculinity, using "manhood" as a shorthand for something like self-command or free will. His opportunity to escape arrives with an influx of strength that he attributes to "the cumulative horrors of such a scene" flooding him with mental strength—or, somewhat less heroically, that the Woman of Songs' "absorption in her religious duties had caused her to forget to tighten" the psychic "cord" that had held him fast (214). As she walked toward him in this state, "she approached a man, and one who, for the first time for many a day, was his own man" instead of the "fibreless, emasculated creature" her control rendered him (215). Manhood, then, is equated with free will, agency, mastery, perhaps even able-bodiedness, since it implies a relationship with his body and

mind that Lessingham regards as ordered, standard, or expected, in keeping with the oft-noted Western equation of independence and self-control with ability. The alignment of the norm of healthy masculinity with mastery and domination is driven starkly home when Lessingham uses his newly recovered command of his faculties—in his terms, his *manhood*—to strangle the foreign woman who enslaved him, reasserting his masculinity by restabilizing his position of dominance in the hierarchies of male/female and British/Egyptian that the Woman of Songs has upset. The Woman of Songs escapes the murderous reassertion of Lessingham's status (if she escapes) only by abandoning her own personhood to transform into her scarab form.

Being raped and witnessing fiery human sacrifices leaves Lessingham afflicted with persistent and debilitating trauma responses (which would likely be diagnosed as a form of post-traumatic stress disorder today) so severe that all three of the novel's male narrators interpret it as a disqualification of the manly solidity that characterizes his professional persona—in other words, the restoration of his manhood is imperfect or illusory, leaving him not only feminized but disabled in the eyes of the other characters. Two of them, Atherton and Champnell, tell Lessingham as much to his face, suggesting that the manhood which Lessingham described recovering to slay his capress was materially, perhaps irrevocably, damaged by his captivity—or worse, was too flimsy to hold up against such an ordeal in the first place. The representation of his attacks as disabling and emasculating or feminizing are closely related in ways that will feel familiar to any reader acquainted with the long association of femininity with disability (Tasca et al. 110). For instance, language associating the trauma responses with disability appear in nearly every account of his fits, and these proofs of disability are coded distinctly feminine. Confronted with reminders of the Beetle, Lessingham helplessly trembles “as with palsy,” “gibber[s],” and cowers, flees, or sinks to the floor (Marsh 81, 80). Champnell sneers at Lessingham's

“hysterical” fearfulness, “I have always understood that you were a man of unusual strength; you appear instead, to be a man of extraordinary weakness” (267). The way Lessingham’s masculinity folds before a foreign sexual invasion, then, compromises his able-bodiedness, or vice versa—or the two are so interconnected that the failure is mutual, or they both were mere performance all along. Even contained inside the characters’ many demands for Lessingham to manage his trauma responses, however, is the implication that true manhood is not the impregnable fortress they present it to be. On two separate instances when his composure crumbles into disability or effeminacy, Atherton and Champnell exhort him to “play the man,” suggesting either an insistence that the farce of manhood be maintained when the substance fails—rendering it nearly impossible to determine if a display of manhood is reality or performance—or that it had no true substance to begin with (150, 268). This exhortation, idiomatic though it may be, cannot but plant the suspicion that manhood as unrelenting self- and other-mastery has always been a performance, a superficiality which cannot be sustained in the face of profound terror and pain.

The most literal scene of re-gendering in the novel is the way the abuse Marjorie suffers at the Beetle’s hands unsettles her cisheterosexuality—a violation treated as doubly alarming because it threatens not only her femininity, but her virginity. When the men scour the Beetle’s lodgings after they kidnap Marjorie, they discover all of her clothing under the floorboards and realize she was “stripped to the skin” by the Beetle (Marsh 236). In the same hiding spot, they also find a braid of her hair “cut off at the roots,—so close to the head in one place that the scalp itself had been cut, so that the hair was clotted with blood” (237). This forced stripping and near-scalping masculinizes Marjorie, removing markers of femininity to prepare her to pass as male on a mesmerically-driven dash through London towards her own fiery demise (truly, the analysis

of Victorian transphobia condemning sexual deviants to Hell writes itself). We have no benefit of a section through Marjorie's perspective while she is under hypnotic compulsion, as we do with Holt; her narration, sealed away from her recollection by trauma, ends the moment the Beetle assumes control of her mind. However, she enjoys no protection from blame for complicity in this deadly drag performance; the assumption of noncompliance that the men receive automatically, she receives only belatedly. Beyond the men's continual agonizing over the status of Marjorie's virginity—entirely absent in Holt or Lessingham's cases, of course—when Champnell suggests that Marjorie might be the “young man” dressed in ragged clothes seen exiting the Beetle's house, Atherton (in unison with Lessingham) reacts with outrage at the aspersions he perceives this as casting on her character:

“But—man alive! what on earth should make her do a thing like that? Marjorie, the most retiring, modest girl on all God's earth, walk about in broad daylight, in such a costume, and for no reason at all! my dear Champnell, you are suggesting that she first of all went mad.” (Marsh 258)

Why, after all Atherton has heard and witnessed for himself of the Beetle's mesmeric power, should he require Champnell's clarification that Marjorie would have cross-dressed under compulsion in order to absolve her from allegations of unfemininity and even madness? It is as though Atherton assumes, in a mirror image of how male victims of rape are feminized—as though compulsively to reassert equations of passivity with unenjoyment, both rendered feminine in sexist paradigms of sexual participation—that since the Beetle's exposure as female Marjorie has grown masculine to match. This reflects a complex response to the prospect of gender fluidity in the sexual space—both the Beetle's and Marjorie's—composed of a double standard quicker to assume female complicity in sexual violence than victimhood, a transphobia

that compounds revulsion beyond what would be felt towards rape alone, and an inability to conceptualize sex outside of gendered and exclusionary concepts of which partner gets to experience the sexual encounter as a space of agency and enjoyment. If Marjorie has assumed a masculine role, she must by extension be active, in charge—it stretches the characters’ imaginations beyond comprehension to imagine that Marjorie could be simultaneously *masculinized* and *victimized*.

The Beetle is preoccupied with normative and appropriate sexuality on a dizzying array of registers, even down to its minor characters like Dora Grayling (a wealthy woman without any identifiable male guardian who attempts to wheedle a marriage proposal out of Atherton by offering to patronize his scientific experimentation) and Percy Woodville (whose bumbling efforts to propose to Marjorie result only in an accidentally exorbitant haberdashery purchase, a violation of his teetotaler values, and a sexually coded mouth-to-mouth resuscitation from the Beetle). As such, it seems appropriate that the characters’ reward for surviving the Beetle’s attack, which is rife with omnidirectional and weaponized sexual force, includes places in the lineup of the many weddings that take place at the end of *The Beetle*: Lessingham to Marjorie, Atherton to Dora Grayling, and even Percy Woodville to “one of Mrs Atherton’s bridesmaids” (Marsh 294). It is the happiest of endings eugenic fiction has to offer: safe entry into the realm of normative sexuality, hopefully to perpetuate their excellent genes through plentiful reproduction for the sake of country’s future, as well as full participation in their respective fields of civic life. However, the validity of this ending is much in doubt. After a long novel stuffed to bursting with such shocking events, readers are hard-pressed to accept the novel’s abrupt resolution, with the Beetle somehow splattering to goo in a run-of-the-mill train crash that leaves Marjorie relatively uninjured. Champnell’s closing remarks skim so blithely over the years the characters spent

recovering from the novel's events that readers may be in danger of failing to recognize exactly how grueling that recovery was—and how incomplete. Champnell introduces the lawfully wedded Lessinghams as professionally successful, “popular and universally revered,” but those same remarks cannot fully conceal a lingering trace of trauma they share: a “constitutional disrelish for the subject of beetles” (293). Traces of their trauma remain even through Marjorie's near-total amnesia, meaning that their restoration to their former status as ideal eugenic citizens is not, and can never be, complete. Their brushes with a foreign sexuality as vicious as it is voracious has left them both with a taint of gender instability and psychosexual trauma that can never entirely be effaced, rendering their apparent excellence—and perhaps, their qualifications for full participation in public and civic life—a mere guise overlying a strain of weakness. Even if that weakness were successfully concealed in the Lessinghams' lifetime, would by eugenic reckoning surely surface in their offspring, all the more since the taint left by the foreign invader affects mother and father alike.

Contributing Members of Society

The analysis I have just concluded has shown how characters in “The Repairer of Reputations” and *The Beetle* are driven and even crushed by the demand that all be able-bodied and heterosexual in their respective national contexts. I will now expand on this argument to explore the importance of work in relation to this homogenizing impulse. The management of social capital—through the maintenance of mutually dependent criteria of public esteem and financially independent status—appears as a major concern both in “The Repairer of Reputations” and *The Beetle*. In both, avoiding perception as mad or incompetent by maintaining (at least the façade of) employment and financial stability is not merely a matter of advancement

or the ability to form desired social connections, but of evading entry into disciplinary apparatuses that threaten physical freedom and personal choice. As such, failing to meet the homogenized standards of race, sexuality, and ability explored in the previous section of this chapter can result in disqualification from economic life, or vice versa—the inability to perform well as an economic actor can lead to racialization or debilitation. These categories of exclusion, as I hope to show, are interrelated sometimes to the point of inextricability in eugenic rhetoric. In short, success in the professional sphere, especially insofar as that success rendered state support unnecessary, was a good indicator of good genes.

Eugenic aims to create better nations—and therefore, the importance of developing and admitting better citizens—were inevitably informed by increasing globalization. Drawing on the same Darwinian discourses that motivated eugenic thinking—positing the life of nations, just like the life of organisms, as essentially competitive, with the fittest thriving at the expense of those unable to compete (Pearson 36)—the new rhetoric of nationbuilding looked with trepidation on the rapidly revolutionizing world order. As such, the “greater good” so often invoked by eugenic and other utopian thinkers came increasingly to be identified with a country’s ability to succeed on a newly competitive, complex, and saturated global stage, to dominate in terms of economics, resources, influence, and cultural exports. As anyone with a passing familiarity with history already knows well, though, the good of the nation in fact tends to disregard—and even exist thanks to—the sufferings of many marginalized communities inside and beyond its borders: the exploited labor of enslaved people and sweatshop workers, the slow deaths of communities exposed to environmental pollutants for the convenience of industry, the way the interests of big business are marketed to voters as aligning with their own wellbeing. Because the rise of eugenics coincided with the implementation of more social support structures

characteristic of a welfare state in Britain and the US, eugenic rhetoric harped upon a promise that their strategies could mitigate the financial burden that the poor, the sick, and the criminal inflicted on the state (Soloway 173).

