



Emilia under the direction of C. Cooke, Dec: 27. 1794.
Isabella's escape from the Castle. Vide Page 22.

OF THE
LORDS OF THE
MIDDLE

1.





Mysteries of Udolpho.



George Cruikshank

"You do not think he is ill?" said I.

No. He looked robust in body.

"That he cannot be at peace in mind, we have too much reason to know," I proceeded. "Mr. Woodcourt, you are going to London?"

"To-morrow or the next day."

"There is nothing Richard wants so much, as a friend. He always liked you. Pray see him when you get there. Pray help him sometimes with your companionship, if you can. You do not know of what service it might be. You cannot think how Ada, and Mr. Jarndyce, and even I—how we should all thank you, Mr. Woodcourt!"

"Miss Summerson," he said, more moved than he had been from the first, "before Heaven, I will be a true friend to him! I will accept him as a trust, and it shall be a sacred one!"

"God bless you!" said I, with my eyes filling fast; but I thought they might, when it was not for myself. "Ada loves him—we all love him, but Ada loves him as we cannot. I will tell her what you say. Thank you, and God bless you, in her name!"

Richard came back as we finished exchanging these hurried words, and gave me his arm to take me to the coach.

"Woodcourt," he said, unconscious with what application, "pray let us meet in London!"

"Meet?" returned the other. "I have scarcely a friend there, now, but you. Where shall I find you?"

"Why, I must get a lodging of some sort," said Richard, pondering. "Say at Vholes's, Symond's Inn."

"Good! Without loss of time."

They shook hands heartily. When I was seated in the coach, and Richard was yet standing in the street, Mr. Woodcourt laid his friendly hand on Richard's shoulder, and looked at me. I understood him, and waved mine in thanks.

And in his last look as we drove away, I saw that he was very sorry for me. I was glad to see it. I felt for my old self as the dead may feel if they ever revisit these scenes. I was glad to be tenderly remembered, to be gently pitied, not to be quite forgotten.

CHAPTER XLVI.

STOP HIM!

DARKNESS rests upon Tom-all-Alone's. Dilating and dilating since the sun went down last night, it has gradually swollen until it fills every void in the place. For a time there were some dungeon lights burning, as the lamp of Life burns in Tom-all-Alone's, heavily, heavily, in the nauseous air, and winking—as that lamp, too, winks in Tom-all-Alone's—at many horrible things. But they are blotted out. The moon has eyed Tom with a dull cold stare, as admitting some puny emulation of herself in his desert region unfit for life and blasted by volcanic fires; but she has passed on, and is gone. The blackest nightmare in the infernal stables grazes on Tom-all-Alone's, and Tom is fast asleep.

4.

144 THE PICTURE OF DORIAN GRAY

somewhat over-emphasised, account of the sorrow and despair of one who had himself lost what in others, and in the world, he had most dearly valued.

For the wonderful beauty that had so fascinated Basil Hallward, and many others besides him, seemed never to leave him. Even those who had heard the most evil things against him, and from time to time strange rumours about his mode of life crept through London and became the chatter of the clubs, could not believe anything to his dishonour when they saw him. He had always the look of one who had kept himself unspotted from the world. Men who talked grossly became silent when Dorian Gray entered the room. There was something in the purity of his face that rebuked them. His mere presence seemed to recall to them the memory of the innocence that they had tarnished. They wondered how one so charming and graceful as he was could have escaped the stain of an age that was at once sordid and sensual.

