Asexuality in Victorian England:

The Celibate Eccentric Genius Trope in *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde, Frankenstein,* and Sherlock Holmes

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Abstract

This thesis looks at the trope of the Chaste Eccentric Genius trope in Victorian literature to expose the potential-asexuality in Robert Louis Stevenson's *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*, Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, and Arthur Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes stories. These asexual readings will challenge the hetero-/homosexual binary and eronormativity by evaluating the (lack of) relationships and sex in these three narratives. The readings showed that there are possibilities for queer readings that go beyond hetero- and homosexual and that not every queer reading has to be eronormative to be non-normative. Additionally, the readings will draw connections between asexuality and Fin-de-Siècle beliefs of degeneration. All three stories can be seen as warnings against degeneration and devolution. They also show that not every form of degeneration is related to sex. This thesis hopes to contribute to the upcoming field of asexuality studies. This will hopefully expose a new audience to asexuality and provide some insights into the community's history and experience.

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Introduction

Asexuality studies are quite novel. According to Mollet and Lackman, 'the earliest academic articulation of asexuality came from' the biologist and sexologist Alfred 'Kinsey … who incorporated asexuality as '"Group X" into the spectrum of sexuality' in 1953.[1] Group X represented people that did not identify with any of the other options such as heterosexual, homosexual, or bisexual.[2] In simple terms, asexuals are not sexually attracted to anyone. Since asexuality's debut, research and debate around asexuality have increased in quantity. An example would be the founding of the Asexuality Visibility and Education Network (AVEN) in 2001.[3] These recent studies of asexuality come from all sorts of academic backgrounds, such as sociology, psychology, and feminist studies. Take for example Bogaert's book *Understanding Asexuality* (2012),[4] Hinderliter's comparison of asexuality and Hypoactive Sexual Desire Disorder,[5] or Cerankowski and Milk's paper on adapting asexuality into women's studies.[6] The multi-faceted approach to asexuality was much needed because until 2004 'the term asexual was used almost exclusively in biology' to describe the asexual

1. Amanda L. Mollet and Brian R. Lackman, "Asexual Borderlands: Asexual Collegians' Reflections on Inclusion Under the LGBTQ Umbrella," *Journal of College Student Development* 59, no. 5 (2018): 624.

2. Mollet and Lackman, 624.

3. "About AVEN," The Asexual Visibility and Education Network, accessed August 13, 2021.

4. Anthony Bogaert, *Understanding Asexuality* (Plymouth, Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2012), 1-183.

5. Andrew Hinderliter, "How Is Asexuality Different from Hypoactive Sexual Desire Disorder?" *Psychology and Sexuality* 4, no. 2 (2013): 167–178.

6. Karli June Cerankowski and Megan Milks, "New Orientations: Asexuality and Its Implications for Theory and Practice." *Feminist Studies* 36, no. 3 (2010): 650–64.

reproduction of plants, bacteria, and so forth.[7] Now, there is finally more interest in asexuality as a human construct. Although it remains a slow-going process, asexuality studies is steadily becoming more and more established in all areas of academia.

One area in which asexuality studies could do with some more interest is in literary studies. This thesis is not the first in its exploration of potential-asexuality in English literature. Some excellent studies have been done by Megan Arkenberg and Simone Chess who looked at medieval and Early modern asexual representation respectively.[8] [9] This thesis is not even the first attempt at analysing asexuality in fin-de-siecle literature; the most prominent other example being Elizabeth Hanson's PhD dissertation, in which she looks at the narratological consequences of asexuality in *Lady Audley's Secret* and *The Picture of Dorian Grey*.[10] However, heteronormativity and homosexual readings have had such a strong influence over the years that, in my opinion, asexuality studies is still underrepresented. Any step towards closing this gap in representation, visibility, and research of heterosexuality, homosexuality, and all other less discussed sexualities such as asexuality will be a step in the right direction towards inclusivity and equality in literary research.

Beyond the goal of increasing equality and inclusivity, the concept of asexuality in Victorian times is also inherently intriguing. Around the turn of the 19th century, people started to

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7. Adrienne Colborne, "Chasing Aces: Asexuality, Misinformation and the Challenges of Identity." *Dalhousie Journal of Interdisciplinary Management* 14, (2018): 2.

8. Megan Arkenberg, "'A Made, and Last of Youre Blood': Galahad's Asexuality and Its Significance in Le Morte Darthur." *Arthuriana* 24, no. 3 (2014): 3–22.

9. Simone Chess, "Asexuality, Queer Chastity, and Adolescence in Early Modern Literature." Story. In *Queering Childhood in Early Modern English Drama and Culture*, ed. Jennifer Higginbotham and Mark Albert Johnston, 31–55. Springer, 2018.

10. Elizabeth Hanna Hanson, "Making Something Out of Nothing: Asexuality and Narrative," PhD diss., Loyola University, Chicago, 2013, https://ecommons.luc.edu/luc_diss/520.

assign labels to sexual expressions such as homosexuality for the first time.[11] The Victorians were overall more engaged in discussion around sexuality than many might think.[12] Far gone is the belief that Victorians were prudish about these matters. It is not unlikely that they had at least some knowledge of the concept of asexuality, although they did not yet have the words to assign to it. Some Victorians have even been speculated to have been asexual, such as Sir James Matthew Barrie, the writer of the Peter Pan stories. His nephew says: 'I don't believe that Uncle Jim ever experienced what one might call a stirring in the undergrowth for anyone'.[13] It is also not unlikely that writers at the time would incorporate the concept of asexuality in their stories. A possible example would be Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, a friend of Sir James Barrie and author of the Sherlock Holmes saga.

The goal of this thesis is to explore the latent asexuality that can be found in stories such as Arthur Conan Doyle's. I will broaden my scope to the trope character of the Chaste Eccentric Genius to include characters such as Dr Jekyll and Dr Frankenstein. Exposing the potential-asexuality of these figures will give insight into the historical and societal beliefs of Victorians surrounding chastity and asexuality. The anachronistic identification of pre-Kinsey potential asexuals can also 'satisfy the needs and desires of communities in the present'[14] by '[extending] the resources for self- and community building even into the . . . past'.[15]

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11. Holly Furneaux, "Victorian Sexualities." *Literature Compass* 8, no. 10 (2011): 769.

12. Furneaux, 767.

13. Terri Windling, "On J.M Barrie and Peter Pan. "Myth & Moor, June 19, 2020. https://www.terriwindling.com/mythic-arts/peter-pan.html

14. Arkenberg, "A Mayde," 4.

15. Carolyn Dinshaw, *Getting Medieval: Sexualities and Communities, Pre- and Postmodern* (Durham: Duke Univerity Press, 1999), quoted in Arkenberg, "A Mayde," 4.

