Jekyll and Hyde

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Ian Rankin on The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde

Published in 1886, Robert Louis Stevenson drafted The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde, in which Mr Hyde, the terrifying alter-ego of the respectable Dr Jekyll, wreaks violent havoc on the streets of London, over a few days while confined to bed. In his introduction to a new edition of the novel, Ian Rankin explores the real-life history that lies behind the book.

Think you know this book?

Think again.

The notion of a "Jekyll-and-Hyde" character has become a lazy way of describing someone when they do something contrary to their normal nature. But that's not quite what Dr Henry Jekyll does. Rather, he consciously searches for a chemical that will allow him to separate out the two sides to his nature. He is fascinated by the duality of man and wants to explore his darker side. Resolute and determined, eventually he succeeds. But his evil self becomes stronger over time, until it threatens to extinguish Jekyll altogether. The doctor has played with fire and he's burning from the inside.

Sadly, we'll never know the thrill experienced by this explosive book's original audience. Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde is a work of suspense, but we all know the twist these days, don't we? So why do we still read the story? Well, it's written with great economy, tension and wit. I know few books so concise that pack such an emotional punch. It's also a complex narrative: Jekyll himself figures only as a friend of the other characters and narrators – right up until the revelation provided by his "confession". We start the book in the company of two gentlemen called Utterson and Enfield. They are out walking, but Enfield has a story to tell. It concerns a grotesque incident and its aftermath. The story links the thuggish and mysterious Edward Hyde to the wealthy and urbane Henry Jekyll. Utterson and Enfield are in no doubt: their friend is being blackmailed. But Hyde has a stronger hold on Jekyll than this, as Utterson will eventually discover.

The tale originally came to its author in a dream. Robert Louis Stevenson had always trusted to "brownies" – meaning his daydreams and nightmares. He felt that stories and characters were being channelled to him from elsewhere. As a young man his fantasy life had been kept in check. He had grown up in a family of engineers and was himself destined for a career in the law. He lived with his family in a large house in Edinburgh's "New Town" (constructed to a rational, geometric design in the late 18th century). But the population of the New Town had decamped from the squalid, overcrowded and downright dangerous "Old Town" (the stretch of Edinburgh between Castle Rock and the Palace of Holyrood). Stevenson was captivated by the Old Town, and would tiptoe out of the house when everyone else was asleep, climbing the steep slope towards drink and debauchery. He knew fine well that there were two sides to Edinburgh's character – he'd known it since childhood. In his bedroom there stood a wardrobe constructed by William Brodie, and young Stevenson's nanny would tell him the story of Brodie, who had been a respected citizen by
day but housebreaker by night. Here was the duality of Man – not only in the figure of Brodie but also apparently built into the construction of the city itself – light and dark, the rational and the savage.

Stevenson suffered ill-health all his life, and was being dosed with an experimental drug at the time when his "brownies" assailed him with the story of the good doctor and his evil other self. It must have struck Stevenson that it might be a yarn about his own attraction to the less savoury side of life. Maybe self-preservation led him to set the novel in London rather than Edinburgh. On the other hand, London was perfect. It had been the home of a Scots-born doctor called John Hunter. Hunter was known in all the right circles. He was married to a patron of the arts who would give grand parties at their home in Leicester Square. But if you continued through the house you came to Hunter's surgery. You might also be shown his vast (and growing) collection of weird and wonderful specimens. And eventually, you'd find yourself in the cramped accommodation used by his students, beyond which a door led out into a narrow alley off what is now Charing Cross Road. This was where, at dead of night, the grave-robbers arrived with fresh deliveries of cadavers.

When you read Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde you will be struck by the similarities. (Jekyll himself purchased such a property from the heirs of a great medical man.) For a tale steeped in fantasy and the macabre, this is a novel with its roots firmly planted in a recognisable world – so much so, in fact, that when Jack the Ripper began his work, the public began to suspect that Hyde himself might be real. And remember ... Jack, too, was reputed to be a medical man.

As a writer, Stevenson wanted to explore the various facets of human nature. Was civilisation just a very thin veneer? Did you dare to scratch its surface and reveal the truth beneath? We are all capable of committing evil acts – look at the atrocities meted out in wartime. Killers talk about the "red mist" that descends, then lifts, leaving them wondering how they could have done such terrible deeds. Religious believers talk of "possession". Psychopaths can appear to be just like you and me for the most part of their lives, but then suddenly flip, before flipping back again.

This is an important book because it discusses a very basic problem which is still (and forever) with us – how can we do such terrible things to each other? Jekyll feels hidebound in his own skin, made to comply with the rigid conventions of his class and society. Hyde frees him from this, but the sensation of liberation becomes addictive. It is no accident that Hyde is described as being much younger than Jekyll. Jekyll himself is a man of 50, regretting times past and opportunities missed. The folly of youth – that sense of possibility and invincibility – is regained when he becomes Edward Hyde.