Sarah F. Rose and Douglas Baynton both point out that this period saw an increasing identification between *ability* and *employability* (Baynton, *Defectives in the Land* 20)—even with documented histories of self-sustenance or even when their disabilities had no bearing on their ability to work, disabled people were treated as though disqualified for any kind of labor and therefore liable to pose a financial burden for the state (Rose 1–2). In previous eras, before the center of economic life shifted from the home to more public spaces like factories and offices, work was highly adaptable to the needs of individual minds, bodies, and energy capacities, but more inflexible workspaces demanded bodies as interchangeable as cogs in a machine (Rose 2). (It is important to note that this was only a change for white people; the mutual identification between ability, labor, and life already had a long history inscribed on bodies of color. As Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha points out, if people of color were “too sick or disabled to work, we were often killed, sold, or left to die, because we were not making factory or plantation owners enough money” [Piepzna-Samarasinha 38].) This led to the shrinking of economic opportunities for disabled people, whose bodies resisted interchangeability.

If we connect this to nationbuilding rhetoric that eugenicists used to obtain support for their policies from the governments whose authority could help realize eugenic goals, eugenic status comes to be defined in terms of productivity and economic contribution to national prosperity, and dysgenic status conversely by financial dependence and drains on state resources that were perceived as posing threats to prosperity on a national scale. Take for example analyses

of the Juke family, which were used in Chapter 1 of this dissertation to demonstrate the interchangeability of class and eugenic status. Richard Dugdale, in his original study of a family infamous for producing an inordinate proportion of criminals, paupers, and prostitutes, calculates the public cost of sustaining this extended family of 1,200 members at around \$1,308,000—a sum that would total over thirty-seven million dollars by today’s currency (Dugdale 70). Even though Dugdale was not himself a eugenicist and argued that the degeneracy of the family could be laid largely at the feet of environmental influences like poverty and poor company, he still recognizes the power the fear of financial loss to the nation to 1) portray the gravity of degeneration in terms that anyone could conceptualize by converting it to a dollar sum and 2) to enlist concern by casting the financial loss as one in which his readers (assumed to be law-abiding taxpayers) would have a personal stake. Galton himself considered eugenics as a matter of national economic expediency. Based on the statistical efforts of Dr. William Farr to calculate the “money worth” of a child of the laboring class by determining the difference between “the cost of maintenance while a child and when helpless through old age” and “its earnings as boy and man,” Galton suggests that if children of a profitable class “could be distinguishable as children and procurable by money in order to be reared as English men, it would be a cheap bargain for the nation to buy them at the rate of many hundred or some thousands of pounds per head” (Galton, *Essays* 11). The suggestion that children might be purchased and integrated into the citizenry in order to improve the national stock seems like the stuff of Swiftian satire, but Galton seems to be in earnest, lamenting only the difficulty of determining for each child “the class he is destined to occupy when adult” since “the amount of care and cost that might profitably be expended in improving the race clearly depends on its result” (12). Galton makes it clear that state funds would bankroll the procurement of eugenic children, just as he elsewhere

suggests that the government make grants to encourage marriage and reproduction between eugenic individuals (11). Richard Soloway points out that Galton even considered redirecting funds from public charities to be an ideal solution for funding eugenic initiatives like family allowances (65). In Galton's thinking, by redirecting government spending from subsidizing the weakest strains of society to cultivating the greatest, the government could ensure the births of citizens that will contribute to, rather than detract from, national prosperity, especially in financial terms.

"The Repairer of Reputations" offers an interesting opportunity to examine eugenic assumptions about economic participation since its disabled characters are able to position themselves as contributing members of society in defiance of the assumption that disability equates with disqualification from social and economic life. Since Hildred is able to maintain a respectable image mostly by passing as sane, the most interesting case of managing perception through financial pursuits comes from Mr. Wilde, who operates a business as the titular Repairer of Reputations (Chambers 15). If financial self-sufficiency, even success, can be substituted for ability and value to the community and government, Wilde's incredible achievements in his unconventional career troubles any straightforward dismissal of him as more fit for the Lethal Chamber than for society. In his capacity as a Repairer of Reputations, Wilde accepts commissions for increasingly exorbitant pay (up to \$1,500, tens of thousands of dollars by today's currency³⁷) to restore the damaged social standing of his clients. The results Wilde achieves must be incredible for clients to pay such staggering sums to a man whose eccentric appearance and behavior would be sure to inspire hesitancy. His ethos as a service provider is

³⁷ It is, of course impossible to calculate the exchange rate with a fictional future that is now far in our past! Still, comparing the value of currency in 1895 and the real-world 1920 to today's dollar, tens of thousands of dollars is a reasonable range.

also improved by his mastery over a workforce of so many prominent people, such as the “owner and editor-in-chief of the great New York daily,” whose social influence enables him to restore the standing of his clients (16). Of course, the reader is strongly inclined to regard this preposterous business and its outlandish lucrateness as yet another delusion that Hildred and his master share—until Wilde bends his talents to the successful location of long-lost pieces of a suit of armor his neighbor is assembling (23). At the accuracy of this prediction, which is not less extraordinary than many of his other claims but is corroborated by one of the story’s few reliable characters, both characters and readers are forced to question whether Wilde’s eccentricities might be a sign of exceptionality rather than insanity, and it casts the distinction between delusion and truth into doubt. Wilde emerges as what might even be called a contributing member of society, a disabled person not only supporting himself without state subsidies but maintaining stability within the social order, a trusted resource to and even employer of society’s most prominent citizens. While eugenicists surely would have objected in the strongest terms against the “deformed” Wilde exercising his reproductive capacity, if the ability to support oneself and contribute to national prosperity are eugenic qualities, then it is impossible to dismiss Wilde as unequivocally dysgenic despite his disabilities.

If Wilde represents a disabled person whose self-supporting economic status allows him to operate freely in society, Robert Holt from *The Beetle* represents the opposite end of the spectrum—a morally upright, able-bodied citizen, eager for work, who becomes debilitated by poverty to the point where he is driven to crime (literally *driven*, since the Beetle hypnotically forces him to commit burglary). Critically, Holt falls under the Beetle’s influence because of the failure of a state-sponsored organization meant to alleviate poverty: the workhouse. From the passage of the 1834 Poor Law Amendment Act to the abolishment of the system in 1930,

Britain's solution for the care of and provision for the unhoused and unemployed was the union workhouse (Higgenbotham 299). Here, people in need would be provided with housing and food (of quality that varied extremely from one workhouse to another) and usually obligated to perform labor to the extent of their ability in return for their room and board (Higgenbotham 296). However, resorting to the workhouse was regarded with significant dread and aversion. The negative reputation of the workhouse was partially self-imposed since, as Fraser puts it, the institution bore a "paradoxical aim of alienating its potential clientele" in order to discourage abuse of its services or overcrowding (Fraser 60). To do so, workhouses often intentionally sought to provide "a standard of living below that of the lowest independent labourer" so that it would be perceived as preferable only to utter destitution (Fraser 49). Furthermore, public aid-seeking was perceived at the time as casting aspersions on the character of the seeker, to the extent that Rose argues that rehabilitative initiatives like Goodwill Industries "tended to focus more on restoring their clients' putatively damaged morality than on determining how to integrate disabled people into the labor market"—and this for disabled clients, who would have been more readily identified as members of the "deserving" poor than an able-bodied vagrant like Holt (Rose 12). Holt shares this disinclination to rely on public aid, and has to overcome extreme hesitance to enter the casual ward, which he refers to as the "abode of all ignominy" (Marsh 7). And of course, eugenicists, ever ready to paint inferior heredity as the root cause of any type of strife, interpreted the use of social services as indicators of poor eugenic qualifications. Echoing earlier-cited eugenic sentiments that the money "wasted" on public relief might be better withheld not only to save the country money in the short term but to stop subsidizing the survival of those better off nonreproductive, Karl Pearson wrote, "I do not believe that the closing of all the casual wards in the country would be unjust to a single human

being who is of any value to the nation at large” (Pearson 104). The casual ward, the residence of the workhouse designated for vagrants and the destitute in active search of employment, is precisely where Holt attempted to seek shelter, placing him amongst those who Pearson would regard as of no value to the nation (Higgenbotham 48).

While my readings throughout this dissertation have investigated moments of authorial complicity with eugenic logics, here I am able to present a welcome exception. Marsh does appear to regard reliance on public charity as negative; instead, he appears critical of the attitude that the need for support necessarily represents a personal moral failing, acknowledging that economic upheaval has rendered the status of even the most trustworthy and industrious workers precarious. Marsh portrays Holt as unwilling both to rely on public charity and to serve the Beetle’s nefarious ends, but forced to both evils by the cruelties of poverty and the bleak realities of the labor market, a critique that highlights the mismatch between eugenic equations of “pauperism” with personal failing and the rapid-fire transformations of economic realities during the Second Industrial Revolution. Unemployment was becoming a reality for a greater and more rapidly fluctuating subset of the population than ever before, and partly as a result of an increasing tautology between disability and exclusion from economic citizenship, being unemployed while *nondisabled* carried a strong stigma. Unsympathetic commentators were likely to identify drunkenness or dissolution as the barrier to securing work for the able-bodied unemployed rather than the unpredictable vagaries of the market (Rose 6). Therefore, when no accepted “reason” (like disability, age, or youth) for economic nonparticipation exists, as in Holt’s case, many find themselves in a uniquely precarious position. His harsh circumstances trap Holt in a liminal state between disability and ability, where he is in desperate need of help but beyond all access to it. He is not disabled enough to receive support as one of the “deserving

poor” (like dysgenic status, a supposedly “objective” label truly mediated by emotional factors), but too debilitated by poverty and want to behave as an idealized economic and moral actor is expected to do. As such, he barred both from citizenship status and the paternalistic protection that usually forms the trade-off for its loss.

In eugenic terms, difficulties of the type Holt faced were also regarded as a personal failing to keep up with the pace of civilization. In his eponymous text on the subject of degeneration, Max Nordau writes that symptoms of the *fin de siècle* (including increased rates of madness, more rapid aging, decadence in art, hysteria, even somatic changes) are “the consequences of states of fatigue and exhaustion, and these, again, are the effect of contemporary civilization, of the vertigo and whirl of our frenzied life, the vastly increased, number of sense impressions and organic reactions, and therefore of perceptions, judgments, and motor impulses, which at present are forced into a given unity of time” (Nordau 42). Paradoxically, even as these discourses recognized that progress came at a human cost, grinding down the human beings unable to keep ahead of its path, eugenicists continued to regard a failure to keep up with the pace of that progress with suspicion that it might represent dysgenic quality. Instead of correcting the environments and systems that lead to disablement, eugenicists thus preferred to trim off those fringes of society that the systems did not encompass (incidentally, the precise purpose that the Lethal Chambers of “The Repairer of Reputations” serve).