Methodology

This thesis will look at these three genius characters in Victorian fiction and it will examine their potential-asexuality according to guidelines inspired by other methods of queer reading, as well as asexual readings done by academics such as Megan Arkenberg. Her analysis will serve as a basis for this thesis and consists of three parts.

Firstly, the analysis will question heteronormativity: Berlant and Warner note that 'queer work wants to address the full range of power-ridden normativities of sex'.[16] Arkenberg adds 'entrenched norms surrounding reproduction' to these normativities.[17] Questioning heteronormativity means reading critically to find the underlying potential of non-normative sexuality. Questioning heteronormativity would, for example, mean not assuming every instance of degeneration is caused by suppressed homosexuality. In addition, this reading will also question eronormativity, which is the 'too easy assumption that everyone is attracted to someone'.[18] An example of this would be to not assume every married couple is sexually active.

Secondly, the analysis will explore the textual representation of sex and relationships in the rest of the text and place the text in its historical context: find out what exactly makes the actions of the potential-asexual character non-normative in both the textual and historical context. This means comparing the potential-asexual character to other characters in the book, especially ones that do not seem asexual and contrasting their beliefs and desires to the ones normally expressed in society at the time.

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16. Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner, "What does Queer Theory Tell Us about X?." *PLMA* 110, no 2. (1995), quoted in Arkenberg, "A Mayde," 5.

17. Arkenberg, "A Mayde," 5.

18. Hanson, "Making Something out of nothing," 18.

Thirdly, the analysis will question the belief in Reproductive Futurism, which Arkenberg defined thusly:[19]

> Lee Edelman frames reproductive futurism as the heteronormative social order's 'pervasive invocation of the child' generated through heterosexual reproduction as the emblem of futurity's unquestioned value.'[20] He argues that queerness figures 'the place of the social order's death drive,'[21] the position that opposes not merely the fact of reproduction but reproduction's entire ideological basis, which is the moral value of the future itself.

Questioning the idea of reproductive futurism will be especially interesting in Frankenstein, where there is an instance of asexual reproduction that does not exactly aid the future. It will be interesting to see how the Victorian potential-asexual fits within the narrative of reproductive futurism.

While homosexual and heterosexual reading of all these stories are valid, it can be argued that they have been done through the lens of eronormativity. An asexual reading of *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*, *Frankenstein*, and the Sherlock Holmes saga will establish Dr Jekyll, Dr Frankenstein and Sherlock Holmes as potential-asexuals and, with it, give valuable insights into Victorians ideas of degeneration, Reproductive Futurism, and the bachelor lifestyle.

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19. Arkenberg, "A Mayde," 5.

20. Lee Edelman, *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004): 3-4.

21. Edelman, 3.

Chapter 1: Theoretical Framework and Historical Context

What is Asexuality and Where Does It Go?

Defining asexuality might not seem like such a difficult task at first but there is much contention on the proper definition and terminology surrounding asexuality. Elizabeth Hanna Hanson describes the various definitions academics and asexuals have self-identified with.[22] She states that the most used definition is most likely the one posted on the homepage of AVEN, where the asexual is described as 'a person who does not experience sexual attraction.'[23] The problem with this definition, according to Hanson, is that it 'belies the latent diversity of the asexual community.'[24] A better definition would be the one given by AVEN founder David Jay, who describes an asexual as a person who 'disidentifies with sexuality.'[25] This definition shows the connection between sexuality and asexuality. People who identify as asexual still have a relation to sexuality that 'results from the subject's disappointment in the signifier's failure to produce a unity of signification and signified.'[26] The benefits (besides being a more inclusive definition) are that this model of collective identity exposes the constructedness of sexuality and the 'culturally dominant ideas about sexuality.'[27] In this way, asexual studies can provide valuable insights for queer studies. Przybylo and Cooper even go

22. Hanson, "Making Something out of nothing," 10.

23. "Overview," The Asexual Visibility and Education Network, accessed August 13, 2021. https://www.asexuality.org/?q=overview.html

24. Hanson, "Making Something out of nothing," 10.

25. "Collective identity model," AVENWiki, http://wiki.asexuality.org/Collective_identity_model, quoted in Hanson, "Making Something out of nothing," 10.

26. Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"*. (New York: Routledge, 2015), quoted in Hanson, "making something out of nothing,": 11-12.

27. "Collective identity model," AVENWiki, quoted in Hanson, "Making Something out of nothing," 12.

as far as to say that 'queerness should be reworked and rethought from asexual perspectives' because that approach 'encourages scepticism of any approach to sexuality that does not question the socio-cultural centrality of sex'.[28]

It is clear that asexuality has some relevance to queer studies in the insights it can provide into sexuality as a whole but there is some debate about whether or not asexuality is 'queer'. Even asexual people themselves are not united in their opinions on this matter. Asexuality shares a lot of similarities with the other queer sexualities. If 'queer' is defined as 'differing from the heteronormative', asexuality would be suitable. Besides heteronormativity, asexuality studies also expose the eronormativity of society. Reworking queerness from an asexual perspective also exposes the 'focus on sex as part of the definition of queerness'.[29] Where the asexual experience differs from other queer communities is in its oppression. According to Hanson, the queer experience is based around a history of the communities oppression and the community's reaction to this oppression.[30] Asexuality does not (yet) have this history. After all, 'you can't oppress a group of people on the basis of a difference whose existence you don't recognize.'[31]

It may be true that asexuality has not yet faced the same amount of systemic oppression as other gender and sexuality communities but it cannot be said that there is no prejudice against asexual individuals. One study by MacInnis and Hodson found that ‘within sexual minorities, homosexuals and bisexuals were evaluated equivalently, with asexuals evaluated more negatively than both homosexuals and bisexuals’ amongst their sample groups of Canadian

28. Ela Przybylo and Danielle Cooper, “Asexual Resonances: Tracing a Queerly Asexual Archive.” *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 20, no. 3 (2014): 298.

29. Cerankowski and Milks, “New Orientations,": 660.

30. Hanson, "Making Something out of nothing," 21.

31. Hanson, 28.

heterosexual undergraduates.[32] If this 2012 study is still representative of society today, then attitudes towards asexuality are not the reason behind the lack of oppression facing the asexual community. Hanson argues that asexuals are not yet recognised enough to be oppressed.[33] AVEN, the biggest online source of information regarding asexuality, has been trying to increase visibility since the site's founding in 2001. It is possible that this push for visibility will inevitably cause oppression when asexuality becomes more scrutinised. In the Cycle of Oppression, invisibility is one of the first stages of oppression, followed by 'social acceptance of mistreating the group' and later in the cycle it evolves into oppression that 'becomes embedded within institutions.'[34]

Still, the push for visibility is needed to help the asexual community and this can be done through fiction. There are still a lot of misconceptions about asexuality, such as believing that it is the result of autism, Hypoactive Sexual Desire disorder, or strict religious upbringings.[35] Having asexual characters would help people have sympathy and understanding of asexual people. Although there are more and more books with confirmed asexual characters, it would also be beneficial to include books with potential-asexuals, characters that were written before Kinsey popularised the concept of asexuality. A welcome side effect to exploring asexuality in pre-Kinsey literature is that it would give asexuality a certain degree of validity. It would support the idea that asexuality is not just a modern invention and that asexuality has always existed.