This book, then, is a morality tale as well as a stark warning. It's also every bit as claustrophobic, creepy and chilling as when it first saw the light of day over a century ago.
Gothic fiction began as a sophisticated joke. Horace Walpole first applied the word ‘Gothic’ to a novel in the subtitle – ‘A Gothic Story’ – of The Castle of Otranto, published in 1764. When he used the word it meant something like ‘barbarous’, as well as ‘deriving from the Middle Ages’. Walpole pretended that the story itself was an antique relic, providing a preface in which a translator claims to have discovered the tale, published in Italian in 1529, ‘in the library of an ancient catholic family in the north of England’. The story itself, ‘founded on truth’, was written three or four centuries earlier still (Preface). Some readers were duly deceived by this fiction and aggrieved when it was revealed to be a modern ‘fake’.

The novel itself tells a supernatural tale in which Manfred, the gloomy Prince of Otranto, develops an irresistible passion for the beautiful young woman who was to have married his son and heir. The novel opens memorably with this son being crushed to death by the huge helmet from a statue of a previous Prince of Otranto, and throughout the novel the very fabric of the castle comes to supernatural life until villainy is defeated. Walpole, who made his own house at Strawberry Hill into a mock-Gothic building, had discovered a fictional territory that has been exploited ever since. Gothic involves the supernatural (or the promise of the supernatural), it often involves the discovery of mysterious elements of antiquity, and it usually takes its protagonists into strange or frightening old buildings.

In the 1790s, novelists rediscovered what Walpole had imagined. The doyenne of Gothic novelists was Ann Radcliffe, and her most famous novel, The Mysteries of Udolpho (1794) took its title from the name of a fictional Italian castle where much of the action is set. Like Walpole, she created a brooding aristocratic villain, Montoni, to threaten her resourceful virgin heroine Emily with an unspeakable fate. All of Radcliffe’s novels are set in foreign lands, often with lengthy descriptions of sublime scenery. Udolpho is set amongst the dark and looming Apennine Mountains – Radcliffe derived her settings from travel books. On the title page of most of her novels was the description that was far more common than the word ‘gothic’: her usual subtitle was ‘A Romance’. Other Gothic novelists of the period used the same word for their tales, advertising their supernatural thrills. A publishing company, Minerva Press, grew up simply to provide an eager public with this new kind of fiction.

Radcliffe’s fiction was the natural target for Jane Austen’s satire in Northanger Abbey. The book’s novel-loving heroine, Catherine Morland, imposes on reality the Gothic plots with which she is familiar. In fact, Radcliffe’s mysteries all turn out to have natural, if complicated, explanations. Some critics, like Coleridge, complained about her timidity in this respect. Yet she had made a discovery: ‘gothic’ truly came alive in the thoughts and anxieties of her characters. Gothic has always been more about fear of the supernatural than the supernatural itself. Other Gothic novelists were less circumspect than Radcliffe. Matthew Lewis’s The Monk (1796), was an experiment in how outrageous a Gothic novelist can be. After a parade of ghosts, demons and sexually inflamed monks, it has a final guest appearance by Satan himself.
A second wave of Gothic novels in the second and third decades of the 19th century established new conventions. Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* (1818) gave a scientific form to the supernatural formula. Charles Maturin’s *Melmoth the Wanderer* (1820) featured a Byronic anti-hero who had sold his soul for a prolonged life. And James Hogg’s elaborately titled *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner* (1824) is the story of a man pursued by his own double. A character’s sense of encountering a double of him- or herself, also essential to *Frankenstein*, was established as a powerful new Gothic motif. Doubles crop up throughout Gothic fiction, the most famous example being the late 19th-century Gothic novella, Robert Louis Stevenson’s *Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*.

This motif is one of the reasons why Sigmund Freud’s concept of the uncanny (or *unheimlich*, as it is in German) is often applied to Gothic fiction. In his 1919 paper on ‘The Uncanny’ Freud drew his examples from the Gothic tales of E T A Hoffmann in order to account for the special feeling of disquiet – the sense of the uncanny – that they aroused. He argued that the making strange of what should be familiar is essential to this, and that it is disturbing and fascinating because it recalls us to our original infantile separation from or origin in the womb.

Another writer who commonly exploited doubles in his Gothic tales was the American Edgar Allan Poe. He used many of the standard properties of Gothic (medieval settings, castles and ancient houses, aristocratic corruption) but turned these into an exploration of extreme psychological states. He was attracted to the genre because he was fascinated by fear. In his hands Gothic was becoming ‘horror’, a term properly applied to the most famous late-Victorian example of Gothic, Bram Stoker’s *Dracula*. The opening section of *Dracula* uses some familiar Gothic properties: the castle whose chambers contain the mystery that the protagonist must solve; the sublime scenery that emphasises his isolation. Stoker learned from the vampire stories that had appeared earlier in the 19th century (notably *Carmilla* (1872) by Sheridan Le Fanu, who was his friend and collaborator) and exploited the narrative methods of Wilkie Collins’s ‘sensation fiction’. *Dracula* is written in the form of journal entries and letters by various characters, caught up in the horror of events. The fear and uncertainty on which Gothic had always relied is enacted in the narration.