Often, on returning home from one of those mysterious and prolonged absences that gave rise to such strange conjecture among those who were his friends, or thought that they were so, he himself would creep upstairs to the locked room, open the door with the key that never left him now, and stand, with a mirror, in front of the portrait that Basil Hallward had painted of him, looking

now at the evil and ageing face on the canvas, and now at the fair young face that laughed back at him from the polished glass. The very sharpness of the contrast used to quicken his sense of pleasure. He grew more and more enamoured of his own beauty, more and more interested in the corruption of his own soul. He would examine with minute care, and sometimes with a monstrous and terrible delight, the hideous lines that seared the wrinkling forehead, or crawled around the heavy sensual mouth, wondering sometimes which were the more horrible, the signs of sin or the signs of age. He

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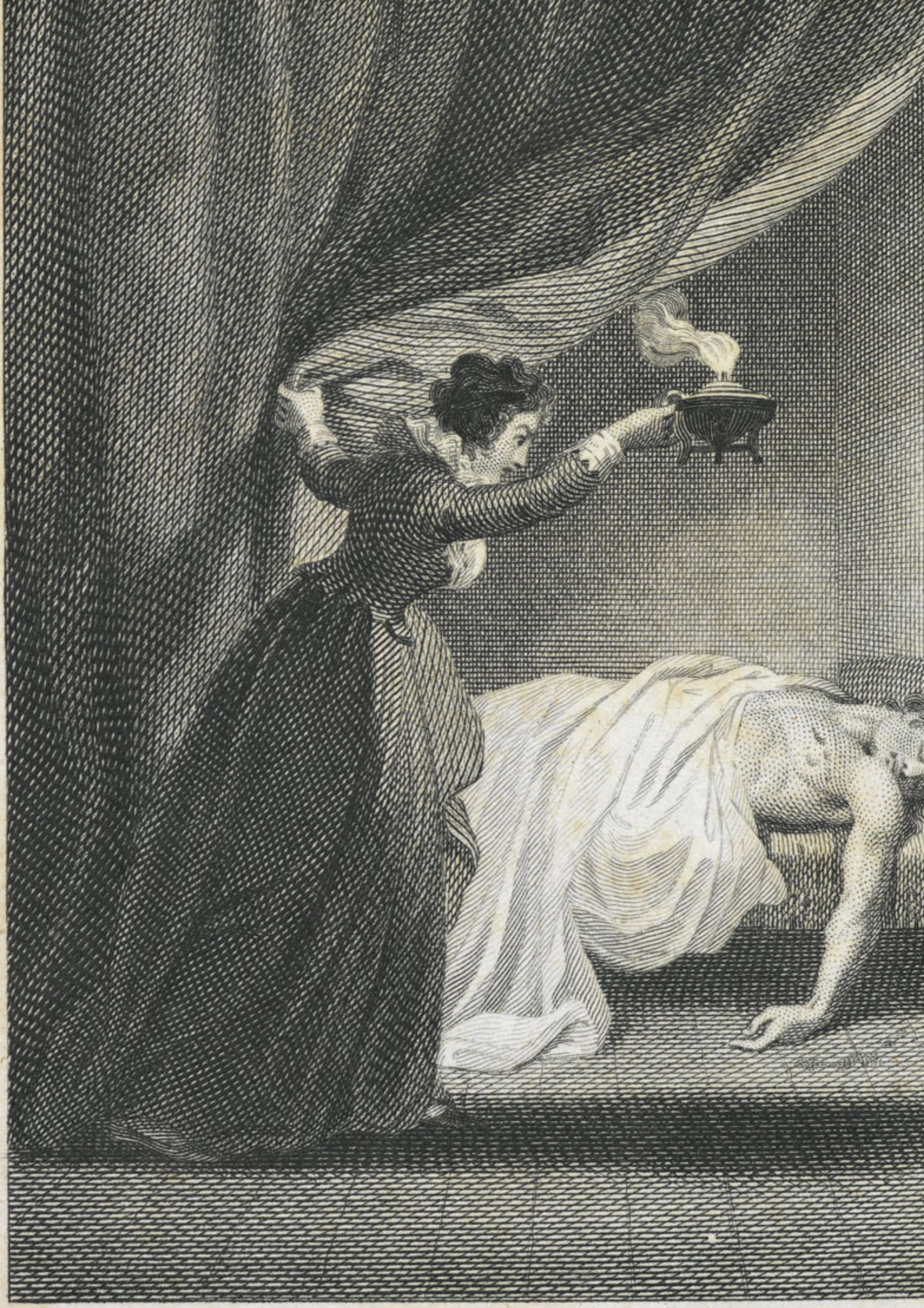
Pinellina under the direction of C. Cooke. Dec: 27. 1704.
Isabella's escape from the Castle. Vide Page 22.