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32. Cara C. MacInnis and Gordon Hodson, "Intergroup Bias toward 'Group x': Evidence of Prejudice, Dehumanization, Avoidance, and Discrimination against Asexuals." *Group Processes & Intergroup Relations* 15, no. 6 (2012): 735.

33. Hanson, "Making Something out of nothing," 28.

34. Robin DiAngelo, "The Cycle of Oppression." *Counterpoints* 497 (2016): 84 –86.

35. Colborne, "Chasing Aces,": 3.

Victorian Asexuality

The Victorian period is highly important to queer- and sexuality studies because, as Furneaux states, it was 'the era in which the modern terminologies we use to structure the way we think and talk about sexuality were invented.'[36] Nineteenth-century sexologists were thinking about sexuality critically and categorising their findings, resulting in the existence of labels such as homosexuality and heterosexuality.[37]

The existence of non-normative sexualities in Victorian times was cause for some concern for the people at that time. The concerns extended to potential-asexuality. The 'unmarried man', as Hanson explains, 'was widely regarded with suspicion and condemnation, both for what he was presumed to be doing . . . and for what he was manifestly *not* doing' (emphasis in orig.).[38] The unmarried man was, at best, not doing his duty of 'repopulating England and the expanding British Empire' and was, at worst, a deviant.[39] The Victorian bachelor was also stereotyped as 'selfish, lazy, generally ineffectual and at times suspiciously effeminate.'[40] The Celibate Eccentric Genius trope and the character of the Victorian bachelor co-exist in characters such as Sherlock Holmes and Dr Jekyll. They cannot be considered lazy or ineffectual but they might still be sites for potential asexuality. The same applies to Frankenstein who, despite his engagement to Elizabeth, lives a bachelor-lifestyle throughout the majority of the book.

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36. Furneaux, "Victorian Sexualities," 769.

37. Furneaux, 769.

38. Hanson, "Making Something out of nothing," 65.

39. Hanson, 65.

40. Hanson, 70.

All stories that will be included in this thesis are Gothic stories because there is a connection between queer sexualities and The Gothic. In *Queering the Gothic*, William Hughes and Andrew Smith argue that 'Gothic has, in a sense, always been "queer"' because 'the genre . . . has been characteristically perceived in criticism as being poised astride the uneasy cultural boundary that separates the acceptable and familiar from the troubling and different.'[41] Haefele-Thomas expands on this idea, saying '"Gothic" and "queer" are aligned in that they both transgress boundaries and occupy liminal spaces, and in so doing, they each consistently interrogate ideas of what is "respectable" and what is "normal"'.[42] This 'queering' can happen in many different ways: the Gothic genre can explore society's beliefs about gender roles, deviant sexualities, exotic Others, among other taboos. 'Gothic fiction offered a testing ground for many unauthorized genders and sexualities.'[43] Haefele-Thomas also remarks that many writers of gothic seemed sympathetic to these 'others' and that the genre might have 'enabled them to explore the complex issues of the day more honestly and thoroughly.'[44]

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41. William Hughes and Andrew Smith. “Introduction: Queering the Gothic.” Introduction. In *Queering the Gothic*, ed. William Hughes and Andrew Smith, 1–10. (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2011): 1.

42. Ardel Haefele-Thomas, *Queer Others in Victorian Gothic: Transgressing Monstrosity*. (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2012): 2.

43. George Haggerty, *Queer Gothic* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2006), quoted in Haefele-Thomas, *Queer Others in Victorian Gothic*: 3.

44. Haefele-Thomas, *Queer Others in Victorian Gothic*: 4.

Chapter 2 The Ace Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde: The Various Reasons for Degeneration

Robert Louis Stevenson's *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (1886) is undoubtedly a story about degeneration spurred on by Darwin's theories of evolution. The existence of Hyde as Dr Jekyll's more unsavoury 'pleasures' and the ape-like descriptions of Hyde in the text make this quite clear. However, there is some debate possible about the cause of this degeneration and the exact nature of the pleasures Jekyll is repressing. Many academics in queer studies have found their answer in homosexual readings of *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*. Jekyll is repressing homoerotic tendencies and this makes him a degenerate. To free himself from these homosexual urges, or perhaps because of their repression, Edward Hyde is born. There are certainly instances in the book that can serve as evidence in support of this homosexual reading. However, queer studies' focus on homosexuality in readings of this book has possibly ignored other reasons for Dr Jekyll's degeneration that could provide different insights into queer sexualities as they are known today. This chapter will show how homosexual readings of Stevenson's *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* may have been the result of eronormativity and it will posit other reasons for Dr Jekyll's degeneration that align more with the lack of sexuality in the book.

Challenging Eronormativity

This thesis is not the first to comment on the oversaturation of (homo)sexual readings in queer studies of *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*. Stephan Karshay, for example, remarks that 'much of modern literary criticism reads Stevenson's . . . [text] as coded allegories of sexual desire.'[45] He also says that 'modern critics have gone to great lengths to

45. Stephen Karshay, *Degeneration, Normativity and the Gothic at the Fin de Siècle*. (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan): 85.

show that Hyde's degeneration signals his deviant sexuality, despite the text's factual reticence on all matters sexual.'[46] Roger Luckhurst expresses his concern that 'perhaps the risk is that these readings impose a modern obsession with sexuality as a hidden truth of every self and every text'.[47] Both Karshay's and Luckhurst's comments show the eronormativity at work in queer academic criticism. It is possible to conduct a study on Hyde's deviant sexuality without assuming sexuality as a 'hidden truth of every self and every text' while also respecting *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*'s 'reticence on all matters sexual'. Deviant sexuality does not have to mean homosexuality or extra-marital heterosexual practices. All that deviated from the sexual norms could be counted as sexual deviancy. If this meaning of deviancy is assumed, asexuality could also be a deviant sexuality. Or perhaps Hyde's deviancy does not have to do with sexuality at all. There were far more factors that would cause degeneration, which the many (homo)sexual readings have perhaps overshadowed in the debate surrounding Stevenson's text.