Meanwhile Gothic had become so influential that we can detect its elements in much mainstream Victorian fiction. Both Emily and Charlotte Brontë included intimations of the supernatural within narratives that were otherwise attentive to the realities of time, place and material constraint. In the opening episode of Emily Brontë’s *Wuthering Heights*, the narrator, Lockwood, has to stay the night at Heathcliff’s house because of heavy snow. He finds Cathy’s diary, written as a child, and nods off while reading it. There follows a powerfully narrated nightmare in which an icy hand reaches to him through the window and the voice of Catherine Linton calls to be let in. The vision seems to prefigure what he will later discover about the history of Cathy and Heathcliff. Half in jest, Lockwood tells Heathcliff that Wuthering Heights is haunted; the novel, centred as it is on a house, seems to exploit in a new way the Gothic idea that entering an old building means entering the stories of those who have lived in it before.
Two of Charlotte Brontë’s novels, *Jane Eyre* and *Villette*, feature old buildings that appear to be haunted. As in the Gothic fiction of Ann Radcliffe, the apparition seen by Jane Eyre in Thornfield Hall, where she is a governess, and the ghostly nun glimpsed by Lucy Snowe in the attic of the old Pensionnat where she teaches, have rational explanations. But Charlotte Brontë likes to raise the fears of her protagonists as to the presence of the supernatural, as if they were latterday Gothic heroines. Gothic still provides the vocabulary of apprehensiveness. Similarly, Wilkie Collins may have introduced into fiction, as Henry James said, ‘those most mysterious of mysteries, the mysteries which are at our own doors’, but he liked his reminders of traditional Gothic plots. In *The Woman in White*, all events turn out to be humanly contrived, yet the sudden appearance to the night-time walker of the figure of ‘a solitary Woman, dressed from head to foot in white garments’ haunts the reader as it does the narrator, Walter Hartright (ch. 4). *The Moonstone* is a detective story with a scientific explanation, but we never forget the legend that surrounds the diamond of the title, and the curse on those who steal it – a curse that seems to come true. The final triumph of Gothic is to become, as in these examples, a vital thread within novels that otherwise take pains to convince us of what is probable and rational.
Curator Greg Buzwell considers duality in *Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*, exploring how the novel engages with contemporary debates about evolution, degeneration, consciousness, homosexuality and criminal psychology.

Robert Louis Stevenson’s *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (1886) is a late-Victorian variation on ideas first raised in Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* (1818). Stevenson’s monster, however, is not artificially created from stitched-together body parts, but rather emerges fully formed from the dark side of the human personality. In the story Dr Jekyll, an admired member of the professional Victorian middle-classes, conducts a series of scientific experiments which unleash from his own psyche the ‘bestial’ and ‘ape-like’ Mr Hyde (ch. 10). Gothic fiction had examined the idea of the sinister alter ego or double before on many occasions but Stevenson’s genius with *Jekyll and Hyde* was to show the dual nature not only of one man but also of society in general. Throughout the story, respectability is doubled with degradation; abandon with restraint; honesty with duplicity. Even London itself has a dual nature, with its respectable streets existing side-by-side with areas notorious for their squalor and violence.

Viewed on a simple level, Dr Jekyll is a good man, much admired in his profession. Mr Hyde, meanwhile, is evil. He is a murderer; a monster who tramples upon a small girl simply because she happens to be in his way. On a deeper level, however, the comparison is not merely between good and evil but between evolution and degeneration. Throughout the narrative Mr Hyde’s physical appearance provokes disgust. He is described as ‘ape-like’, ‘troglodytic’ and ‘hardly human’ (ch. 2). As Mr Enfield, a well-known man about town and distant relative of Jekyll’s friend Mr Utterson, observes ‘There is something wrong with his appearance; something displeasing, something downright detestable’ (ch. 1). Some 15 years before *Jekyll and Hyde*, Charles Darwin had published *The Descent of Man* (1871), a book in which he concluded that humankind had ‘descended from a hairy, tailed quadruped’ which was itself ‘probably derived from an ancient marsupial animal’. Going back even further, Darwin hypothesised that these stages of evolution had been preceded, in a direct line, by ‘some amphibian-like creature, and this again from some fish-like animal’. Such a nightmarish biological lineage that denied the specialness of humans, feeds into many late-Victorian Gothic novels. Dracula’s ability to transform into the shape of a wolf or a bat is one example, while Dr Moreau’s experiments upon the hapless animals on his island as he attempts a barbaric form of accelerated evolution is another. Stevenson’s portrayal of Hyde works in a similar fashion. Mr Hyde is regarded as physically detestable but perhaps only because he subconsciously reminds those he encounters of their own distant evolutionary inheritance. When Dr Jekyll’s medical colleague, Dr Lanyon, witnesses Hyde transform back into Jekyll, the knowledge that the ugly, murderous beast exists within the respectable Victorian scientist sends him first to his sick-bed, and then to an early grave.