C. Warren, sc. 48.

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Mysteries of Udolpho.

Vol. 3. 6



George Cruikshank

THE MEETING

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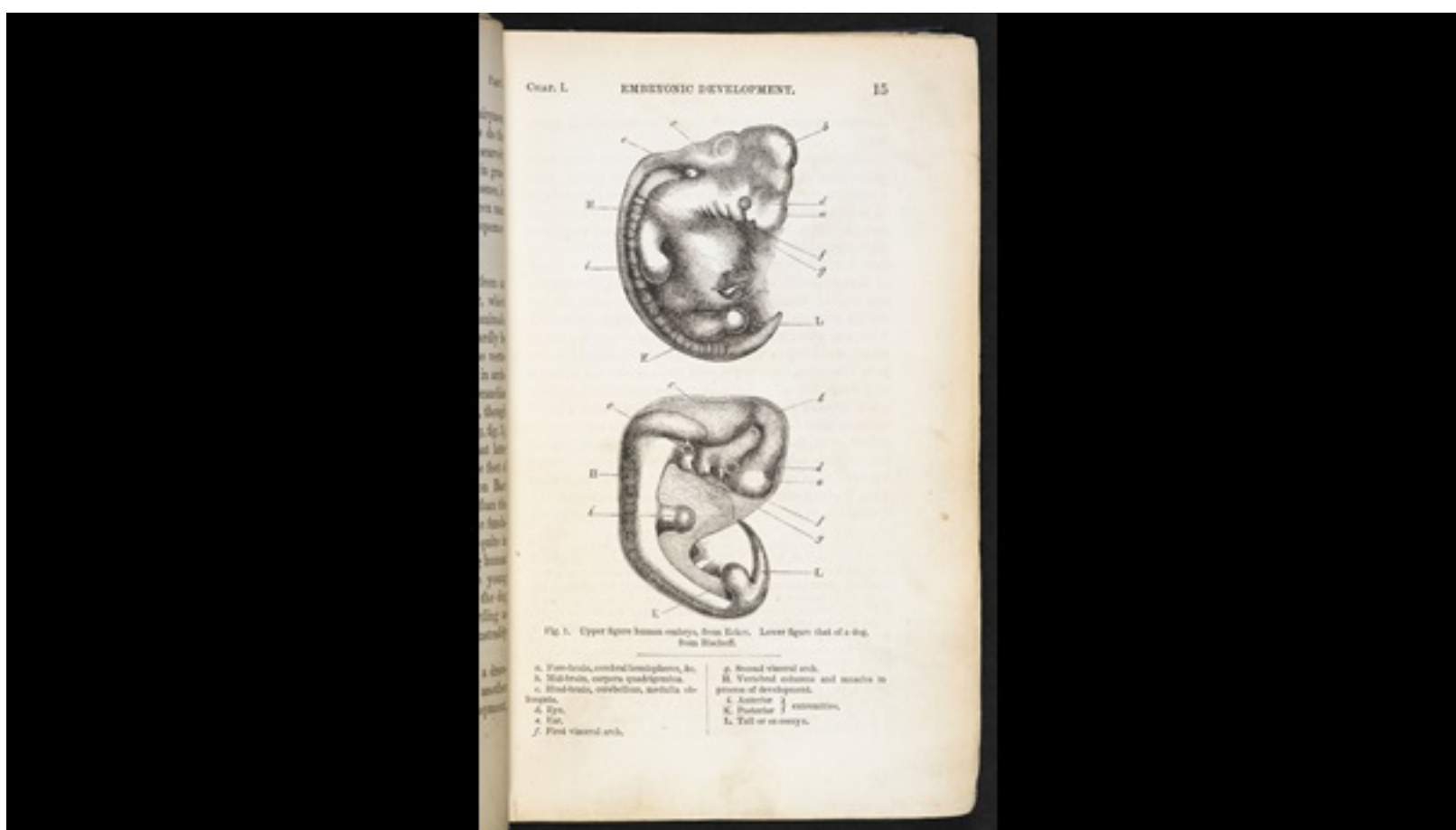
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Post-Darwinian nightmares