The main goal of this asexual reading is not to discredit the (homo)sexual readings of this text. There is nothing in the book that would make any homosexual reading impossible, as there is little discussion around sex at all. However, it would still be beneficial to look at the allusions to (homo)sexuality in the book to see where these theories come from and to see if, perhaps, the conclusion was made too hastily. For example, Elaine Showalter's theory, one of the best known homosexual readings of *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*, rests on arguments that are based on assumptions from other characters in the book. For example, Utterson's belief that Dr Jekyll is being blackmailed (and the connotation between blackmail and homosexual practices) does

46. Karshay, *Degeneration, Normativity and the Gothic*: 87.

47. Roger Luckhurst, 'Introduction', in Robert Louis Stevenson, *Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde and Other Tales*, ed. Luckhurst (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), quoted in Stephen Karshay, *Degeneration, Normativity and the Gothic*: 87.

not make Dr Jekyll a homosexual character.[48] In the same way, Utterson's explanation of Jekyll's changed voice and isolation as the result of 'one of those maladies that both torture and deform the sufferer'[49] is not a reason to assume Dr Jekyll has Syphilis, as Showalter suggests.[50] Showalter does not seek to posit Jekyll as a homosexual/sexually active character. She merely comments on the assumptions that Victorians likely would have made while reading this book. Many of these assumptions also hinge on the conclusion of the story: they fall apart when it is revealed that Jekyll and Hyde are the same person. Hyde is not blackmailing Jekyll, Jekyll is not harbouring a fugitive Mr Hyde because he loves him, Jekyll has not contracted an STD. When the final plot is resolved, a second reading of the text reveals that it is a markedly asexual narrative. As mentioned by Karshay, the text has this 'factual reticence to all matters sexual.'[51] Even the religious talk of sinning, abstinence, and Jekyll's sharing in 'the pleasures and adventures of Hyde' do not have to be interpreted as evidence of (homo)sexuality.[52] It is clear that Dr Jekyll is repressing and abstaining from something but from what is seen in the book, these pleasures and adventures are more-so violent than sexual. The book certainly hints at homosexuality, but this could be interpreted as merely the assumptions and worry of a friend for an esteemed fellow gentleman. The readings and theories into this (homo)sexuality are a valuable insight into Victorian ideas about sexuality, but they fall victim to eronormativity. Maybe Dr Jekyll did not have any sexual desires to repress at all.

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48. Robert Louis Stevenson. *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*. (Groningen: Wolters-Noordhoff, 1995): 10.

49. Stevenson. 44.

50. Elaine Showalter, "Dr. Jekyll's Closet." Essay. In *The Horror Reader*, ed. Ken Gelder, 190–97. (London: Routledge, 2005): 195.

51. Karshay, *Degeneration, Normativity and the Gothic*: 87.

52. Stevenson. *The Strange Case:* 67.

Other Possibilities for Degeneration

Jekyll's degeneration may not have been related to repressed (homo)sexuality. There are a few other causes for degeneration that would fit Dr Jekyll's character, which would also not rely on eronormativity to work. There are multiple possible reasons for degeneration, as degeneration was never clearly defined beyond a vague definition of 'not fitting the societal norm'. One possible explanation for Dr Jekyll's degeneration is his intelligence. As Cesare Lombroso, a contemporary of Stevenson and criminologist, wrote in 1891: 'I had been enabled to discover in genius various characters of degeneration which are the foundation and the sign of nearly all forms of congenital mental abnormality'[53] This would mean that Hyde's creation was both the reason for and product of Dr Jekyll's degeneration. There is no denying that the character of Jekyll is indeed a genius. He possesses knowledge that his colleague Dr Lanyon cannot even comprehend, even after seeing the results in person. Dr Jekyll's accomplishments have shaken Dr Lanyon's worldview in such a way that it was fatal, and even then Lanyon proclaims that he will 'die incredulous.'[54]

Another possibility for Dr Jekyll's degeneration is something that could be coined as 'asexual degeneration'. The Victorians were not quite as prudish as they are nowadays often thought to be. They did think and write about sex and the right ways to have it. Many English doctors followed Doctor Lallemand's teachings that sexual excess and masturbation were indicators of an unhealthy lifestyle.[55] Many doctors, therefore, prescribe abstinence. Others, such as J. L.

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53. Cesare Lombroso. *The Man of Genius*. *The Project Gutenberg EBook of The Man of Genius, by Cesare Lombroso*. (Project Gutenberg, 1891). https://www.gutenberg.org/files/50539/50539-h/50539-h.htm.

54. Stevenson. *The Strange Case*: 58.

55. Ivan Crozier, "'Rough Winds Do Shake the Darling Buds OF MAY': a Note on William Acton and the Sexuality of the (Male) Child." *Journal of Family History* 26, no. 3 (July 2001): 412.

Milton, were against abstinence because 'a man who remains continent can hardly reach twenty-six without becoming partially, if not wholly, impotent.'[56] However, Milton does not condone masturbation either.[57] Somewhere between too little and too much sex (supposedly only with a woman one was married to) lay the answer to a healthy lifestyle for the Victorian gentlemen. In the world of *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*, this would cause trouble. The world of this book is overwhelmingly masculine. There are no female characters of note and the social circle of Dr Jekyll seems entirely comprised of other gentlemen. Dr Jekyll's lifestyle would be seen as unnatural to Victorian standards and would arouse the fear of degeneration, even without the possibility of homosexuality. Furthermore, the asexual degeneration would fall in line with the general criticism of gentlemanliness in the book.

Masculine domesticity experienced an evolution in the nineteenth century as a result of the Industrial Revolution.[58] Traditional gender roles and family structure were being questioned and the private sphere became something of much more importance to bourgeois men.[59] The domestic sphere was a 'moral sanctuary'[60] and 'masculine identity was constructed around the home, the workplace and all-male associations.[61] However, nearing the end of the century, opinions of Victorian men's public and private lives came under scrutiny for homosocial

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56. J. L. Milton, *On Spermatorrhœa: Its Results and Complications*, 9th ed. (London, 1872,) quoted in Ivan Crozier, "'Rough Winds," 413.

57. Milton, *On Spermatorrhœa,* quoted in Ivan Crozier, "'Rough Winds," 412.

58. Ashleigh Prosser, "'His Bachelor House': the Unhomely Home of the Fin-De-Siècle Bourgeois Bachelor in Robert Louis Stevenson's Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde." *Journal of Stevenson Studies* 11 (October 30, 2014): 108.

59. John Tosh, *A Man's Place: Masculinity and the Middle-Class Home In Victorian England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999) quoted in Ashleigh Prosser, "His Bachelor House," 109.