The depiction of Dr Jekyll’s house was possibly based on the residence of famous surgeon John Hunter (1728–1793), whose respectable and renowned house in Leicester Square in the late 18th century also had a secret. In order to teach and to gain knowledge about human anatomy, Hunter required human cadavers, many of them supplied by ‘resurrection
The front aspect of Dr Jekyll’s house presents a ‘great air of wealth and comfort’ (ch. 2). Meanwhile Mr Hyde, soon after we first encounter him, is seen entering a building which displays an air of ‘prolonged and sordid negligence’ (ch.1). The twist is that the reputable front and the rundown rear form two sides of the same property. Stevenson is not only making the point that the respectable and the disreputable frequently exist in close proximity, but also that a respectable façade is no guarantee against dark secrets lurking within. In a similar fashion, the seemingly decent Mr Enfield, a friend of the lawyer Mr Utterson, first encounters Hyde while ‘coming home from some place at the end of the world, about three o’clock of a black winter morning’ (ch. 1). Exactly where Mr Enfield has been, and what he has been up to, are never made clear but it sounds far from innocent. Throughout the book the people and events that initially seem innocent and straightforward become dark and sinister when viewed more closely.

Just as the differing appearances of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde play upon the theories emerging from Charles Darwin’s work, so their differing personalities explore contemporary debates about moral behaviour and the possible plurality of human consciousness. By literally splitting the consciousness of Dr Jekyll into two – the decent side that attempts, and largely succeeds, in suppressing desires that run contrary to the dictates of society; and the amoral side that runs riot in an attempt to gratify animal desire – Stevenson explores in a heightened fashion the battles played out in every one of us. As Dr Jekyll observes ‘I saw that, of the two natures that contended in the field of my consciousness, even if I could rightly be said to be either, it was only because I was radically both’ (ch. 10). Through Hyde, the respectable Dr Jekyll is freed from the restraints imposed by society – ‘my devil had been long caged, he came out roaring’ (ch. 10). In his confession at the end of the book, Jekyll observes that, ultimately, he will have to choose between being Dr Jekyll or Mr Hyde. To become the latter would mean giving up on noble aspirations and being ‘forever despised and friendless’. (ch. 10) To become Jekyll, however, means giving up the sensual and disreputable appetites he can indulge as Hyde. In spite of the curious circumstances of his own case it is, as the melancholy Jekyll observes, a struggle and debate ‘as old and commonplace as man’ (ch. 10).

In an early draft of the book, Stevenson has Dr Jekyll confess ‘From an early age … I became in secret the slave of certain appetites’. Such an observation inevitably leads us to wonder what such ‘appetites’ could have been. For some as the book’s other characters – as well as the first readers of the book – unaware that Jekyll and Hyde are the same person, the relationship between the two must have appeared puzzling. Why would the respectable Jekyll grant the vile Hyde free access to his house, let alone alter his will so that in the event of his death or disappearance Hyde will inherit. For Mr Enfield there can only be one answer: ‘Blackmail, I suppose; an honest man paying through the nose for some of the capers of his youth’ (ch. 1). Stevenson, because of the era in which he was writing, could not make specific references to homosexuality, but much of the plot initially hints at Hyde blackmailing Jekyll because of the doctor’s unorthodox sexual preferences.
Homosexuality and blackmail were frequently linked in this period. Section 11 of the Criminal Law Amendment Act, 1885 (the year in which Stevenson was writing his tale), made ‘gross indecency’ – a nebulous term that was not precisely defined – a criminal activity. In practice, the Act was primarily used to prosecute homosexuals on the flimsiest of evidence and was dubbed a ‘Blackmailer’s Charter’. Dr Jekyll is a bachelor – indeed the entire story is played out amongst a small circle of unmarried men. As implied by comments such as Mr Utterson’s ‘It turns me cold to think of this creature [Hyde] stealing like a thief to Harry’s bedside’, homosexuality (either as a secret from the doctor’s past, or else as a current relationship between the youthful Hyde and the lonely Jekyll) is a thinly-veiled theme throughout (ch. 2). Even the behaviour of the elderly MP Sir Danvers Carew, who meets his death at Edward Hyde’s hands after ‘accosting’ Hyde ‘with a very pretty manner’ late one night down by the river, takes on a new light once the reader becomes aware of homosexuality as an undercurrent in the story (ch. 3). In this tale of double-lives nobody is quite what they initially appear to be.