Late-Victorian society was haunted by the implications of Darwinism. The ideas outlined in Charles Darwin's *On the Origin of Species* [romantics-and-victorians/articles/darwin-and-the-theory-of-evolution] (1859) and *The Descent of Man* [collection-items/the-descent-of-man-by-darwin] (1871) had by the 1880s and 1890s been assimilated, initially by the scientific community and then by much of the general public. For many, the balance between 'faith' and 'doubt' had tipped disturbingly in favour of the latter, and questions about the origins, nature and destiny of humankind had become matters for science, rather than theology to address. The final chapter of *The Descent of Man* contains a passage in which Darwin concludes that humans are 'descended from a hairy, tailed quadruped' which, via several intermediary stages, had itself evolved 'from some amphibian-like creature, and this again from some fish-like animal'. Such a nightmarish lineage in which human evolution was portrayed as a disturbing variation on the theme of Frankenstein's monster, with humanity being assembled from assorted disparate earlier versions, perhaps lies behind the descriptions of Mr Hyde as 'ape-like' and 'troglydotic' in Stevenson's *Jekyll and Hyde*; the implication is that the brutal and uncivilised Hyde is somehow a reversion to a more primitive stage of human development; a ghastly evolutionary precursor who stands in a direct genetic line behind the eminently respectable Dr Jekyll.

The Descent of Man by Darwin



Charles Darwin's *The Descent of Man*, published in 1871, is the first of Darwin's published works to contain the word 'evolution'. The first part of the book applies the theory of evolution to the human species, and the second looks at the role of sexual selection within the process of evolution.

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Illustrations to *Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*, 1930



Illustration depicting the physical transformation of Jekyll (top figure) into Hyde, 1930.