Perhaps to counteract this assumption “that poverty stemmed from some personal failing” in the minds of contemporary readers (Fraser 139), Holt’s narration repeatedly emphasizes that, at every juncture on his backslide into unemployment, he made every effort to provide for himself. When he lost his job, he took a temporary one for lesser pay, and subsequent efforts procured only a string of even more temporary and lesser-paying jobs until he could find no

more, despite “trudg[ing] all over London in search of work” (Marsh 21). He is even unable to secure a bed in the casual ward (the nightly temporary housing offered for vagrants at the workhouse) partly because he “had not given up [his] quest for work till all the shops were closed;” he is punished for his industriousness by losing his spot to someone who spent less of their day, or none of it, on the hunt for employment (11). This complies with historian Derek Fraser’s assessment of the workhouse as an imperfect solution for the problem of the proliferating numbers of the able-bodied poor. The Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834, which would have remained in effect while Holt searched for lodgings in the 1880s or early 1890s,³⁸ was designed to assuage “rural destitution” and assist the poor who were unable to work; as such, the workhouse proved an “inappropriate remedy” for the growing prevalence of the urban poor who were neither elderly, very young, nor disabled, but lost their work to new and unpredictable economic fluctuations (Fraser 53). Despite how entry in the workhouse came to figure as a personal failing, however, Lynn Hollen Lees points out that the workhouse simultaneously served as a sign of community belonging even as it bore with it an alienating stigma: “by applying for aid under the Poor Laws, people asserted their membership in a local community and, usually, present or past participation in a local labour market” (Lees 229). In this light, Holt’s inability to enter the casual ward despite his merits as a formerly productive member of society and assiduous seeker for work is also a rejection from his membership in the community despite his every attempt to remain a contributing member of society. Communal care structures were dissolving in the blank face of urban anonymity, but governmental apparatuses were unequipped to step into the widening gap left behind.

³⁸ According to the final chapter, in which Augustus Champnell provides a brief overview of what has occurred to the characters since the events described by the novel, at least three and likely many more years have passed before he undertook their transcription in 1897. This means that the novel’s events likely occurred in the early 1890s or 1880s (Marsh 292).

While Holt may not be disabled enough to become an appropriate postulant for public relief, his lack of access to the public resources he is considered unqualified for renders him too debilitated to protect himself—and those he harms while under mesmeric control—from the Beetle’s assault. A comparison to the novel’s other, more affluent characters reveals Holt as belonging to a population that Jasbir Puar refers to as “targeted for injury” (Puar 69). In *The Right to Maim*, she theorizes that marginalized populations are strategically positioned to become debilitated or disabled, at least somewhat because this strategic debilitation is “how these populations come to be populations as such in the first place” (69). For Puar, debilitation is an unavoidable byproduct of discrimination, a necessary aspect of how some populations are elevated above or debased below others, and a constitutive quality of the marginalized experience (69). Holt’s inferior socioeconomic status plays a direct role in his death under the Beetle’s thrall most obviously by causing their meeting. If it were not for his homelessness and his inability to find lodging in the casual ward, Holt would not have entered the “dismal-looking habitation”—apparently empty and with an open window as irresistible bait to a freezing, starving, and miserable vagabond—where he meets and is captured by the Beetle (Marsh 187). Once inside, he is unable to present even the slightest resistance to the Beetle’s mesmerism due to the physical weakness and defeated state of mind that unemployment and homelessness have forced upon him. In Holt’s narrative, circumstantial, not constitutional, weakness are cast the source of his feeble defense against compulsion, and he laments that he might have presented more of a challenge if he could “only get one or two square meals and have an opportunity of recovering from the enervating stress of mental and bodily fatigue” (29). Even the indignity of his beggar’s rags is proffered as an explanation for his failure to shake off the Beetle’s hypnotic influence as he traverses the city on their errand: “I believe, too, that the consciousness of the

incongruity of my attire increased my sense of helplessness, and that, had I been dressed as Englishmen are wont to be ... he would not have found in me, on that occasion, the facile instrument which, in fact, he did" (36). It is not only his physical and psychological fatigue, then, but an oppressive sense of shame at failing to live up to his own internalized standard of what an English citizen should look like and be able to achieve that cause him to become a servant to, rather than a master over, a dangerous and evil foreigner—which, in turn, causes yet greater disturbance in his construction of self.

The fragile state that makes him easy prey for the Beetle's mesmeric compulsion also makes it impossible for him to survive the strain of being mesmerically dragged across London, despite the care he receives from Marjorie in between bouts of compulsion. The Beetle's other victims, on the other hand—all more socially prominent, wealthy, and nobly-born—are permitted to survive the same and worse abuses than those to which Holt is subjected. When Lessingham is captured by the Beetle as a youth, he spends two months trapped in an underground temple, a slave to the lusts of his captress, and emerges in a "state of semi-imbecility" that lasts months, followed by years plagued by visions of what he suffered (Marsh 216–17). Marjorie is physically and perhaps sexually assaulted, survives a train accident, and suffers a nervous collapse of her own that maintains her "for something like three years under medical supervision as a lunatic" (292). By comparison, Holt's nearly-naked dash on a dreary night, forced performance of robbery, and long day of rushing through London seem relatively mild, yet Holt is the one who dies of his ordeal, not Lessingham or Marjorie. When he is discovered dead, he does bear a few scratches on his throat, but these are deemed "sufficient [...]" to cause death" only when "joined to an already weakened constitution" (276). Though he is not disabled enough for the workhouse, he is too debilitated to resist the Beetle's influence, and also

too debilitated to survive that influence. In what is clearly a critique of the state of England's handling of its poor and destitute,³⁹ Marsh portrays Lessingham and Marjorie as equally porous to the Beetle's control as Holt, but also as positioned for survival and healing while Holt is positioned for destruction. Because Lessingham and Marjorie have respectable work and/or familial resources to provide a roof over their heads and food in their bellies, the money to pay for the expensive psychiatric treatments required to recover from their trauma, and the command of discretion required to maintain their reputations until they can emerge restored, their stories end much differently than Holt's. Because of their class privilege, they become victims rather than an unwilling accomplice, survivors rather than collateral damage.

While disqualification from economic life is a *cause* for Holt's falling into the Beetle's thrall, it is a for Lessingham a *consequence* that attends his "emasculatation" at their hands, making exclusion from economic citizenship both a cause and effect of sexual fraternization with this foreigner. And with Lessingham described as the "rising-hope-of-the-Radicals," disqualifying Lessingham for his profession has the potential to create major shockwaves for national prosperity (Marsh 72). Douglas Baynton points out that in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, it was understood that "there was not one but two races, two struggles, in which disability was a handicap: the economic race for life in which an individual might succeed or fail, and the evolutionary competition by which races and nations would rise or fall" (57). Already a prominent politician despite his relative youth and "destined, probably, to rise much higher," Lessingham is involved in both races at once, and appropriately, his ability or

³⁹ The most blatant proof of Marsh's sympathy towards the unfairness of Holt's demise comes from the final pages of the novel, where Champnell wraps up the stories of each of the novel's major players. His summation of Holt's end describes how the more affluent characters provide for his burial: "He lies buried in Kensal Green Cemetery, under a handsome tombstone, the cost of which, had he had it in his pockets, might have indefinitely prolonged his days" (Marsh 294).

masculinity is strongly tied both to his service to his country and his appeal as a potential mate (74). As soon as the catatonic fits that plague him since his entrapment in the Temple of Isis are tamed to manageability by years of psychiatric treatment—that is, as soon as he is restored to at least *passing* as able-bodied, even if his disability persists—Lessingham commences a meteoric rise to prominence as a member of the House of Commons. Though Lessingham comes a relatively obscure family to be classified as of high eugenic quality by default (Marjorie’s father disdainfully refers to him as a “toadstool” that “sprung up in the course of a single night, apparently out of some dirty ditch”), there exists a “great multitude which regards Paul Lessingham as the greatest living force in practical politics” (125, 30). Atherton attributes this assessment of Lessingham’s personal merit to the “proverbial” impenetrability of his coolness and “the adroitness which is born of his invulnerable presence of mind” (41-42). Further, the characters recognize this excellence in the political arena as a sexual attractor; Atherton, in a fit of bitter jealousy watching Lessingham lead Marjorie away after delivering a masterful address before Parliament, remarks, “when a man makes a speech like Lessingham’s any girl would go away with him,—and be proud to” (96), without even knowing that Marjorie dates “the first stirring of [her] pulses” to “the report of a speech of his which [she] read in the *Times*” (155).

However, this attractive professional success and self-possession evaporates in the face of reminders of Lessingham’s suffering, so much that not only are the characters forced to question the validity of his formidable reputation, but readers are reminded of this reputation most frequently by his failure to live up to it. The extremity of Lessingham’s reactions to what the other characters consider relatively minor stimuli—at no point in the novel does Lessingham actually confront the specter that torments him, only triggers like mentions, suggestions, or illustrations of beetles—lead *The Beetle*’s characters to regard his condition as so irreconcilable

with his professional exceptionality as to discredit its existence. An astonished Atherton, witnessing Lessingham's triumphant speech to Parliament the evening after a fit, describes the juxtaposition in terms of both disability and animality: "When I remembered how I had seen him that same morning, a nerveless, terror-stricken wretch, grovelling, like some craven cur, upon the floor, frightened, to the verge of imbecility, by a shadow, and less than a shadow, I was confronted by two hypotheses. Either I had exaggerated his condition then, or I exaggerated his condition now" (Marsh 91). Atherton cannot imagine how the "imbecile" of this morning can wield a masterful intellect in the evening, or how the "cur" of the morning can command the attention and respect of the nation's most immanent men. In a scathing critique of a member of Parliament, Champnell coldly charges Lessingham with possessing "an imagination so *ill-governed* that its ebullitions remind [him] of nothing so much as feminine hysterics" (267, emphasis added). Ironically for this vaunted "Leader of Men," Lessingham's venal, emasculating failure is an inability to master himself the same way he does others (265). In his PTSD symptoms, the other characters read a clear indication that he is neither actually equipped for the service he performs for his nation nor deserving of the sexual appeal he derives from his performance of that service.

Lessingham is well aware of the stakes of failing to—or failing to appear to—maintain his respectability by living up to his professional reputation. He shares the other characters' dread of mental instability, stating that "of all diseases insanity is the most to be dreaded;" as a result, he attempts to mitigate the diagnosis of his nervous state to "mental overstrain" from "the pressure of overwork" (Marsh 81, 150). Claiming overwork might seem a socially safer, more comprehensible, or even admirable alternative to admitting that his nervous instability comes from his stint as a sex slave to a shapeshifting Egyptian priestess decades ago. However, this

more civilized and therefore seemingly more respectable explanation still raises the specter of *neurasthenia*, or *nervous exhaustion*, an affliction unique to the most civilized societies in which the mental pressures of urban life and high demands of modern workplaces culminated in mental and bodily collapse. American physician George Beard described the condition as a loss of “nervous force” that could result in “general paralysis, in neuralgia, in uterine disturbances, in dyspepsia, in chorea, in hypochondriasis, in hysteria, and in actual insanity” (Beard 218). As a result of this association, neurasthenia contained within itself an interesting ambivalence, “transform[ing] white American men’s bodily weakness into compelling evidence of their racial and sexual superiority” (Jung 406) but also suggesting a constitutional inability to live up to gendered expectations and the demands of modern existence (Schuster 85–86). Though it seems unclear whether eugenicists believed that the pressures of modern society were breaking down eugenes to dysgenic status or revealing a dysgenic strain that was present all along, what *is* clear is that they feared the effects that neurasthenia would have on the *best* far more than the *worst* of society. In *American Nervousness*, George Beard wrote of the peril in terms bordering on the apocalyptic: “All our civilization hangs by a thread; the activity of the very few make us what we are as a nation; and if, through degeneracy, the descendants of these few revert to the condition of their not very remote ancestors, all our haughty civilization would be wiped away” (97). Even if Lessingham is not constitutionally weak, falling ill to overwork means that he still fails to meet the standard of relentless productivity demanded even to remain afloat in “civilized” capitalist society, much less to achieve a stature like the one he holds. In the end, “that great work of constitutional and social reform which he has set himself to do” might be beyond Lessingham’s capabilities, and the effort of achieving them catastrophic not just to him, but to his future offspring and to the nation he helps to lead (Marsh 30). There is simply no way of narrating his

ailments that allows Lessingham to avoid allegations that he is not only professionally, but reproductively, unfit, even dangerous.