The fascinating instances of doubling in Stevenson’s tale did not come to an end upon the book’s publication. In a macabre twist, events from real life began to overlay themselves upon the narrative. The Whitechapel Murders occurred in the autumn of 1888, two years after the publication of Jekyll and Hyde, and the real murderer and the fictitious Mr Hyde were swiftly paired in the public imagination. Indeed, the murders became so entangled with the story, Richard Mansfield who famously played Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde in the stage adaptation produced a year after the publication of the novel, was accused of being the Ripper murderer by a member of the public.

When Hyde attacks Sir Danvers Carew he beats him to death with his walking stick, commenting afterwards ‘With a transport of glee, I mauled the unresisting body, tasting delight from every blow’ (ch. 10). The ferocity of the attack mirrors the intensity of the Ripper murders. Jekyll and Hyde pointed towards an unpalatable truth. Mr Hyde, with his ‘ape-like’ appearance conformed to contemporary criminological theory in which delinquents displayed visible traits indicative of their unpalatable natures. Dr Jekyll, however, a ‘large, well-made, smooth-faced man of fifty’ would not conform to such a theory and yet, as we know, Jekyll and Hyde are one and the same; two faces of a single personality (ch. 3). This leads to the uncomfortable possibility that one could pass a monster such as Jack the Ripper in the street and yet only see a respectable, civilised gentleman exhibiting absolutely no trace of the depraved killer lurking within Jekyll and Hyde and Jack the Ripper.
The Victorian period saw Gothic fiction evolving and taking on new characteristics. With a focus on the late 19th century curator Greg Buzwell traces common themes and imagery found in *Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*, *Dracula* and *The Picture of Dorian Gray*.

For centuries Gothic fiction has provided authors with imaginative ways to address contemporary fears. As a result, the nature of Gothic novels has altered considerably from one generation to the next. Early Gothic novels, such as Horace Walpole’s *The Castle of Otranto* (1764) and Ann Radcliffe’s *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794) were set in exotic landscapes and distant times; the action took place in crumbling castles and torch-lit monasteries while the villains tended to be dissolute Catholic noblemen and corrupt, sex-crazed monks. Later, in the early Victorian period, authors such as Charles Dickens borrowed typically Gothic motifs – the innocent abandoned in a threatening environment for example, or the mysterious stranger with secrets to hide – and transplanted them to contemporary Britain to highlight modern concerns. Stories such as *Oliver Twist* (1838) and *Bleak House* (1853) used Gothic imagery as a means of drawing attention to the social ills afflicting the poor in modern London. Urban slums with their dark, labyrinthine streets and seedy areas of vice and squalor supplanted ivy-clad castles and catacombs as the settings for Gothic terror. Later still in the Victorian *fin de siècle* the scene changes again: it is no longer the physical landscape that provides the location for Gothic tales but rather, more disturbingly, the human body itself. Works such as Robert Louis Stevenson’s *Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (1886); Oscar Wilde’s *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1891); Arthur Machen’s ‘The Great God Pan’ (1894); H G Wells’ *The Time Machine* (1895) and Bram Stoker’s *Dracula* (1897) all explore the theme of the human mind and body changing and developing, mutating, corrupting and decaying, and all do so in response to evolutionary, social and medical theories that were emerging at the time.

Late-Victorian society was haunted by the implications of Darwinism. The ideas outlined in Charles Darwin’s *On the Origin of Species* (1859) and *The Descent of Man* (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 ‘troglodytic’ 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.
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.

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.

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.
ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON’S INSPIRATION FOR THE STRANGE CASE OF DR. JEKYLL AND MR. HYDE

April Edwards

In Anne Stiles’ article “Robert Louis Stevenson’s Jekyll and Hyde and the Double Brain”, she argues that though Stevenson claimed he had no previous knowledge of the psychological idea of multiple personalities, he may have read several scientific articles published during the 1870’s and 1880’s from French and British popular medical journals about this condition, which inspired him to write several works including Deacon Brodie: A Double Life, The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, and “Markheim”. During the Victorian Era, contemporary scientists were discussing the idea of everyone having a double brain. As they saw it, the right-hemisphere and the left-hemisphere were associated with distinct attributes (this still remains true) and that a person may have the opposing sides pulling them towards specific characteristics. Stiles explains Stevenson’s interpretation by saying “While Jekyll exhibits left-hemisphere attributes (masculinity, whiteness, logic, intelligence, humanness), Hyde embodies right-hemisphere traits (femininity, racial indeterminacy, madness, emotion, and animality)”. However during this time, Stevenson may also have heard about the dual-brain theory, where the right and left hemispheres could act independently such that an over-active right brain may lead someone to very emotional and irrational acts, such as murder. Stiles discusses an article “The Brain of a Criminal Lunatic” by the physiologist David Ferrier (1882) where he discovered an over-enlarged right-hemisphere and an abnormally-small left-hemisphere during an autopsy of a woman who was mentally ill and murdered her children. During the Victorian Era, many scientists proposed the idea of needing to equally exercise both areas of the brain in order to prevent one side of the dual-brain from taking over. Stevenson likened this idea of a dual-brain in Jekyll and Hyde:

“The evil side of my nature, to which I had now transferred the stamping efficacy, was less robust and less developed than the good which I had just deposed. Again, in the course of my life, which had been, after all, nine tenths a life of effort, virtue and control, it had been much less exercised and much less exhausted. And hence, as I think, it came about that Edward Hyde was so much smaller, slighter and younger than Henry Jekyll” (55).