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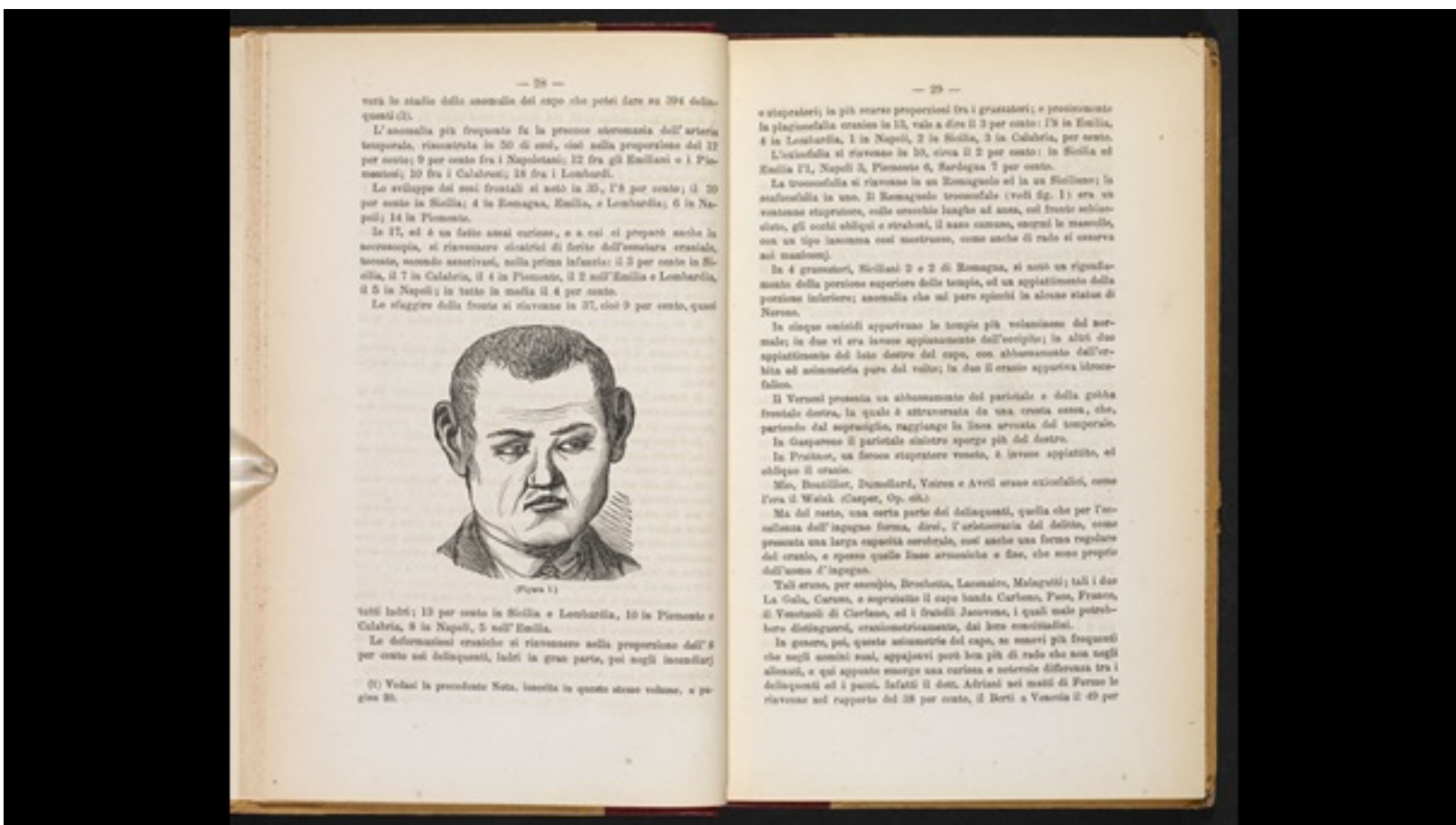
Evolution also raised doubts in another sense. Initially it appeared logical that evolution would always lead to physical and mental improvement with weaker and less-useful characteristics being eradicated over time; however, it was soon recognised that this was not necessarily the case. Evolution is a mechanistic process with no guiding hand or ultimate goal and therefore, it was argued, in certain circumstances degeneration into less-complex forms was just as likely as progress into more complex ones.

H G Wells, who had studied under the biologist T H Huxley, examined in his essay 'Zoological Regression' (1891) the curious case of ascidians (commonly known as 'sea squirts'), organisms that initially have 'a well-developed tail' enabling rapid progress through the water but which subsequently regress into creatures capable of nothing more strenuous than attaching themselves permanently to a rock; becoming in effect 'merely a vegetative excrescence' on a stone. In *The Time Machine*, set far in the future, Wells imaginatively applies a similar level of evolutionary decline onto humans. The Time Traveller (he is never named) discovers that in the year 802,701 AD the human race is comprised of the Eloi – the leisured classes grown elfin and effete through idleness and completely unable to look after themselves, and the Morlocks – the decayed working classes, living underground; brutal, predatory and afraid of the light.

Criminology

The influential Italian criminologist Cesare Lombroso (1835–1909) had argued that the 'born criminal' could be recognised by certain physical characteristics – unusually sized ears, for example, or asymmetrical facial features; particularly long arms or a sloping forehead. Notions that cruelty and criminal intent manifested themselves visibly in the features of an individual lay behind Wilde's novel *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. No matter how vile Dorian's behaviour – his callous pursuit and subsequent rejection of the actress Sybil Vane, for example, or his furtive visits to the Limehouse opium dens – he remains ever youthful and beautiful, while the picture of him locked away in an attic bears every visible scar, line and stain of his corrupt behaviour.