Atherton explicitly brandishes Lessingham's ill health to question his reproductive qualifications. He demands that Lessingham "withdraw [his] pretensions to Miss Lindon's hand;" if he refuses, Atherton will "place certain facts before that lady, and, if necessary, publish them to the world," so that "the shadow of [his] evil fortune shall not fall upon an innocent girl" (Marsh 146, 150). Even before knowing that Lessingham's episodes stem from a sexual taint on his past, which might interfere with the marriage from the standpoint of morality, Atherton argues that Lessingham's nervous condition disqualifies him for a relationship with Marjorie. Approaching Marjorie in a state such as Lessingham's—"haunted," as Atherton describes it, rendered a wreck of himself by trauma and sexual degradation that threatens to return, even from the dead, at any moment⁴⁰—is an ethical travesty that would cast the "shadow of [his] evil fortune" across not only the well-being but also the reproductive prospects of a young, beautiful, brilliant, and well-bred young woman with at least two other aristocratic and able-bodied suitors readily to hand. By marrying her, he would commit a twofold eugenic crime, not only perpetuating his own weak(ened) germ plasm but monopolizing her valuable one. Worsening Lessingham's dilemma, once again, his political and romantic fortunes remain linked, though this time they threaten to *fall* together rather than rising as one. It is surely not only his romantic prospects, but his political ones, that would be decimated by the publication of "certain facts;" in order to extricate him from Marjorie, Atherton is willing to sacrifice the political career that comprises Lessingham's livelihood and life's work as collateral damage. Even Lessingham

⁴⁰ When the novel was initially serialized in *Answers*, its title was *The Peril of Paul Lessingham: The Story of a Haunted Man* (Vuohelainen xii). Though the title would later be exchanged for the less alliterative but snappier and more attention-grabbling *The Beetle: A Mystery*, the original title reveals that Marsh himself and not just Atherton conceptualizes Lessingham's affliction—and the novel's narrative itself—as a "haunting."

seems to consider this slash-and-burn tactic as justifiable, agreeing, “if my health is really failing me, I shall resign everything,—everything!”, and swears not only to “withdraw [his] pretensions to Miss Lindon’s hand, but to all [his] other ambitions” if his tormenting specter has truly returned to haunt him (150). Lessingham is driven to seek out the services of Champnell—his own “repairer of reputations,” a private investigator of appropriately aristocratic extraction, known for handling “business, of a very delicate nature, with much skill and tact”—in order to protect his position both as a public servant and as a worthy mate to Marjorie (and, presumably, any other “innocent girl”) (206).

In claiming Lessingham twenty years before, and even more in following him to England on a quest for vengeance, the Beetle may not present a direct drain on the country’s resources, but in despoiling the best among the citizenry, they strike at the true heart of eugenic value: the double helix of physical and human capital, the eugenes that must be protected and acquired at any cost because of their economic benefit to the country they represent, each priority spiraling back on itself until it becomes impossible to determine which of the two is of primary value to the nation.

The Sticking and Spreading Power of Popular Fiction

Since I began this chapter with a reading of the baffling opening paragraphs of “The Repairer of Reputations” it feels appropriate to close it with the equally bizarre ending of *The Beetle*. After a long, desperate, and frankly a little rambling chase sequence that absorbs nearly all of Part IV, Marjorie’s mesmeric kidnapping abruptly ends—and not because her would-be rescuers manage to dispatch the villain who spirited her away. Instead, the prolonged chase ends in an abrupt *deus ex machina*, a freak train accident that leaves the car carrying Marjorie and the

Beetle “matchboxed” (Marsh 290). The Beetle vanishes from the wreckage, apparently for good, leaving behind only unidentifiable scraps of fabric and foul-smelling stains (identified by various experts as “parboiled” human blood, the blood of some species of cat, paint, or “some sort of viscid matter, probably the excretion of some variety of lizard”) (292). This resolution may feel abrupt and even unfulfilling to readers, since it substitutes a dramatic final confrontation between the rescuers and the foreign interloper with a mere accident. The would-be heroes chasing after Marjorie don’t even witness the train crash, much less do anything to cause it. This ending not-so-neatly evades the long-anticipated confrontation between Lessingham and his tormenting specter—the repressed never returns, imagination never becomes reality, and resolution is never to be had. Reading this ending, one cannot help but suspect that Marsh may have avoided staging a direct clash between the human heroes and the Beetle because he had backed himself into a narrative corner and was unable to envision a scenario in which the humans emerge sane, virginal, and victorious from such a confrontation.

Bookending this chapter with Chambers’ American utopia and the literal screeching halt with which *The Beetle* ends is more than just a pleasing exercise in symmetry. These moments do similar things for their respective narratives, both offering compelling opportunities to investigate their stories’ investments in intertwining notions of progress and civilization, specifically in the context of their own respective nations. Specifically, where Marsh’s imagination may have failed to envision human victory, the mighty and mindless power of the train prevails to vanquish the Beetle. What could paint the Beetle as more antithetical to civilized Britain than a stable and reliable technology like the railway system revolting so catastrophically against the Beetle’s attempts to turn it to their own ends? What could be more modern and civilized than technology mounting a rescue on its own, an automated salvation independent of

the efforts of Marjorie's human heroes? Precisely because they are advanced technologies, the London rails and the government surveillance of 1920s New York are hostile environments for our antagonists, the Beetle (the primordial foreign Other), Hildred, and Wilde (the degenerate dysgenes hiding in plain sight). The intensified homogenizing pressures of a new social order, of which the Lethal Chamber is the crowning symbol, will render it impossible to conceal damning differences like those harbored by Hildred and Wilde; railway technology itself will revolt against being used by the Beetle for purposes of reverse colonization and pagan ritual.

However, there is also something less strictly textual that the opening of "The Repairer of Reputations" and the closing of *The Beetle* share—their contribution to the exuberant oddity of each text. These narratives are bursting at the seams with the stock situations, set pieces, and affective overflow of popular horror fiction: diary-entry-style narration, insane and sexually threatening antagonists, virgins in peril, lovers selflessly braving that danger, and lingering in the liminal moment of uncertainty that Tzvetan Todorov refers to as "the fantastic," when it is unclear whether the story's uncanny events are to be explained through magical or conventional means (a question that neither story settles firmly) (Todorov 25). This generic excess is perhaps even more apparent because of the economic conditions under which these stories were produced: as fast as possible, to make money to earn their writers a living. To achieve the stunningly prolific outputs—over eighty novels each in their fifty-seven (Marsh) and sixty-eight (Chambers) years of life⁴¹—which kept them ahead of their bills, each churned out multiple

⁴¹ All of the authors included in this dissertation were employed professionally as writers, but Marsh and Chambers both belong to a much more commercialized class of writer than Arthur Machen and H. G. Wells. Though highly regarded in his lifetime, especially by a cadre of devotees calling themselves the Arthur Machen Society, Machen was by far the least prolific of my authors and the least regularly and gainfully employed writing fiction (his writing career was interrupted by stints as an actor and a journalist). Wells, at the other extreme of the spectrum, was one of the most successful writers of his generation. Not only was he prolific, producing over fifty novels and dozens of short stories in his seventy-nine years of life, but he was a public figure sought after for political opinions due to his prominence in the Fabian Society and is frequently taught at both grade school and university levels today (Smith xii-xiii).

novels per year, almost exclusively in popular genres like thriller, romance, and adventure novels. Sometimes, this haste came across in the execution of their works; of *The Beetle*, the *St. James Guide to Horror* complains, “Like most of Marsh's novels it gives the impression of having been written in a tearing hurry, and the fact that it never comes remotely close to making sense strongly implies that its bizarre plot was made up as the author went along” (“Richard Marsh”). If the pleasure of reading genre fiction is, as Petra Kuppers describes it, a “recombinant” one—the delight of discovering well-known set pieces arranged in new ways, the comfort of familiarity greeting you in each new text (Kuppers 83)—then hastily mass-produced works of popular fiction like those that kept roofs over the heads of the Marsh and Chambers families are perhaps examples of this recombination in its purest form. With high demands for output that would appeal to a variety of reading publics, Marsh and Chambers would have been even more aware than most of how to pull a successful story to pieces and reintegrate its constituent parts into a new tale. Ironically for this chapter’s readings of how financial success and assessments of eugenic status overlap, Marsh and Chambers were decried by critics as contributing only drivel to the national cultural milieu—not because they were incapable of better, but because writing was their profession. Rare is the author who can escape the paradox of popular fiction, in which those able to make a living as an author (especially those who receive the most remuneration for their work) are suspected, by dint of their popularity, to be undeserving of acclaim. Despite the eugenic ideals Marsh and Chambers reproduce in their fiction, their own authorial status works as a counterpoint to a simple equation of productivity and financial stability with eugenic worth; their popularity and its attendant commercial success were not understood to represent a marker of their personal quality, but as proof of the inferior quality of their products and even, perhaps, themselves as writers.

Since they square so uneasily with the rest of the texts, both the utopian setting of “The Repairer of Reputations” and the abrupt *deus ex machina* of *The Beetle* may at first appear to represent an unhappy or even ill-conceived deployment of generic tropes, proof of slapdash quality or inferior command of narrative. While I am ultimately convinced that these moments are both useful ones for exposing and understanding the authors’ investments in national advancement, I am also conscious of these moments as diegetically unstable ones, and readers will in fact note that my readings of these moments have been offered in more flexible terms than the other readings included in this chapter. They are so outlandish that their jarring dissonance with the surrounding narrative threatens to yank the reader up from their immersion in the text, to make them scrutinize the author as a “man behind the curtain,” destabilizing the suspension of disbelief that is often a prerequisite for absorption in the reading experience. But, after all, being jarred from the text at this ending is not so far removed from the general experience of reading “The Repairer of Reputations” and *The Beetle*. These texts are so narratively bewildering, so affectively over-the-top, that summarizing them to those around me as I produced this dissertation never failed to elicit dropped jaws or stunned barks of laughter. These reactions echoed my own experience of reading and closely studying the texts, when I was constantly held in the tension between thrill bordering on absurdity or drama bordering on camp. Writing this chapter was full of moments that made me call across the house to my roommate, send a text message to a friend, raise my head to speak to my coworking partner after long stretches of companionable silence broken only by busy keyboards—inviting them into my delight at the absurdity or excess of a particular quotation or event. As is a particular power of the “lowest” forms of fiction, the moments that most jarred me out of the story became doorways through which I invited others into the textual world with me—and vectors by which I incited the

interest of others. As a modern reader, my strongest reactions to the text certainly look different than those of Marsh's original audience would have, but the principle remains: a text that makes you *feel*, perhaps especially when it makes you feel too much or feel silly, is a text you talk about, revisit, share, spread. Horror fiction has the power not just to quietly change the way we think and feel by overpowering our emotions, sinking the hooks of lingering associations and anxieties into our brains. It can also use those affective hooks to hijack us into spreading it to others, like a virus does to its host in order to perpetuate itself. If we do not pause to think critically about what we are spreading, we become complicit not only in re-enacting harmful generic patterns of marginalization, but in training new readers and viewers up in those same patterns.