In the beginning, Jekyll and the right-brain was the dominant personality but as the story progresses and Jekyll increasingly turns into Hyde, the secondary persona strengthens until eventually Jekyll is no longer in control and Hyde can appear whenever he wants.

“That part of me which I had the power of projecting, had lately been much exercised and nourished; it had seemed to me of late as though the body of Edward Hyde had grown in stature, as though (when I wore that form) I were conscious of a more generous tide of blood; and I began to spy a danger that, if this were much prolonged, the balance of my nature might be permanently overthrown, the power of voluntary change be forfeited and the character of Edward Hyde become irrevocably mine” (59).
It can be connected in the novel how the new medical theories about dual-brains and multiple personalities that Stevenson may have been exposed to played a significant impact in his writing. After the publication of *Jekyll and Hyde*, Frederic W. H. Myers sent his 1886 article titled “Multiplex Personality” in which he discussed the case study of Louis V. Also at the time two other famous case studies of Felida X. and Sergeant F. were summarized and discussed in the *Cornhill Magazine* during the late 1870’s, of which Stevenson was also a contributor. These case studies of potential interest to Stevenson along with his own scientific interests may have led him to create Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde. The fact that Stevenson titles the novella as *The Strange Case* infers that he sees the potential behind his story being like a psychological case study of someone with multiple personalities. Stiles goes on to say “In other words, Stevenson does not merely reproduce the typical form of the case study, which was generally dry, unemotional, and detached from the patient’s suffering. Stevenson combines the basic structure of the case study with a tone and subject matter more appropriate to the Gothic, so that his novella suffers from a case of split personality like that of the protagonist himself. The logical, left-brain perspective of science combines with the primitive, emotional, right-brain perspective of the Gothic, demonstrating how Stevenson incorporates the polarities of the dual-brain theory into the literary form of his famous novella”.

I agree that there were many new psychological and scientific theories being discussed during the time when Stevenson was working on *Jekyll and Hyde* and that while he may not want to admit any inspiration from these theories, there are definite connections that can be drawn between the two. While the story has been seen historically as a tale of “good versus evil” within a man, there are much subtler psychological depths with which we can study Stevenson’s “case study”.

**Works Cited**

Source 6

The Anxiety of the Unforeseen in Robert Louis Stevenson’s Jekyll and Hyde

Ben D. Fuller

Robert Louis Stevenson typifies an anxiety shared by many prolific Victorian writers: that God will disappear as human psychology is readily researched and understood. Such a concern is evident in Stevenson’s personal experiences and writings, wherein he passionately expresses the belief that there is no such thing as definitive evil or good in a person, a medieval notion that had survived through the Romantic movement and until the time of skeptical Victorian writers. Following the example of his fellow Victorians, Stevenson created a character, Mr. Hyde, who exemplifies the concentrated evil present in not some, but all people. In the short novel in which Hyde appears, Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, Stevenson portrays Jekyll’s experiment as a failed attempt at reconciliation of faith and science in regards to questions of human nature and character. Through allusions to and inversions of past Romantic notions of nature and morality, he presents Mr. Hyde as a paradigm of the unforeseen and unwanted horrors that intriguing, yet uncertain discoveries may entail.

In Father Damien, An Open Letter to the Reverend Dr. Hyde of Honolulu, Stevenson expresses an understanding that a person’s religion does determine his morality. He notes that despite the fact that both Hyde and the missionary Damien (the man whose sainthood he’s defending) are religious men with similar goals for the Hawaiian lepers, Hyde, simply because Damien is a Catholic, finds petty reasons to discredit him (such as poor hygiene and alleged licentiousness). While Stevenson concedes that Damien was “indiscreet and officious” and could not help “human grumbling” when faced with making sacrifices, he emphasizes that he learned a “mania for doctoring” regardless (25).

This is in contrast to Hyde, who, despite making no such effort, considers his religious beliefs (and by extension, himself) superior to Damien in every way. Hyde, then, serves as the model for the character who shares his name: he is consumed with so much hypocrisy and mercilessness that he closely resembles pure evil, and is perhaps more “in tune” with his evil side for taking “pleasure to find and publish” Damien’s faults and failures (30). Damien, on the other hand, can be viewed as more in touch with his good side for having “honesty of mind” to acknowledge such faults (29).