60. Tosh, *A Man's Place*, quoted in Ashleigh Prosser, "His Bachelor House," 109.

61. Tosh, *A Man's Place*, quoted in Ashleigh Prosser, "His Bachelor House," 109.

relationships and Victorian gentlemen's refusal to step into 'the role of the patriarch, the husband and father, of the middle-class home'.[62] The bachelors in *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* create an atmosphere of das Unheimliche in which there is a lack of 'the traditional domestic ideologies'.[63] According to Arata, the descriptions of the bachelor's houses are 'a symbol of these men's isolations and repression.'[64] The book shows the unhomely private sphere of the bachelor and these spaces '[function] symbolically to represent contemporary issues concerning the bourgeois bachelor's rejection of the dominant middle-class ideological conception of an idealised familial, feminised home space'.[65] This critique of bachelor's in Stevenson's text adheres to Hanson's explanation of bachelors being a symbol of laziness and rejection of duties.[66]

In conclusion, the Chaste, Eccentric, Genius bachelor in *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* can be considered as a potential-asexual. There is certainly a case to be made for Jekyll as a victim of degeneration due to repressed homosexuality, but these theories can exist alongside theories of potential-asexuality. The lack of all matters sexual in the novella makes this an asexual narrative in any case but reading Dr Jekyll as a victim of asexual degeneration gives the reader insights into the Victorian thought processes around (the lack of) sex and its supposed drawbacks on a gentleman's health. The next chapter will show another example of the link between asexuality and degeneration in Frankenstein. Other reasons for the degeneration of Dr Jekyll that do not rely on eronormativity are degeneration because of his

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62. Tosh, *A Man's Place*, quoted in Ashleigh Prosser, "His Bachelor House," 110.

63. Prosser, "His Bachelor House," 113.

64. Prosser, 114.

65. Prosser, 114.

66. Hanson, "Making Something out of nothing," 70.

intellect or his status as a bachelor. This case shows the importance of looking critically at readings to expose the possible eronormativity within them.

Chapter 3: Frankenstein: Aesthetic Attraction, Asexual Reproduction and Devolution

At first glance, Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* may not appear as an obvious candidate for an asexual analysis. After all, Shelley does not write much about sexuality in *Frankenstein*. Just as it is the case with Stevenson's *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*, *Frankenstein* is, in that regard, an asexual narrative. The similarities between the books do not end there. *Frankenstein* has also been subjected to the usual homosexual/ homoerotic treatment in queer studies. Especially the relationships between Frankenstein and his monster and between Frankenstein and Clerval have been thoroughly analysed. However, *Frankenstein* also offers the possibility for potential-asexual characters, especially Victor Frankenstein. For this analysis, it is highly important to remember the distinction the asexual community makes between sexual attraction and romantic attraction: 'Many asexual people may experience forms of attraction that can be romantic, aesthetic, or sensual in nature but do not lead to a need to act out on that attraction sexually.'[67] Asexuality does not mean a lack of romance or relationships.[68] The idea that romantic and sexual attraction are codependent is actually quite a new, though thoroughly pervasive, belief. Alain de Botton explains that eighteenth-century Romantics popularised the idea that 'love and sex go together' and that 'sex is the ultimate expression of love.'[69] This distinction is especially important in this work, as Victor Frankenstein is in a relationship with a woman. It could even be argued that he is romantically attracted to her, although this thesis will argue the opposite is true. For now, it is important to remember that this relationship does

67. "Overview," The Asexual Visibility and Education Network.

68. "Overview," The Asexual Visibility and Education Network.

69. Google Zeitgeist. "Why Romantics are Ruining Love | Alain de Botton | Google Zeitgeist." *YouTube* video, 19.53. May 23, 2016. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R2v8TywXjLA: 3:02-3:43.

not negate the possibility of Frankenstein being asexual. An asexual reading of *Frankenstein* will include an analysis of Doctor Frankenstein's aesthetic attractions, his fear of female sexuality, his successful attempt at asexual reproduction, and its implications with regards to degeneration and Charles Darwin's theory of evolution.

Shelley's Doctor Frankenstein and Ovid's Pygmalion: a Comparison

A close look at the ties between Greek mythology and Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* will reveal an important characteristic of Victor Frankenstein's: aesthetic attraction. The most important Greek myth connected to Frankenstein is, without a doubt, the myth of Prometheus. This is clearly evidenced by the secondary title of '*The Modern Prometheus*'. However, Prometheus is not the only mythological character that can be linked to Victor Frankenstein. I will argue that Mary Shelley was also heavily influenced by Ovid's *Metamorphoses* and the myth of Pygmalion and Galatea during the writing of her debut novel. This connection between Pygmalion and Frankenstein should be understood in connection with the interpretation that the scene around the creation of the monster is an example of homosexual panic.[70]

In Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, it is said that Pygmalion, a Cyprian sculptor, feels no attraction to regular women because they are too sexual for his tastes. He thinks they 'went to bed with anyone who'd take them, And laughed at Venus when her back was turned;'[71] The text says

70. David Sahai, "Fear of the Monster or the Closet?:An Analysis of Frankenstein's Relationship with His Creation Through the Interrelation of Feminist and Queer Theories." *Footnotes* 14 (March 31, 2021): 65. https://doi.org/https://journal.lib.uoguelph.ca/index.php/footnotes/article/view/6178/6261.

71. Ovid. *The Metamorphoses*. trans. Horace Gregory. 1st ed. (New York: The Viking Press, 1958): 277.

that 'his instincts told him he'd better sleep alone'.[72] Not content with remaining single, Pygmalion decides to take matters into his own hands by creating his ideal woman. He then prays to Aphrodite to get a companion that resembles his statue Galatea. Aphrodite understands his underlying wish and instead gives Galatea life directly. The myth of Pygmalion and Galatea clearly resembles the construction of the monster in *Frankenstein*. Both the monster and Galatea were masterpieces of exquisite beauty and skill. Victor acknowledges the beauty of his monster: 'His limbs were in proportion, and I had selected his features as beautiful. Beautiful! –Great God!'[73] Both sculptors are aesthetically attracted to their creations, meaning that they appreciate the beauty that they have created. Aesthetic attraction is an important part of the asexual community. It explains why asexuals can still have preferences and tastes. The lack of sexual attraction does not mean the disability to find people attractive.

The difference between *Frankenstein* and Ovid's myth is the way in which the sculptor-characters react to their creations receiving life. Pygmalion is overjoyed that he finally found a woman that meets his high standards and even has a child with her.[74] In contrast, Victor Frankenstein is disgusted by his creation the moment it receives life. The difference between Frankenstein and Pygmalion may lie in the fact that the genders of their creations are different, which would tie into the 'homosexual panic theory'. This thesis would, however, argue that there is another important difference between Frankenstein's monster and Galatea: personality. Weiner, Stevens, and Rogers note that Pygmalion's 'animated statue seems to have no inner

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72. Ovid. *The Metamorphoses*, 277.

73. Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein or The Modern Prometheus*. (Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Editions Limited, 1993.): 51.