Conclusion *The Shape of Water*: Recombinant Genres and the Social Model of Monstrosity

Introduction

In an interview with NPR, Doug Jones, who has made a name for himself in Hollywood suiting up in full-body prosthetics to play an impressive lineup of monstrous creatures,⁴² describes his initial reaction to Guillermo del Toro's invitation to star in *The Shape of Water* as one of "utter terror" (Yu). In this Academy award-winning 2017 film, Elisa Esposito, a mute janitor, and a humanoid fish creature, treated as a god in its native South America and as a dissectible key to American supremacy in the Space Race at the Aerospace Research Center where Elisa works, fall in love. In defiance of the ruthless Colonel Richard Strickland and aided by a team of "misfits" (her Black coworker Zelda Fuller, her gay illustrator neighbor Giles Gunderson,⁴³ and the undercover Russian agent Dr. Robert Hoffstetler/Dimitri Mosenkov), Elisa contrives to free the creature and return him to the sea. When Strickland shoots Elisa during the creature's release, his restorative powers not only heal her bullet wound, but cause scars on her neck to flutter open into gills, and together they escape to what is presumably the aquatic happily ever after of this Cold War fairy tale.

⁴² Doug Jones' credits include, delightfully for this dissertation, a Morlock in the most recent film adaptation of *The Time Machine* (released in 2002 and directed by H. G. Wells' great-grandson Simon Wells).

⁴³ Giles' surname comes from the novelization of the film, written by Daniel Kraus and del Toro. At various points in this chapter, I will reference details of interest from the novelization but do not regard it and the film as interchangeable or its inclusions as necessarily canonical, since the novel includes many additions, contradictions, and ret-cons to the film's content. Of the two, I treat the film as bearing greater authority.

The role del Toro approached his favorite monstrous character actor with was, of course, that of the Amphibian Man.⁴⁴ In assuming this role, Jones found himself faced with a unique artistic challenge: he would become a romantic lead without ever vacating the monstrous role for which del Toro had already tapped him several times (*Mimic*, *Hellboy* and *Hellboy II*, *Pan's Labyrinth*, and *Crimson Peak*) (“Doug Jones”). After arguing over the course of three chapters that eugenic rhetoric and the horror genre are projects more closely bound together by generic similarities than we might at first perceive, I chose to conclude this dissertation by contrasting my nineteenth century horror texts with a contemporary romantic fantasy film. I do so because, in casting a monster as a romantic lead, the film invites viewers openly to spectate—even delight in—monstrous sexuality in ways the *fin-de-siècle* texts in this dissertation express in a much more furtive manner. While this dissertation’s other texts always safely foreclose or abject the prospect of hybridized or abhuman sexualities in the course of their moral housekeeping, *The Shape of Water* invites viewers to experience with compassion, even to identify with or enjoy vicariously, a love that violates that border, and in so doing demonstrates that the conflation of monstrosity with evil was an artificial one all along. It bursts with narrative and filmic trappings much more suited to the horror genre than to romance: the menacing nonhuman creature who claims a white human woman as his sexual object, the world-altering secret concealed in a government lab, the hypermasculine white “hero,” the misfits siding with that nonhuman creature against other humans. Armed with these trappings, however, *The Shape of Water* proves

⁴⁴ There are several ways I might choose to refer to Doug Jones’ character. In the credits, Jones’ role is called “Amphibian Man;” Colonel Richard Strickland refers to him as “the asset;” in the novelization by del Toro and Kraus, he has yet more appellations, with Hoffstetler referring to him as “the Devonian” and the native people of the Amazon calling him “Deus Brânquia” (del Toro and Kraus 126, 4). In this conclusion, I adopt both “the Amphibian Man” and “the creature”—a tribute to his physiological resemblance to and narrative descentance from the Creature from the Black Lagoon—since I find these two terms united represent both his humanness and his animality, both of which I consider essential to capture in my analysis.

that (meta)genre is a performance—one we can always choose to enact differently than we have been trained to do—by presenting us with a love story instead.

***The Shape of Water's* Eugenic Heritage**

I believe the analyses I have conducted over the course of this dissertation do more than point out a curiosity confined to a single historical moment. Stories from the nineteenth century are the progenitors of those we tell now, and eugenic ideology has far from disappeared—instead, it retains a pervasive and unacknowledged influence over the horror tradition as well as that which it enjoys in reproductive discourse. If genre is an act of recombination, of strategic borrowing from the successful narrative and affective devices of earlier works (Kuppers 83), then it is undeniable that the horror stories of the early eugenic era still lurk in the DNA of the horror stories we produce today. Aptly for the genetic metaphor—which contains the idea of assembling a new iteration of a structure from parts copied from a multitude of ancestors, always at the mercy of unpredictable atavisms and mutations—fictional works continue to bear their own influence, in addition to the influence borne by their progeny. For instance, elements of Robert W. Chambers' *The King in Yellow* (1895) furnished major motifs for the first season of the smash hit TV series *True Detective* (2014); *The Twisted Ones*, a 2019 novel by popular contemporary fantasy writer T. Kingfisher, is a modern-day take on Arthur Machen's Little People mythology, generated by Kingfisher's attempt to retell the story of "The White People" (written late 1890s, published 1904) from memory and then construct a story around the fragments thus generated (*True Detective*; Kingfisher). The authors included in this dissertation remain influential to this date in their own right, as well as by dint of the works they have inspired.

In many ways, we are but little removed from the attitudes that I describe in previous chapters, and disabled people continue to be the unacknowledged but disproportionate targets of the discriminatory legacies of both a horror genre and reproductive discourse steeped in eugenic ideology. While filmmakers have blessedly become both more aware and more wary of racializing or queer-coding their villains, disability and mental illness are less contested grounds in which to plant the seeds of horror. In M. Night Shyamalan's horror/thriller films *The Visit* (2015) and *Split* (2016), the villains' evil actions are direct results of sensationalized versions of mental illnesses (sundowning, a phenomenon related to dementia, and dissociative identity disorder respectively) (*The Visit*; *Split*). While all iterations of Stephen King's novel *Pet Sematary* (1983) deploy Zelda Goldman, with her body twisted by spinal meningitis and her mind by her suffering, less as a character than as a source of lasting psychological trauma for her more narratively relevant younger sister, the 2019 filmic adaptation exploits her for greater disturbing effect than either the 1989 film or the novel, escalating its exploitative representation of disability rather than learning to show Zelda greater compassion in the forty-six years since the story's creation (*Pet Sematary*). In its obsession with integrity of the human body—which additionally demands a strict policing of sexuality and the purity of the child—the horror genre too often continues to reinforce the most foundational tenets of eugenic logic: that humanity is a static category with identifiable borders and that these borders ought to be policed, by force if necessary.

This continued eugenic influence in the realm of horror is partly because eugenic logic remains pervasive in our society more broadly, not just in our fiction. As Richard Soloway puts it, “eugenics was ... always more a product of the culture of the times than it was a viable science or social science;” “as the times changed so did eugenics,” and therefore today's iteration

of eugenics is unique to our times (Soloway xxiv). The coercive aspect of early to mid-twentieth century eugenics, in which governmental and institutional power was openly leveraged to force the dysgenic from the breeding pool by sterilization or death, has all but disappeared. However, if eugenics has sunk out of our cultural consciousness, it is not because it is no longer there—instead, it has passed into our cultural *subconscious*, crystallizing into the metageneric patterns I described in the introduction, which determine not only how we behave in a given encounter, but the participants in and structure of the encounter. As David Mitchell and Sharon Snyder put it “the movement [has] run its course with respect to its primary function as a public policy campaign with scientific justifications;” now that it has successfully converted public opinion to its viewpoints, eugenics no longer needs to persist in the forms in which it was originally instituted (Snyder and Mitchell 136). The ideas motivating eugenic interventions—that certain types of human embodiment/enmindment should not exist, that those undesirable types are identifiable by metrics to which human beings have access, that there is a firm line to be drawn between nature and nurture, and that by allowing selective access to reproduction and even existence, we can alter the proportion of undesirable qualities in the human population at large—enjoy an unacknowledged undeath in our culture. Existing in nonnormative ways (with normativity judged according to a wide array of standards including race, gender, sexuality, ability, and socioeconomic status) is still unsafe, and individuals judged to be personally or socially dangerous continue to suffer reprisals in the forms of domestic abuse, hate crimes, institutionalization, and the consequences of systemic inequality.

It is into this neo-eugenic milieu that *The Shape of Water* was born, and against eugenic progenitors—primarily monster lover tales and the horror film series *Creature from the Black Lagoon* (1954, with sequels in 1955 and 1956)—that it revolts. The animal bridegrooms of

folklore, a genre del Toro has referred to as the “primal motor of storytelling” (Rottenburg), are almost always apparently familiar and natural creatures, a contrast to the Amphibian Man’s humanoid but scaly, slimy-when-ill, exoskeleton-plated, gill-breathing form. (In the novelization, he even possesses a retractable pharyngeal jaw [del Toro and Kraus 91]!) Boding even worse for the sanctity of the human category, *The Shape of Water* rejects the near-universal narrative trajectory of fairy tales in the “animal as bridegroom” category, which tend to culminate in the revelation of a previously concealed human status that was nevertheless held since the beginning, or at least reward a faithful creature with human status before permitting them to enjoy the love of a human (Uther 248–49).⁴⁵ In our modern popular fiction landscape, monstrous lovers continue to enjoy popularity—consider Angel and Spike from *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, Edward Cullen from Stephanie Meyer’s *Twilight* series, Tamlin and Rhysand from Sarah J. Maas’ *Court of Thorns and Roses* series, and the inhuman lovers other fantasy/“romantasy” texts. Unlike the bestial lovers of folklore and the Amphibian Man, these monstrous lovers do not *appear* monstrous at all but are portrayed as “inhumanly” beautiful (paradoxically, by an extremely normative human standard). They earn their right to the love of a human (usually a woman) by conforming to human value norms,⁴⁶ a romantic convention also cherished by eugenicists that reinforces stereotypes of women as gatekeepers for normative morality. The specter of bestiality/immorality is thereby safely dissipated, establishing the nonhuman lover as

⁴⁵ Examples include: France’s *Beauty and the Beast*, Germany’s *The Frog Prince*, Norway’s *East of the Sun and West of the Moon*, Afghanistan’s *Khastakhumar and Bibinagar*, India/Sri Lanka’s *The Turtle Prince*, Japan’s *The Snail Son*, etc.