It becomes clear, then, that Damien, along with Stevenson himself, serve as templates for Dr. Jekyll, whose Biblical allusions in the novel’s closing narrative appear to characterize him as a man who is unambiguously religious, but with human flaws (in the case of Damien), or at least once religious, but now skeptical (in the case of Stevenson). Moreover, Jekyll’s description of Hyde’s antics as “apelike” in the same narrative suggests Stevenson’s distaste for the possible negative ramifications of Darwinian evolution (Stevenson 874). Also, Jekyll confesses himself the “chief of sinners,” and “sufferers,” suggesting he shows remorse on a spiritual level and believes in divine retribution (Stevenson 849).
Nonetheless, he clearly states he is a proponent of “transcendental medicine” and shuns “narrow and material views,” characterizing him as similar to Damien in his earnestness to help others through innovation: Damien creates a sanctuary for the lepers, while Jekyll seeks to solve “those provinces of good and ill which divide the compound of man’s dual nature” (Stevenson 863-64). Still, he holds flexible views about God and the mechanisms of human personality (much like Stevenson).

Certain subtleties in the text also connect Stevenson to Jekyll. G.K. Chesterton notes, for instance, that the story, though presented as if taking place in London, feels rather like it takes place in Stevenson’s native Edinburgh, with Jekyll’s “horror of mixing his reputation with moral frailty” being something with which Stevenson could relate, as it would be a concern for “the upper middle classes in solid Puritan communities” of Edinburgh (183). Stevenson’s story came from discreet defiance of social pressure to adhere to religion, and so Jekyll’s experiment allegorically represents Stevenson’s writing of the story itself.

His agnostic sensibilities aside, Stevenson’s attachment to the Romantics is apparent in the novel’s Romantic allusions, all of which are transformed to serve the story’s purpose as a sophisticated work of psychological horror. Stevenson evidently was not fond of the late Victorian era’s large market for popular fiction. Patrick Brantlinger notes this, proposing the novel is, in fact, “an unconscious allegory about the commercialization of literature” (198). Jekyll’s “great esteem” for “pious work,” despite being a scientist, is the result of him being the surrogate for an agnostic author with Romantic sensibilities—one who leisure reads as a Romantic would, never touching Victorian popular fiction (Stevenson 857).

Stevenson’s nostalgia and subsequent retooling of the Romantics is most obvious in his over-arching theme of double personality. Returning to the Open Letter, the “bad hygiene” that Dr. Hyde attributes to Damien seems to transfer to the character of Mr. Hyde, Jekyll’s “bad side,” whose physical “dirtiness” is apparent from people’s reactions to him. Though he establishes in his letter to Dr. Hyde that he thinks physical appearance or dirtiness irrelevant if it does not hinder good works, Stevenson, because he is satirizing the medieval idea of ugliness being associated with character, presents Hyde as inspiring “a strong feeling of deformity” for a reason that is apparent, yet impossible to grasp (Stevenson 836). This mystery of the ugliness of Mr. Hyde, here, becomes an inversion of the Romantic notion of the mystery of the beautiful power of nature. While the Romantics had no desire to understand nature and were content to bask in the sublimity of its mysteriousness, the Victorians, as Jekyll reflects, seek the “greed of curiosity” (Stevenson 863).

The inexplicable ugliness of Mr. Hyde, then, becomes something undesirable and impossible to comprehend not because it is sublime, but because it is ghastly. Stevenson also owes his attention to features to his forerunner Browning, who, in “Fra Lippo Lippi,” suggests through the words of the title character that “watching folks’ faces” is an adequate psychological evaluation of character (151). This theory is comforting to Stevenson in that it does not completely disregard former notions, though it does complicate human morality by disqualifying mere deformity as an absolute factor in determining one’s character.
Mr. Hyde’s physical appearance thus cannot explain his intrinsic evil. Rather, Stevenson’s explanation for primal evil in humans is that it is dormant until activated. This stands in contrast to Wordsworth’s idea that primal goodness in humans is present in an ideal pre-existence of the soul which diminishes into a mere intimation in childhood before fading away as a person grows into an adult. In his quintessential work on this Neo-Platonist idea, *Ode: Intimations of Immortality*, Wordsworth insists that “our birth is both a sleep and a forgetting” (23). Stevenson counters this in a scene from Lanyon’s narrative in which Lanyon encounters Hyde. Hyde’s smallness is emphasized with the image of his clothes “being enormously too large for him,” impressing the image of a child (861). Unlike a child as envisioned by the Romantics, Hyde does not remind of the lost “radiance” and “splendor” of the natural world (Wordsworth 39). Rather, he causes feelings of “incipient rigor,” such as that which Lanyon senses. He can only ascribe the sudden chill to a perception that lies not in a past pre-existent state but deep in “the nature of man,” turning on “some nobler hinge than the principle of hatred” (Stevenson 861). In other words, Stevenson inverts Wordsworth’s Neo-Platonism by having humans capable not of sensing a world removed from themselves, but a world within themselves—not a heavenly far-gone world, but a dark world of “black secrets,” as Utterson says, palpable in the presence not of children, but of Mr. Hyde (Stevenson 841).