74. Ovid. *The Metamorphoses*, 279.

life of her own.'[75] Compare this to the Monster, who immediately attempts communication, displays emotion, and reaches out to Victor Frankenstein. The difference between the passivity of Galatea is even more contrasting to the monster later on in the book when he expresses his wishes and desires. Particularly the desire to pro-create seems to cause Frankenstein great turmoil.

Victor Frankenstein's Other Relationships

Of course, the horror Frankenstein expresses at the thought of the monster having children could be caused by concern for the future of the human race. However, it could also be plain horror at the thought of sexuality. He is, for example, terrified of the possibility that the Female Monster might be attracted to human men (i.e. him) and would want to act on this attraction.[76] Victor Frankenstein's fear of sexually active people shows up more often in the novel. One might even go as far as to say that Frankenstein is exclusively attracted to people without sex drives. This shows up in the relationship with his wife Elizabeth, for example. Anne K. Mellor makes the interesting observation that Victor only 'embraced [Elizabeth] with ardour' *after* she has passed away.[77] He only shows her affection when she is unable to reciprocate it. This might also explain why Victor tries to treat Elizabeth as an object while she is still alive: 'she presented Elizabeth to me as her promised gift, I, with childish seriousness, interpreted her words literally, and looked upon Elizabeth as mine –mine to

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75. Jesse Weiner, Benjamin Eldon Stevens, and Brett M. Rogers. "Introduction: The Modern Prometheus Turns 200." Introduction. In *Frankenstein and Its Classics*, ed. Jesse Weiner, Benjamin Eldon Stevens, and Brett M. Rogers, 1–24. (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2018): 12.

76. Shelley, *Frankenstein*, 176.

77. Department of English, Arizona State University. ""Mothering Monsters: Mary Shelley's Frankenstein" by Anne K. Mellor." *YouTube* video, 1:16:32. Jan 15, 2019. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Rd-eKRRQzcQ: 49:38-50:15. (emphasis added)

protect, love, and cherish. All praises bestowed upon her, I received as made to a possession of my own.'[78] He cannot handle the fact that Elizabeth is a person with her own thoughts, needs, and wants. He instead objectifies her and only shows her any kind of love after her passing, although this might also be explained by another theme in the book: necrophilia. The monsters and Elizabeth are both only beautiful when dead. To avoid making the unwanted connection between asexuality and necrophilia, Victor's necrophilic tendencies should be analysed in a different context than this essay.

Another reason for Doctor Frankenstein's lack of sexual attraction could be found in his fear of women's sexuality, especially of women that are stronger than him. He stops creating the female monster partly out of supposed self-preservation because 'she also might turn with disgust from him to the superior beauty of man'.[79] Mellor supposes that the doctor is afraid that the female monster might make sexual or romantic advances on him.[80] He would be unable to reject her because of her superior size and strength.

Shelley, Frankenstein, and Asexual Reproduction

In the book, there is a notable influence of reproductive futurism. This philosophy, named and studied by Lee Edelman, uses the 'pervasive invocation of the Child as the emblem of futurity's unquestioned value'.[81] In this way, children function as 'a form of continuity with the future' who 'produce measurable effects on the world'.[82] Children must therefore be

78. Shelley, *Frankenstein*, 27.

79. Shelley, 176.

80. Department of English, Arizona State University. ""Mothering Monsters," 41:27-44:26.

81. Edelman, *No Future*, 3.

82. Edelman, *No Future*, quoted in Arkenberg, "A Mayde," 6.

protected. In *Frankenstein*, this can be seen in the way the Frankenstein parents were raising their children: parents have a duty towards their children and towards society: 'I was their plaything and their idol … whom to bring up to good, and whose future lot it was in their hands to direct to happiness or misery, according as they fulfilled their duties towards me.'[83] It is the parents' duty to raise their children for the good of society, as is shown in the case of the De Lacey family, whose 'son was bred in the service of his country'.[84] Victor Frankenstein goes against the Reproductive Futurism displayed in the rest of the book. He abandons his 'child' and does not see him as a positive link with the past. The existence of the monster has an extremely negative impact on the Frankenstein family line and certainly hinders their futurity. At the end of the narrative, only Victor's brother Ernest remains.

This rejection of Reproductive Futurism in *Frankenstein* may be influenced by the Fin de Siècle's theory of degeneration and devolution. The belief that society was regressing is made a reality in Frankenstein. These ideas may be influenced by Mary Shelley's fear of being unable to raise her children properly. The degeneration influences in this book are also influenced by Erasmus Darwin's notes on evolution. According to Mellor, Shelley had read Darwin (both Erasmus and Charles) and applied their theories to this book.[85] It would mean that Victor Frankenstein had also devolved. In the theory of evolution, it is explained that evolution went from single-organism reproduction (coincidentally known as asexual reproduction) to double-organism reproduction.[86] This biological asexual reproduction could be the result of Frankenstein's asexuality. He may not have wanted sex, but he did want to

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83. Shelley, *Frankenstein*, 24.

84. Shelley, 127.

85. Department of English, Arizona State University. ""Mothering Monsters," 56:19-56:25.

86. Department of English, Arizona State University. 56:25-57:02.

reproduce and sought a solution in devolution. Victor Frankenstein, in creating his monster, used methods of reproduction that people had already evolved from. Raised in an environment where the child was seen as important and in which parents had a duty to raise children, Victor Frankenstein chose instead to create life asexually. Victor does mention that his goal was to be of benefit to society: 'what glory would attend the discovery, if I could banish disease from the human frame, and render man invulnerable to any but a violent death!'[87] His motives align with those of Reproductive Futurism: he wants to protect society with the making of his Child (even though the monster is born as an adult, it still behaves like a child in the beginning).

Frankenstein shows that theories of potential-asexuality can be discovered in unlikely stories. Victor Frankenstein does seem like an unlikely source of potential-asexuality but it shows that characters with canonical relationships can still be characterised as asexual. In Victor Frankenstein's case, his disinterest in his relationship with Elizabeth and his similarities to Ovid's Pygmalion would suggest that his attraction is more aesthetic than sexual. The novel as a whole also questions the purpose of reproduction and futurity. It questions whether or not futurity benefits society and the possibility of asexual reproduction and its ties to devolution. Victor Frankenstein's eccentricity and genius absolutely influenced his degeneration and his possible asexuality could have been the cause. His disinterest in sexuality and/or aesthetic attraction could have been the reason behind his mission to improve society. Victor Frankenstein could certainly be canonised as an asexual character, making him yet another example of a Chaste/Asexual Eccentric Genius.