⁴⁶ To take my examples from above, Angel and Spike are both ensouled, giving them a moral compass and capacity for love that other *Buffy* vampires lack (*Buffy the Vampire Slayer*); the Cullen family consumes the blood of animals instead of humans out of moral rectitude (Meyer); Tamlin is discarded in favor of Rhysand once his abusive disregard for his human female partner’s autonomy becomes apparent (Maas).

an appropriate partner and leaving the normative and idealized human category unadulterated by animality, monstrosity, or evil.

In del Toro's fairy tale, this trajectory is reversed, and the unlikely couple prospers through embracing *monstrosity* rather than uncovering or achieving *humanity*. Throughout the film, human value systems are repeatedly violated in favor of the animal-Other, such as in Elisa's treasonous behavior in breaking the Amphibian Man out of a government lab; her abhorrence of Strickland's sexual advances while she embraces that of the creature; or Giles' conciliatory reaction when the Amphibian Man injures Giles and eats his pet cat: "It wasn't his fault. He's a wild creature. We can't ask him to be anything else" (*The Shape of Water* 1:19:02). Perhaps most concretely, the film's ending represents a near-perfect mirror of the monster-lover archetype where the story's end reveals a hidden human status. When the Amphibian Man heals Elisa in the final sequence he reveals her concealed but congenital *nonhuman* status, demonstrating that the symmetrical scars she has borne on either side of her neck since childhood were gills all along and thereby suggesting another member of his own species dwells somewhere in her family tree⁴⁷ (*The Shape of Water* 1:57:20). With her nonhuman embodiment restored, the pair escapes her civilized, grim, terrestrial world for his wild, wondrous, aquatic one—an ending that destabilizes the pedestal upon which we so often elevate human worlds and existences above the animal.

The film's other forebear is the *Creature from the Black Lagoon* series. del Toro describes the germ of *The Shape of Water* originating in his own childhood viewing of the scene in which the Creature swims beneath Kay Lawrence (played by Julia Adams)—swimsuit-clad, the picture of normative Western female beauty, and blithely unaware of her inhuman admirer

⁴⁷ Other interpretations are possible, but my reasons for adopting this one will be explored in further detail later on.

watching from below (Rottenburg; *Creature from the Black Lagoon* 29:20-30:00). The Amphibian Man's character design is clearly indebted to that of the Gill-man: both sport catcher's-mitt webbed hands, crustacean-like plating on the torso, and wide-set piscine eyes and lips (though, thanks to modern prosthetic technology and true to his role as a romantic lead instead of antagonist, the Amphibian Man is equipped with a much more expressive face and a more sensuous mouth than the blank-eyed and rubbery-lipped Gill-man). Visually, the film pays homage to the Gill-man's iconic slow-reaching hand motions when the Amphibian Man tentatively claims the boiled eggs that are Elisa's first tribute and overture to him, and the vicious cattle prod that Strickland uses to torture the creature calls to mind the one wielded by the marine biologists in *Revenge of the Creature* (*Creature from the Black Lagoon* 3:50-4:05; *The Shape of Water* 32:58-33:01). This filmic forebear is also invested in preserving the human gene pool against invasion by a monstrous interloper; in both of the first two films, the Creature attempts the rape (in the sense of kidnapping, but likely also that of sexual violation) of human women, with violent reprisals from their human male protectors. In violently excluding the interloper instead of transforming or rehabilitating it into the normative human reproductive milieu, *Creature* adheres more closely to the horror tradition I have explored in this dissertation, which—unlike monster-lover fiction—categorically refuses to assent to a not-quite-human partner.⁴⁸ *The Shape of Water* rejects this ideological investment even as it speaks with the film's narrative and visual language. In an interview with the *Los Angeles Times*, del Toro recounts his spellbound reaction to the Creature's swimming scene with Kay in *The Creature from the Black*

⁴⁸ In fact, the *Creature from the Black Lagoon* is itself descended from "The Shadow Over Innsmouth," a story about a city of fish monster/human hybrids by H. P. Lovecraft, avowed opponent of miscegenation and a fan of the works of both Arthur Machen and Robert W. Chambers (Lovecraft, "The Shadow over Innsmouth"; Lovecraft, "Supernatural Horror"). The lineage between *The Shape of Water* and this dissertation's other texts is therefore quite direct.

Lagoon: “When I saw the creature swimming under Julie Adams ... I thought three things: I thought, ‘Hubba-hubba.’ I thought, ‘This is the most poetic thing I’ll ever see.’ I was overwhelmed by the beauty. And the third thing I thought is, ‘I hope they end up together’” (Rottenburg).

With *The Shape of Water*, del Toro invites us into his way of hailing interspecies congress with delight and anticipation, or makes space for those who share his instinct to view the Gill-man and Kay’s interaction as coded with romance instead of horror. If, as Ria Cheyne so compellingly argues, “the desire to experience a particular kind of feeling is the underpinning motivation for genre reading” (Cheyne 2)—if the experience of genre we seek is a function of feeling a particular affect—then how the film makes us feel is a major determinant of what the film *is*, generically speaking. *The Shape of Water*, despite aggregating so many features that feel appropriate to a horror film, *feels* like a romance thanks to narrative and filmic choices that engage with, subvert, and reject the tropes and tools of the genres the film draws upon. When we might be inclined to regard the Amphibian Man with fear, the floating and whimsical musical score cue us that he is our romantic lead. The nocturnal, waterlogged color palette that might easily signal a horror film instead feels cozy and safe thanks to hyper-saturated pops of color and early associations of water with comfort in Elisa’s daily rituals of taking a bath and boiling eggs for the breakfast she shares with Giles (and eventually the Amphibian Man). Costume design also contributes strongly to the film’s invitation to romantic feeling, or at least to sexual attraction. In another interview with Jones, the actor describes his suit as sculpted to convey recognizable sex appeal despite its inhuman outlines. “Two areas that I kept hearing about were the lips and the ass,” he reports. “Because again it’s got to be sexy, got to be relatable. Got to be kissable got to be grab-able, right?” (Anderson). According to Jones, he knew they had achieved

this balance when Octavia Spencer, who plays Zelda, “looks at me and goes, ‘Mmm!’ every time I walk away from her. So I thought, ‘OK the butt’s working. The butt is working!’” (Anderson). This is a marked divergence from the Creature from the Black Lagoon, upon whom the Amphibian Man’s design is based but whose scales appear rough and features forbidding. By thus crafting the Amphibian Man to convey sexual attractiveness despite its inescapably inhuman embodiment, del Toro thus gives us overt permission, even an invitation to imagine succumbing to a monster’s sexual allure. This is a much bolder confrontation of nonnormative sexuality than horror fiction usually allows; as previous chapters have shown, horror often offers only covert glimpses into the transgressive, presenting tantalizing glimpses of nonnormative sexual possibility before safely slamming the door shut on all possibility of its consummation.

Even as the film recombines the elements of a horror tale into a romance, refusing either to force the monster into human guise in order to permit its sexual congress with a human or to destroy it rather than entertain the suggestion of its sexuality, it recognizes and even revels in the discomfort with which the audience may regard such congress. The film has a way of using the same detail both to remind us of the Amphibian Man’s inhumanity and to endear him to us: his large, flat, fishy eyes, for instance, which manage to convey wide-eyed wonder and even cuteness while their illegibility and nictitating membrane refuse all fallacious equivalence of him with a human being. Another example is the incongruously domestic scene in which Elisa brings the Amphibian Man his dinner at the table, the picture of a traditional 1962 housewife played alongside a piscine groom and a dinner of five hard-boiled eggs still in the shell; bulwarking the frame of normalcy imposed upon this strange portrait is a conventional shot/reverse shot pattern, which usually accompanies conversational dialogue, but here the Creature’s discernible American Sign Language (ASL) is limited to the word “egg” and Elisa’s conversation is largely

imagined and therefore directed more towards herself than the Amphibian Man (*The Shape of Water* 1:38:18-1:38:48). Viewing this unconventional couple in a highly conventional scene and through familiar filmic cues highlights the incongruity of the monster-lover even it signals to us the heartfelt connection between the two and the grief Elisa feels at their impending separation. The film thus manages to convey the profundity of the connection between Elisa and the Amphibian Man even as it refuses to use common humanity as shorthand for connection.

The fact that the film seems to revel in the discomfort it knows sexual intimacy between a woman and an animal will inspire, no matter how sentient that animal might seem, indicates to me that it is interested in instilling a much more flexible emotional skill than expanding viewers' personal sexual horizons. Instead, *The Shape of Water* seems bent on providing its more squeamish viewers, those unable to regard the Amphibian Man as an object of desire for themselves, with an opportunity to confront discomfort without resorting to instant rejection of the uncomfortable prospect. Once again, as I have argued in this dissertation, fiction provides a safely liminal space to confront feelings that feel unassimilable in real life, though here those feelings are treated with reverence and dignity rather than the furtively lustful gaze that horror casts upon perverse topics. For even as tender scenes between the film's lovers may strike viewers as alien and uncomfortable, they are undeniably lovely, and undeniably relatable. The way the Amphibian Man's scales bioluminesce and his gills flare at Elisa's touch are both emotionally and physically familiar to human viewers of even the slightest romantic or sexual bent, representing the thrill through the skin at a loved one's touch translated into beautiful blue sparks of light (*The Shape of Water* 01:22:35). The unhurried and hopeful music underlying their second, more extended sex scene, composed of a simple melody on the piano and clarinet underlaid with wistful strings, invites us into the bubble of the underwater bower Elisa creates

for them and into the feelings of tenderness and joy their embrace inspires (01:31:31-01:31:49). Since viewers have been trained by previous encounters with the genres of horror film and normative sexuality to regard animalistic sexual advances as upsetting or alienating, it is an uphill battle to represent the encounter in any other way, but del Toro manages to infuse the embrace with wholesomeness. This scene, however tenderly played, may not be able to entirely overwhelm even a sympathetic viewer's instinctual discomfort with such a coupling, but it does make it possible to *look* without having to *look away*, creating a gently inviting bubble for viewers to occupy within an uncomfortable narrative space.

Neogenics and the Social Model of Monstrosity

The skill to appreciate beings and reproductive choices that are not familiar to us/ours remains as critical—and in many ways, as elusive—in 2025 as it was in 2017 (when *The Shape of Water* was released), or 1945 (the end of WWII), or 1883 (when Galton coined the term eugenics). The open practice of coercive measures like sterilization and incarceration on eugenic grounds may have sunk into infrequency, or at least obscurity, but this is because such overt measures have been replaced by positive eugenic policies, more covert coercion, and the expectation of self-management; the underlying philosophy has changed but little. As sub-replacement fertility rates threaten the future economic stability of highly industrialized nations—particularly in Europe and Asia, though at the time of this writing the American government under President Donald Trump is considering implementing pronatalist measures as well—the earliest eugenic toolboxes have been raided for strategies to promote reproduction, such as the tax reductions and “baby bonuses” that Galton himself advocated, but which never got far off the ground when first theorized (Galton, *Essays* 108; “Trump Wants Americans to

Have More Babies”). Pronatalist policies differ from traditional eugenics in that they do not discriminate between the relative genetic quality of their beneficiaries as traditional eugenics would, instead aiming to promote population growth generally (though they do attempt to inflate native populations as a preferred alternative to bolstering population through immigration). They also assist working mothers to balance their careers with parenthood, something mainline eugenicists generally opposed as interfering with women’s reproductive “responsibilities” (Kramer 133).