L'Uomo Delinquente



Cesare Lombroso's *L'Uomo Delinquente* (1876) proposes that criminal behaviour was a throwback to earlier evolutionary states of humanity, and could be detected in advance through study of the shape of the individual's skull.

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Similarly, Mr Hyde's 'troglodytic' appearance in *Jekyll and Hyde* marks him out as a criminal and as someone who is unacceptable in polite society. The fact that Dr Jekyll, who is highly respected, and Mr Hyde who is a social outcast happen to be one and the same person, allows Stevenson to simultaneously accept Lombroso's theory (in the depiction of Hyde) and refute it (in the appearance of Jekyll). This implication that the criminal could lurk behind an acceptable public persona, and that appearances might provide no real indication of the personality within, rendered *Jekyll and Hyde* a particularly disturbing work during the late 1880s as Jack the Ripper carried out his attacks in Whitechapel.

Fantasy

Gothic imagery, given its fantastical nature, allowed authors to explore in an indirect fashion themes that were not necessarily acceptable subjects for discussion in respectable society. Count Dracula, for example, is feared for his ability to move unnoticed through the crowds of London, potentially afflicting all in his path with the stain of vampirism. On another level, however, this can be read as a fear of foreign immigrants moving unnoticed through London, spreading crime and disease as they go. Indeed vampirism itself is often read in *Dracula* as an analogy for syphilis – a subject that was not fit for discussion in a novel published in England at the time. Similarly Mr Hyde, whose very appearance incites 'disgust, loathing and fear' in the staid lawyer Mr Utterson, is sometimes regarded as a physical manifestation of the Victorian fear of homosexuality: Utterson's loathing for Hyde then becomes shorthand for Victorian society's simultaneous fear of, and fascination with homosexuality. Helen Vaughan, the murderous result of a barbaric scientific experiment in Arthur Machen's short story 'The Great God Pan' wavers 'from sex to sex' in nightmarish fashion, mutating rapidly from male to female and back again. This particularly dark and disturbing idea can be read as an attack on the New Woman – the label for the confident and independent females who emerged into society during the final years of Queen Victoria's reign. The New Woman was regarded with admiration by some, but seen as rather mannish, sexually-threatening and unnatural by others.

Promotion for the film adaptation of *Dracula* starring Helen Chandler and Bela Lugosi



Promotional still from the 1931 film version of *Dracula*; the scene shows Dracula at the point of attacking Lucy. The two women in *Dracula* (1897), Lucy Westenra and Mina Murray, embody two different views of womanhood, and meet very different fates.

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Gothic fiction has always possessed the ability to adapt to its environment. It mutates to reflect the times in which it lives, and the Victorian *fin de siècle*, with its aesthetes and dandies and New Women; its fears as the implications of Darwinism worked themselves through; its theories on the criminal classes and the consequences of old, decayed Europe haunting new Britain in the form of immigration; all these allowed Gothic fiction to reach new heights of imagination and terror.

- Written by [Greg Buzwell](#) [[/romantics-and-victorians/articles?authors_sorted=Greg%2ABuzwell](#)] • [Desktop](#)
- Greg Buzwell is Curator of Contemporary Literary Archives at the British Library. He has co-curated three major exhibitions for the Library – *Terror and Wonder: The Gothic Imagination*; *Shakespeare in Ten Acts* and *Gay UK: Love, Law and Liberty*. His research focuses primarily on the Gothic literature of the Victorian fin de siècle. He has also edited and introduced collections of supernatural tales by authors including Mary Elizabeth Braddon, Edgar Allan Poe and Walter de la Mare.

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