87. Shelley, *Frankenstein*, 31.

Chapter 4: Sherlock Holmes and the Mystery of his Sexuality

Sherlock Holmes might be the clearest canonical example of a Pre-Kinsey asexual character that there ever could be. However, even for this case, there is a lack of academic debate surrounding the possibility of an asexual Sherlock. On the other hand, he is frequently seen as asexual by the general public and there are studies on his potential asexuality in modern adaptations.[88] [89] [90] However, there are little to no analyses of the original stories regarding asexuality. The disinterest in the original stories is peculiar because these stories just might provide one of the clearest examples of asexual representation in Victorian literature. Whereas texts such as *Frankenstein* and *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* can be interpreted to contain potential asexuality in their absence of all matters sexual, the Sherlock Holmes stories actively hint at asexuality. The stories do not passively allow for asexuality as many asexual narratives do, instead, the Sherlock Holmes stories actively imply it. It is also interesting that there is overall interest in discovering Sherlock Holmes' potential queerness. In Doyle's mystery stories, the enigmatic character of Sherlock Holmes served as a background mystery for audiences to solve, which included questioning his love life. Regardless, queer studies academics have not yet explored the potential of Arthur Conan Doyle's work to the fullest. When the stories are considered from a queer studies' perspective, the focus is once again almost exclusively on homosexuality. The relationship between Holmes and Watson enjoys a fair amount of

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88. Amber Botts, "(No) Sex and Sherlock: Asexuality, Victorian Abstinence and the Art of Ambiguity." Essay. In *Who Is Sherlock?: Essays on Identity in Modern Holmes Adaptations*, ed. Lynnette Porter, 169–80. (Jefferson: McFarland & Company, 2016).

89. Amandelin A. Valentine, "Toward a Broader Recognition of the Queer in the BBC'S 'Sherlock.'" *Transformative Works and Cultures* 22 (September 15, 2016). https://doi.org/10.3983/twc.2016.0828.

90. Melissa A. Hofmann, "Johnlock Meta and Authorial Intent in Sherlock FANDOM: Affirmational or Transformational?" *Transformative Works and Cultures* 28 (September 15, 2018). https://doi.org/10.3983/twc.2018.1465.

inspection. Heterosexuality, too, is still a viable option for the detective. Whether Sherlock Holmes loved the opera singer Irene Adler or not is still a divisive question. Both these theories, the homosexual and the heterosexual, fall victim to the eronormativity rampant in society. Most academics overlook the hints towards asexuality (and perhaps aromanticism) displayed in the books. All theories around Sherlock Holmes and his possible romantic interests are quite easily debunked and replaceable by indications in the books that imply that Sherlock Holmes is a possible-asexual and possible-aromantic.

Sherlock Holmes and the Women

The discourse around Sherlock Holmes love life is dominated by one woman: *the* woman, Irene Adler. She is often interpreted to be the most valid choice for a love interest. Adaptations especially adhere to this narrative by forcing a relationship between two characters who share no notable chemistry in "The Scandal in Bohemia". From the very first page, any romantic relationship between these two characters is denied by Watson, whom the reader must accept, is the most accurate source of information on Sherlock Holmes. Watson says that 'it was not as if he felt any emotion akin to love for Irene Adler' and that 'all emotions, and [love] particularly, were abhorrent to his cold, precise, but admirably balanced mind.'[91] Even a tiny bit of an emotion such as love would be as 'grit in a sensitive instrument, or a crack in one of his high-power lenses'.[92] One would also suspect that Sherlock would have shown at least a little bit of emotion when he was asked by Irene to witness her marriage to another man. Instead, he seems wholly nonplussed. He is even laughing light-heartedly to

91. Arthur Conan Doyle, and David Stuart Davies. *The Best of Sherlock Holmes*. ed. David Stuart Davies. (Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Editions Limited, 1998): 1.

92. Doyle, 1.

himself as he details the experience to Watson.[93] Finally, Irene Adler has little to no impact on Sherlock beyond "A Scandal in Bohemia". If Sherlock was meant any relationship with her, Arthur Conan Doyle could have expanded her involvement in subsequent stories. Instead, she almost disappears from the canon entirely. It is true, however, that Sherlock admires her and even finds her attractive. Sherlock tells John that she has 'a face a man might die for.'[94] Note, however, the use of the unspecified 'a man' instead of something such as 'I'. Irene Adler also 'eclipses and predominates the whole of her sex'[95] in qualities that Sherlock admires: she is cunning, observant, and she is the only woman to ever beat him at a mental game. But 'eclipsing' other women would not have been too difficult in the eyes of Sherlock. While the romantic relationship between Adler and Holmes is almost entirely the work of hetero/eronormativity, it cannot be denied that Irene had a positive effect on Holmes, showing him that women were to be taken seriously.

There is, interestingly enough, another woman that has a claim to being Sherlock Holmes' love interest. Although this theory is not any better supported and even less well-known. In "The Copper Beeches", the reader is introduced to Violet Hunter, a client that Watson hopes will become Holmes' future bride. It makes for an interesting contrast to Watson's clear denial of romantic feelings on Holmes' part in "The Scandal in Bohemia". Like Irene, Violet is clever and observant. Watson remarks 'that Holmes was favourably impressed by the manner and speech of his new client.'[96]This potential relationship, despite being perfectly acceptable and even expected, leads to nowhere. In the final paragraph, Watson tells the reader that 'as to

93. Doyle, *The Best of Sherlock Holmes,* 12.

94. Doyle, 12.

95. Doyle, 1.

96. Doyle, 123.

Miss Violet Hunter, my friend Holmes, rather to my disappointment, manifested no further interest in her when once she ceased to be the centre of one of his problems'.[97] To say there was any interest at all is a stretch. Sherlock does admire her capabilities and qualities but it is difficult to ascertain if he is interested in her as a person or in her as a valuable asset to the case. It seems to be a pattern for the detective. He admires women that challenge his intellect or are beneficial to his work but he does not see them as potential love interests.

Sherlock Holmes and The Men.

Homosexual readings of Arthur Conan Doyle's focus mostly around John Watson. This makes sense, Watson is certainly the closest relationship Holmes has and Watson is the person that knows the detective best. The question then is the exact nature of their relationship. Although it can be argued that there is some romantic subtext to the relationship, one must consider the fact that these sorts of relationships between men were not anything out of the ordinary in Victorian times. However, close male friendships did arouse suspicions of homosexuality, even then.[98] Suspicion, in this case, would fall mostly on Sherlock. John Watson is in many aspects a model Victorian man: he is married, he has an intellectually challenging and society-serving job, and he served his country before in the war. John Watson, in this way, serves as a contrast to the eccentricity of Sherlock, highlighting his Otherness. Sherlock might be contributing to society through his work but this makes his lack of a wife even stranger. John Tosh notes that the 'punishing work ethic' of bourgeois Victorian men was balanced by

97. Doyle, *The Best of Sherlock Holmes,* 142.

98. Hanson, "Making Something," 73.

domesticity in the private sphere.[99] Sherlock certainly has the work ethic but never balances it out with a wife or family.