Negative eugenic ideology also persists, however, and may even be more accepted than they were at the height of eugenic fervor in the 1920s and 30s, perhaps because they are simply no longer recognized as eugenic. This phenomenon has come about because eugenics has been mischaracterized in ways that make it difficult to recognize (a simplistic association with Nazism, the misguided popular belief that it disappeared after World War II), but also because its tenets have been so normalized as to become unidentifiable. We now live in an age in which science has produced the technologies that early eugenicists could only dream of having at their disposal for the management of human reproduction—and there is a compelling argument to be made that we have them at our disposal *because* eugenicists dreamed of them, since eugenic goals have driven policy and technological development in underrepresented ways (Duster xii). This includes driving the liberalization of abortion law, as Alison Bashford argues: “the imperative to terminate a pregnancy, in light of the new diagnostic capacity [provided by prenatal diagnosis technologies], drove abortion's legalization, as much as did women's arguments for reproductive choice” (Bashford 546). With reproductive technologies so widely available and eugenic ideals unwittingly internalized by a significant proportion of the population, the onus to enact eugenic imperatives has shifted from the government to

individuals, an outcome eugenicists desired all along. Francis Galton wrote in the introduction to his *Essays in Eugenics* that “the power by which Eugenic reform must chiefly be effected, is that of Popular Opinion” (Galton i). In a fore-echo of Michel Foucault’s insights about how individuals internalize systemic demands for compliance with normalcy and assume the roles of disciplinary authority over their own bodies (Foucault 201), Galton knew that eugenic goals would never be fully realized as long as the government or other institutions had to exert constant force and oversight over every reproductive choice. Galton has proved entirely right in his assertion that “the dictates of Public Opinion become so thoroughly assimilated that they seem to be original and individual to those who are guided by them” (Galton i-ii). We are living in an age in which eugenic evaluations about who deserves to be alive or reproduce is regarded as commonsense wisdom to the point that it has lost all association with eugenics—and is therefore not subject to either the scrutiny or the negative associations that eugenics carries with it.

This recasting of eugenic coercion in the guise of personal choice conceals the sociocultural conditioning and structural realities that both constrain conversations about that choice and manage its outcomes. Childbearing people and their partners avail themselves of modern reproductive counseling and technologies to identify possible pitfalls in their genetic compatibility before choosing to conceive; select sperm, egg, or embryo donors based on desired characteristics; perform amniocentesis and other tests to determine a fetus’ genetic prognosis prior to birth; and make decisions about termination of pregnancies based on the results of prenatal testing. The mass of these individual choices, especially selective abortion, can have marked effects on population trends. For example, the selective abortion of female embryos following a cultural preference for sons has led to skewed sex ratios in countries like China and

India; in Europe, only a scanty number of children with a prenatal diagnosis of Down syndrome are permitted to come to term (Eklund and Purewal; Zhang).⁴⁹ While these trends are not entirely in line with eugenic population goals (causing the loss of female children eugenicists would consider valuable and failing to skew population growth in favor of higher socioeconomic classes), the way that technologies like genetic counseling, prenatal testing, and selective abortion can prevent certain lives from coming into the world—not exclusively, but particularly, disabled ones—is as satisfactory a eugenic goal as Galton could wish.

A proper exploration of the complex socioeconomic and biopolitical factors contributing to the choice to abort fetuses with a prenatal diagnosis of disability would fill a whole shelf of books, so here I will only briefly acknowledge that ableism on the parts of prospective parents is only one of many factors motivating the disproportionate vulnerability of disabled fetuses to selective abortion. Others factors contributing to these decisions arise from the more pernicious systemic effects of ableism—the lack of resources to support parents raising disabled children (and the lack of connection to those resources when they do exist); inaccessibility of compassionate care for disabled children and adults who cannot be cared for at home due to parental aging or care needs beyond what can be provided by non-professional carers in a home setting; cultural misapprehensions of the disabilities in question or the life outcomes people with this disability can expect; and subtle or unsubtle pressure to choose abortion from physicians trained and immersed in medicalizing discourse that sees disability as a problem to be eliminated, not an experience that is substantially socially produced and only one quality of a

⁴⁹ Because of this, disability studies scholars can hold complicated views on abortion. They almost universally regard the right to make decisions about one's own body as sacred, especially since this power has so often been denied to disabled people through social and medical paternalism, and so they often support women's rights to do the same. At the same time, they perceive and often decry the discriminatory and eugenic logic motivating the disproportionate abortion of disabled fetuses, which suggests a pernicious consensus that disabled existences are unwelcome in the world (Asch 156).

person with many identities and realities. With the increase in prenatal diagnostic tools, giving birth to a disabled child becomes in itself a failure of parental responsibility, an active moral deficiency rather than an unavoidable act of providence. Parents who select abortion for their disabled fetuses are therefore rarely motivated by explicitly articulated ableism, but rather a sense that this is the compassionate choice, and in making it they are sparing the disabled child a life of suffering either due to the disability or the parents' own inability to provide for the child's wellbeing. Regardless, of motivation, however, the result is still a hostility to disabled existences that begins as early as that disability can be recognized, with the date of recognition advancing earlier and earlier as diagnostic tools mature.

Because of this social repugnance towards the prospect of perpetuating disabled existences, *The Shape of Water*—which features a disabled woman with a healthy adult sexuality in the role of the main character, an astronomical rarity in fiction—is subversive before the creature even arrives on the scene. Elisa's sexuality is introduced early, frequently, and in no uncertain terms, with her morning ritual of masturbation in the bathtub depicted twice in the film's first fifteen minutes. In both fiction and reality, the prospect of disabled sex is frequently rejected as somehow inappropriate—as a violation of the “innocence” of infantilized disabled people, as physically unachievable for disabled bodies, as distasteful, or as an irresponsible choice since it might result in the creation of disabled children. When permitted at all, disabled sexuality is often policed according to able-bodied terms, such as Strickland's fetishizing of Elisa's muteness. (“I don't mind those scars,” he says, in a shot that clearly displays the wedding band displaced to his right ring finger when the creature bit off the left. It is as if the power struggle between Strickland and the Amazonian god has unmoored him from such quotidian concerns as his marital vows. “I don't mind that you can't speak, either ... It kind of gets me

going” [*The Shape of Water* 58:24-58:39]). The novelization explicitly portrays Strickland’s interest in Elisa as motivated by an attraction to silence in women, which also appears in the way he silences his wife during sex by covering her mouth with his bleeding, necrotizing hand; Strickland is drawn to Elisa’s disability because he interprets it as proof of “appropriate” feminine powerlessness in her, and an increase of his masculine power in turn (del Toro and Kraus 165, 111).

In defiance of all normative expectations for disabled sexual behavior—that disabled people have no right to sex because of the prospect of undesirable offspring, or that she owes Strickland something for deigning to desire her despite her “inferiority,” and even the idea that monsters or animals present improper sexual objects—Elisa’s relations with the Amphibian Man take a confidently sexual/romantic turn quite early into their acquaintance. On Elisa’s first intentional visit to the Amphibian Man, she brings him a boiled egg as an offering (the metaphor to be read in her lunchtime ritual of feeding her eggs to the Amphibian Man is not an ambiguous one). It is an act of astonishing or even foolhardy bravery, considering that she was recently forced to collect two of Strickland’s disembodied fingers from the floor after the creature severed them, she perches the egg on her outstretched fingers to offer it to him (*The Shape of Water* 24:00-26:00). When the creature hesitates, she bites down on the egg herself, maintaining eye contact with an eyebrow arched coquettishly and a sultry smile. Though this visit ends unsatisfactorily, Elisa is not deterred; in her next visit, she is all self-satisfied grins, as if knowing exactly how to wrap the monster around her finger. When the creature snags an egg without emerging from the water, Elisa gently lifts the needle of the record player, and the camera pans from facing her to over her shoulder, setting us up for the perfect shot of the Amphibian Man rising to the surface to protest the silencing of the music (*The Shape of Water* 32:30-33:20). The

camera work contributes to the sense of Elisa's assurance about the creature's behavior. By moving to the spot where he will emerge before he does so, the camera shows that she perfectly anticipates his movement, just as she knows that music will entrance him, just as she knew that boiled eggs would tempt him close. She embodies the lazy self-assurance of a seduction as she draws the creature closer to her, knowing that there is no other end besides for his succumbing to her charms.

Elisa might not have known from the beginning that her relationship with the Amphibian Man would culminate in romance and sex, but once the possibility emerges, the film's characters seem surprisingly willing to embrace it, as though he were a mere human man and the possibility of sexual intercourse between them only titillating, not taboo. When Elisa experiences her first unambiguously erotic reaction towards the creature, she overcomes any qualms almost immediately, lasting hours at most before falling into the Amphibian Man's scaly embrace (*The Shape of Water* 1:22:53-1:24:08). Two scenes later, Zelda is quick to correctly interpret Elisa's irrepressible smile as the afterglow of her encounter with the Amphibian Man, and skips straight from wondering *why* to wondering *how*, as though the question of *why* Elisa would choose to have sex with a beast is not a terribly pressing or confusing one (perhaps Zelda shares her actress' appreciation for the Amphibian Man's "grab-able" rear!) (1:25:01-1:25:29). The need to ask who Elisa's partner might have been—the possibility that her partner may have been a *person* rather than the fugitive humanoid beast living in her bathtub—never seems to occur to Zelda at all.

There is a problematic dimension to this easy assumption of sexual compatibility between Elisa and the Amphibian Man that I would be remiss not to mention. Upon the film's release, several disability-invested bloggers and thinkers professed mixed emotions towards its portrayal

of Elisa's sexuality, praising it for representing a woman with both a disability and a healthy libido but expressing pain at the fact that the partner in her sexuality was a monster, as though it strained imagination to envision a disabled woman involved in a romance with a fellow human (Sjunnesson; Crippledscholar). "The first time in years that I have seen a disabled woman sexually desired, and indeed, sexually active, and loved in a film is by a monster," laments Elsa Sjunnesson in her review for *The Reactor*. Sjunnesson reads the film's ending, when Elisa is killed and "resurrected under the water, to join the only man who has ever desired her" as reinforcing the assumption that she "deserves a freak like her, and not a human like her"—that despite the film's sympathetic portrayal of Elisa, human status has never actually displaced the "freak" status as the primary one with which viewers regard her (Sjunnesson). The film's portrayal of disability is further problematized by moments when Elisa expresses internalized ableism that is not checked either explicitly by characters or implicitly by filmic choices, implying that characters and filmmakers may share those ableist beliefs. In one instance, Elisa's love confession for the Amphibian Man takes the form of an elaborate black-and-white song and dance number (*The Shape of Water* 01:39:15-01:41:00), which seems an impotent and even slightly bizarre fantasy for a woman mute since infancy to engage in. Worse is Elisa's claim to love and need the Amphibian Man because, as she signs to Giles, "when he looks at me, the way he looks at me... He does not know what I lack or how I am incomplete" (46:34-46:52). In protest against Giles characterizing the Amphibian Man as a "thing," she even aligns herself with his animality, questioning whether her muteness might also disqualify her from human status. "I move my mouth, like him. I make no sound, like him. What does that make me?" she silently and emphatically demands (46:00-46:12).