It could still be argued that Arthur Conan Doyle uses John's character to hint at Sherlock's homosexuality. For example, Bernthal hypothesises that Irene was the only woman Sherlock was attracted to because she was 'boyish'.[100] He also posits that Sherlock hints at his masculinity with 'passing references to how he would treat wives' because this functions as a smokescreen for his 'almost erotic closeness' with Watson.[101] However, homosexuality is not the only possible explanation for Sherlock's Otherness, although queer studies does seem to have a tendency to make this assumption. Sherlock's Otherness can just as well be caused by his distaste for social conventions, his almost supernatural intellect, or asexuality.

Sherlock Holmes and Asexuality/Aromanticism

The lack of romance in the novels leaves room for the interpretation of asexuality and aromanticism. Contrary to the theories of heterosexuality and homosexuality, the source texts seem to actually confirm this character interpretation of Sherlock Holmes. Some of the evidence rests on Watson's reactions to Holmes' behaviour: his lack of understanding resembles what could be called either arophobia or acephobia today. For example, in "A

99. John Tosh, "Hegemonic Masculinity and the History of Gender.' in *Masculinities in Politics and War: Gendering Modern History*, ed. by Stefan Dudink, Karen Hagemann, and John Tosh (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004), quoted in Amy Milne-Smith "Work and Madness: Overworked Men and Fears of Degeneration, 1860s–1910s." 161.

100. J. C. Bernthal, "English Masculinity and Its Others." Essay. In *Queering Agatha Christie: Revisiting the Golden Age of Detective Fiction*, ed. Clive Bloom, 75–120. (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016): 85.

101. Bernthal, "English Masculinity," 85.

Study in Scarlet", Watson calls Sherlock 'an automaton, -- a calculating- machine'.[102] Of course, Watson's analysis of Sherlock's character is not inherently negative. He may mean it as a compliment or an exclamation of admiration for his detective skills. However, it is still a clear example of Othering because Watson does not even see Sherlock as human anymore.

Watson's Othering of Sherlock appears in multiple stories. In "The Greek Interpreter", Watson remarks that Sherlock is 'a brain without a heart, as deficient in human sympathy as he was pre-eminent in intelligence.'[103] Michael Atkinson explains that 'Holmes is grounded firmly in the long tradition that sees male chastity as a source of heightened abilities.'[104] Atkinson compares Doyle's representation of male chastity to, for example, 'warriors (and boxers) [withdrawing] from the women of the tribe before battle' and 'Polynesian fishermen and Pueblo hunters [spending] chaste nights of ritual and concentration before seeking their prey.'[105] It is certainly an interesting theory to explain Sherlock gifts of intelligence. However, it fails to explain certain other characteristics of Doyle's character. The Asexual Visibility and Education Network places a lot of importance on the distinction between chastity and asexuality: 'Unlike celibacy . . . asexuality is an intrinsic part of who we are, just like other sexual orientations.'[106] Atkinson's definition would make Sherlock's lack of sexuality a voluntary choice, but certain situations from the texts suggest that Sherlock has no choice in

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102. Arthur Conan Doyle. *The Complete Sherlock Holmes Long Stories*. (London: Book Club Associates, 1974.): 136.

103. Doyle, *The Best of Sherlock Holmes,* 199.

104. Michael Atkinson, "'A Scandal in Bohemia': Virginity Preserved and the Secret Marriage of Sherlock Holmes (With a Coda on Poe's 'The Purloined Letter')." Essay. In *The Secret Marriage of Sherlock Holmes: And Other Eccentric Readings*, 38–63. (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1999): 49.

105. Michael Atkinson, 49.

106. "Overview," The Asexual Visibility and Education Network, accessed August 13, 2021.

his lack of attraction. Contrary to other characters, Sherlock does not seem to have the same appreciation for women as other characters in the book show. In fact, he sometimes does not even notice them. In "The Sign of Four", for example, the following takes place: 'What a very attractive woman!' I exclaimed, turning to my companion . . . 'Is she?' he said, languidly; 'I did not observe.'[107] Sherlock does seem to take note of women's attractiveness, but only when it concerns his clients. He knows that the woman in "The Solitary Cyclist" is in danger because 'it is part of the settled order of nature that such a girl', meaning an attractive one, 'should have followers'.[108] Sherlock does understand sexuality, he just does not have an interest in it himself. It does not seem to be a conscious choice to ignore some hidden part of his nature to access superhuman intelligence.

Characterising Sherlock Holmes as asexual and/or aromantic might be the easiest to do out of all characters discussed in this thesis. One merely has to point out the evidence in Arthur Conan Doyle's stories. Though for whatever reason, academics have largely ignored this evidence in favour of more passionate narratives of secret desires between the detective and a married woman or his male best friend. It is almost ironic that these academics 'see' but 'do not observe'.[109] However, it is also important to note that these asexual theories do not have to negate any other theories about a heteroromantic or homoromantic Sherlock Holmes. Theorising an asexual Sherlock Holmes does not even have to negate a heterosexual/homosexual Holmes. This theory merely adds to the mystery of the character.

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107. Doyle, Arthur Conan. *The Complete Sherlock Holmes Long Stories,* 136.

108. Doyle, *The Best of Sherlock Holmes,* 277.

109. Doyle, 3.

Conclusion

This thesis has explained why Dr Jekyll, Dr Frankenstein and Sherlock Holmes can be seen as potential-asexuals and it has given the benefits of an asexual reading of *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde, Frankenstein*, and the Sherlock Holmes series.

The asexual reading has challenged the homosexual/heterosexual binary and eronormativity. Reading asexually has highlighted aspects for the theory of degeneration that have been overshadowed by eronormativity, such as asexual degeneration and degeneration caused by genius. With this, it has given an insight into Victorian beliefs surrounding the bachelor lifestyle. Additionally, it has provided a different motivation for Dr Frankenstein's actions and added to the discussion around Mary Shelley's critique of Reproductive futurism. Finally, This thesis has shown the basis for an asexual Sherlock Holmes through a close reading of several of Arthur Conan Doyle's stories.

Hopefully, this thesis provides visibility for the asexual community and education on asexual issues and beliefs through its explanations of, for example, aesthetic attraction and eronormativity. This thesis has aimed to make a helpful contribution to the under-researched field of asexuality studies. Asexuality is a relatively new concept so there is still much to be researched. This thesis focussed on male asexuality in Victorian literature but an asexual reading women could also be done through an analysis of spinster-characters. This trope character can also be classified as a potential-asexual and can give insights into Victorian gender roles for women. One could also look at different time periods to do asexual readings to analyse changing ideas around sexuality over the years. It would add more validity to the belief that asexuality has existed long before there were labels to assign to it.

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