Some of these objections strike me as more damning than others, and I have no wish to diminish the painful experience of watching bodies like your own be disqualified from normative sexuality yet again. However, I do believe that recognizing Elisa as not-quite-human herself complicates a reading of her relationship with the Amphibian Man as reinforcing the harmful misconception that disabled people are fit for sexual congress only with other “subhumans” like themselves. There is copious proof that the way the scars on Elisa’s neck—which Strickland and perhaps others around Elisa assume to be the cause of her muteness—flutter open into gills under the Amphibian Man’s magical touch is a restoration of her natural embodiment rather than its reconstitution into gill-breathing form (*The Shape of Water* 28:00-28:10, 01:56:40-01:57:30).⁵⁰ Reading Elisa as hybrid-amphibious complicates attempts to locate the origin of her disabled status either in the somatic or the social. Elisa is treated as disabled in human society due to her muteness, but the Amphibian Man can vocalize but not speak. This implies that muteness it is not a deviation from the “norm” for Elisa’s hybrid embodiment, and she might be perfectly able-bodied for a member of their species. This insight reinforces the repeated mantra of disability culture activists and scholars that disability is as much in the eye of society as it is in the body—because Elisa is human-passing and living among humans, her body’s ability is judged according to human “norms,” and a feature perfectly appropriate to her embodiment is regarded as an abnormality. This offers an alternative reading to that of the disabled critics I cited above, who found the film so disappointing because, by their readings, its ending enforced the idea that disabled people are unworthy of the love of their fellow human beings. Rather, my reading of

⁵⁰ Amongst this proof is the Amphibian Man’s bioluminescence (already established as his physiological reaction to using his healing abilities); the unlikelihood that the slashes could be injuries that rendered the infant Elisa mute, somehow penetrating to her larynx without killing her; and the Amphibian Man’s explicit description of the exchange as a healing one in the novelization: “the pain and struggle must happen if she is to heal ... and it is a good sight a happy sight the lines on her neck the lines she thought were scars but are not scars it is a good sight to see those lines split open for the gills to spread wide it is a happy sight and now she knows who she is who she has always been she is us” (del Toro and Kraus 314).

Elisa's hybridity suggests that she can be labeled as disabled *only* if she is simultaneously understood to be human; if we recognize her as a hybrid, her ability status becomes illegible, embedded in physical and cultural/behavioral norms of a species we know next to nothing about. Neither reading excludes the other, and both contribute valuable commentary on the film, especially if I am correct in asserting that del Toro's intent seems to be less to impart a particular moral than to inspire complex emotions towards a taboo topic, from which the self-reflective viewer may derive a moral personalized to their own reaction.

Reading Elisa as a hybrid is also related to the "feeling" of genre I alluded to early in this conclusion, rendering her disability status not only context-bound but bound up in the process of genre-making. The revelation of her hybridity not only destabilizes her ability status; it also complicates the site of transgressive sexual behavior in the film, simultaneously rendering near-natural the romantic and sexual liaison between Elisa and the Creature and confirming beyond doubt the procreative possibilities between humans and this monstrous species. The inciting act of transgression is therefore deferred from the film's events to more deeply-buried realities—Elisa's human- and disabled-passing body become the proof of a prior interspecies romance, and her experience of abandonment raise unresolvable questions about why it might have taken place. Did ecological disaster—deforestation, water pollution, or scientific exploitation like that the Amphibian Man undergoes—separate her from her parents? Or did her hybrid existence inspire rejection or violence in her parents or her natal community? Perhaps Elisa even resulted from a less loving union than her own with the Amphibian Man, and one of her parents (perhaps the monster, perhaps the human) bears a greater resemblance to the rapists of Machen's fairy stories than a romantic lead. However, these questions almost necessarily only occur to the reader after the film has ended, since her gills are only revealed in the film's final moments, a

delay that facilitates del Toro's goal of helping viewers confront their queasy reactions to the prospect of a monstrous-human pairing. By unveiling Elisa's embodiment as monstrous but never allowing us to understand, experience, *feel* that monstrosity the way we have *felt* her as human, he performs a bait-and-switch that makes it nearly impossible for viewers to avoid feeling a sense of identification with Elisa despite her monstrous hybridity. More, this complicates any repulsion readers may have felt towards the film's interspecies love story. If the viewer has felt discomfort at witnessing an interspecies romance, this reaction is revealed to have been misplaced—the romance was simultaneously *intraspecies* the entire time, and more monstrous than is readily apparent, since the Amphibian Man is not the only monster involved. By this method, del Toro provides an array of opportunities for the most skeptical viewers to recognize and engage with their own reaction to an outré love story: when our focalizing character is revealed to be even more Other than anticipated, when the gut reaction against interspecies love occurs, and when that reaction is revealed to have been unwarranted. Such destabilizations reject the binary thinking so characteristic of the metagenre of disability, revealing this response, though habitual, as nonreflective of reality.

The final affective impression the film leaves us with is a tender, poignant, understated farewell. Giles' affectingly narrates an unattributable poem (Armenti); a halo of soft teal light surrounds the lovers as they embrace, somehow brighter below the water's surface than above; their gentle and synchronous movements maintain them afloat; and the unexpected lilt of high notes create a sensation of hope as the final song draws to a close (*The Shape of Water* 01:58:00-1:58:25). If feeling is a form of reading, the film's conclusion undeniably invites us to celebrate Elisa's restoration to an aquatic world and her unfamiliar heritage. Identifying with the parts of her heritage that would be rejected by normative human society is therefore portrayed as offering

greater freedom and fulfillment—as a happier ending—than the exhausting, unending, and always-already-failed attempt to conform to a socially affirmed portrait of normalcy.

Fertility Discourse

As we conclude with a story that bears so much resemblance and so much divergence from those we have yet explored, it is worth reflecting on what causes stories to change as they are retold. The field of adaptation theory often leans upon biological and genealogical metaphor to understand the ways that stories draw from and innovate upon their forebears, and Brian Boyd suggests that taking literally this biological metaphor offers freedom from “fidelity discourse,” a preoccupation with faithfulness to source material that Thomas Leitch calls an “undead spirit” in the discursive history of adaptation theory. An *adaptive* adaptation theory—one that imagines the process of retelling stories in terms borrowing from Darwin—invites us to range in the “lusher landscape of what we could call ‘fertility discourse’” (Leitch, “Introduction” 7; Boyd 587). Boyd’s idea of fertility discourse, rather than evaluating texts on the metric of sameness, revels in diversity, in the way stories evolve into exciting and unpredictable new forms in the course of proliferation. Like organisms evolve through the environmental pressures of competition for limited resources and reproductive opportunities, Boyd contends, stories must change in response to 1) problems that arise through the conversion of medium, through cultural shifts, etc.; 2) the relative cost and benefits of possible artistic choices; and 3) art’s “reproductive” necessity: its ability to engage attention from audiences and therefore to influence future art (590). Just as an animal transplanted to a new environment cannot survive if it behaves only in ways conforming to its vanished ecological niche, stories transplanted from their original times and mediums must identify and adapt to new niches.

I won't strain the biological metaphor too far by referring to *The Shape of Water* as an invasive species, carving out a niche for itself both aggressively and with admirable success—though there is something to be said for the runaway critical and popular success of such a potentially off-putting film, created on a relatively low budget for a director of del Toro's stature (\$19.5 million). The film's similarities to pieces like the student-produced short film "The Space Between Us" (2015) and the teleplay *Let Me Hear You Whisper* (1969)—two of a number of discredited plagiarism allegations the film weathered—demonstrate that del Toro is far from the only artist dreaming of connection in more expansive terms. Stories with less superficial resemblance to *The Shape of Water* are also holding space for the tension between monstrous repulsion and attraction, and thereby pushing back against eugenic reproductive policing; 2024's filmic adaptation of *Nosferatu* (1922), itself an adaptation of *Dracula* (1897) and a mark of our society's continued voracity for Victoriana, takes seriously the idea that sex with an undeniably monstrous monster might be treated with tenderness or even appeal, or that horror and sensuality can coexist in a single embrace without each struggling to overmaster the other.

As Guillermo del Toro said succinctly in an interview with *Little White Lies*, "There's a difference between saying the monster got the girl and the girl got the monster. That's what happens in this one" (Jenkins). It matters whom we consider as the "lucky one" in the relationship, whether we tolerate or celebrate embodiments that are unlike our own. Whether these artistic trends distill something already shifting in the culture or are pushing the culture towards greater compassion and openness, hopefully the ways we are learning to love monsters *as monsters*, not just as humans awaiting a spell to release them from their monstrous guise, means that we might be learning to celebrate diversity in profound ways, even when it is challenging. *The Shape of Water*'s gleeful spurning of its eugenic heritage is, I hope, not a

random mutation, but a sign that we may be writing a new genre, or even a new metagenre of disability. We are learning to celebrate humanity not as eugenicists did, for its perfectibility, worshipping a future-shadow of what we might become, but instead by learning to embrace those differences that have so often been marginalized and monsterized in rhetoric and fiction.

Disability itself, I believe, helps pave the way for this paradigm shift, modeling the feasibility of a category of mutual identification based on radically expansive *inclusion* rather than *exclusion*. Disability is a remarkably capacious category, based less on similarity amongst its members than their difference and experience of exclusion from mainstream society due to their embodiment or enmindment. As Sara Hendren beautifully articulates it, “Disability gathers a dimensional *we* like nothing else, because disability is no more and no less than human needfulness, both personal and political” (Hendren 35). The category of disability is simultaneously gossamer-thin and steel-strong, tenuous and generous. It is eager to embrace, quick to forge connections at the barest flash of a mirrored image—in bodies and minds, yes, but also in experiences as simple as that special disabled brand of fatigue or rage or inspiration or intimacy. In light of the expansive identification that disability permits, the potentially problematic scene in which Elisa identifies her own muteness with the Creature’s animality to recruit Giles’ help in rescuing him may be read more hopefully. When we are poised for connection and celebration, as disability invites us to be, we can ask with Elisa, alert to every point of identification—if this monster is unworthy of saving because he is silent as I am, “What does that make me?” (*The Shape of Water* 46:00-46:15). In Elisa’s hands, these words are not a cry of internalized despair over her muteness. Instead, they become a call to action, to identification, to love that overleaps difference: even if this creature is no human, “if we do nothing [to save him], neither are we” (48:10-48:17). “Humanity,” in the words formed by

Elisa's hands, is not what eugenicists would have us believe it to be. It is not an unreachable icon to strive for or a precious relic to be preserved. It is instead the instinct for compassion for our fellow creatures; the bravery to expand our vision of who is worthy of kindness and love; the creativity to take old scripts and create new stories; the security to exchange horror for hope.

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