In addition to the Romantic idea of sublime knowledge of nature, Stevenson also manipulates the means by which such knowledge is transferred to mortals. The “incipient rigor” emanated by Hyde can be compared to the winter weather of Coleridge’s “Frost at Midnight,” which expresses his sentimentality for his infant son’s potential to learn from nature “the lovely shapes and sounds intelligible of that eternal language, which thy God utters” (291). It is the “frost,” performing its “secret ministry,” that leads him to the revelation of the child’s potential, and it this notion of feelings and imagination being sent forth by the forces of nature (specifically by the wind) that is inverted in Stevenson’s handling of both setting and characters’ emotions (Coleridge 290).

Stevenson’s London is established as a cold and dark place, and nature seems not to deliver divine mysteries, but rather, as Jekyll puts it, “sufferings and terrors so unmanning” (Stevenson 849-50). Victorian essayist John Henry, Cardinal Newman spoke of knowledge as “something which grasps what it perceives through sense,” and Stevenson purposely reflects this notion in his characters’ attitudes (93). As noted by Vladimir Nabokov, he appeals to Victorian sensibilities by having the fantasy pass through the minds of “matter-of-fact” persons to make it “plausible” (186).

Thus, for the characters, hard evidence is favored over intuitions, seen when Poole relates a feeling “in [his] marrow kind of cold and thin” upon seeing Mr. Hyde, and must admit it is “not evidence” of Hyde’s malevolence, though “a man has his feelings” (Stevenson 855). Stevenson distorts the Romantic motif of the wind in the same episode: when Poole and Utterson go to investigate Jekyll’s theatre and get nearer to Mr. Hyde, the wind obscures rather than enlightens, “toss[ing] the light of the candle to and fro about their steps” (856). Ultimately, aided by his dark and confusing portrayal of the world, Stevenson portrays reactionary feelings as revealing tangible horrors rather than beautiful mystical truths,
reflecting the change of interest from enigmatic natural power to hard science that accompanied the Victorian era.

In doing so, he follows in the footsteps of such earlier Victorians as Alfred, Lord Tennyson, who describes the artist’s burden in “The Lady of Shallott,” wherein the title character, a seamstress, becomes “sick of shadows” upon falling in love with Sir Lancelot (42). It is the reverse with Stevenson’s characters: through Hyde, as Nabokov puts it, the “hidden artist” surfaces from within sensible people like Utterson (186). Hyde does not capture, but rather “enslave[s]” the imagination, in contrast to the Lady of Shallott, whose is enslaved by her imagination (Stevenson 838). Hyde’s nature can be explained in scientific, not imaginative terms. For Jekyll, he inspires feelings of “distress that no fancy can exaggerate” (Stevenson 860). Such a feeling is very human and all-too-real when compared to the “emotion[s] recollected in tranquility” that Wordsworth, in his Preface to the Lyrical Ballads, describes as causing “spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings” (146).

Last of note is the huge debt Stevenson owes to Mary Shelley’s Frankenstein, the Romantic work from which he imitates a story and complex narrative structure that he appropriates for the purpose of reflecting Victorian anxieties. Like Frankenstein, Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde falls under the genre of “Gothic fiction,” which, in the words of Peter K. Garrett, has a “characteristic complication of narrative form and multiplication of voices” as to deepen the mystery, suggesting the “uncertain success” of “control of meaning” (196). The narrative device itself, like in Frankenstein, reflects in form the story’s theme of a force that cannot be contained; however, in Frankenstein, this force is the monster, while it is doubly Hyde and science in Stevenson’s novel.

Stevenson inverts the story of Frankenstein itself by gradually revealing the monstrous nature of a human creator rather than the human nature of a monstrous creation. He achieves this with multiple narratives, in the same vein as Shelley. Like in Frankenstein, the narratives gradually reveal the monstrous perpetrators of a crime through the perpetrator’s eventual confession (the murders of William Frankenstein and Danvers Carew, respectively). In his Victorian appropriation of the device, Stevenson introduces a qualification to the confession found also in Browning’s similarly multi-narrative The Ring and the Book: here, too, a crime (adultery) is confessed, but Pompilia, in her confession, resigns to the fact that God is in ultimate control and that “all human plans and projects come to nought,” as evidenced by her damning situation (380). Such “plans and projects” might include Jekyll’s experiment, which comes to nought by killing him rather than ushering in an age of beneficial scientific discovery. So, while Victor’s monster escapes after his confession to do more damage after being shunned by his creator, Jekyll’s monster, after Jekyll’s (and, by extension, Hyde’s) confession, becomes unleashed upon the world after being pursued by his creator. As a result, he goes on a destructive rampage—a rampage similar to Victor’s monster’s and science’s. It is all one rampage: the rampage against God.

From this, it is clear that Stevenson inverts the main thrust of Frankenstein: Victor abandoning his creation. Jekyll does not abandon Hyde; rather, Hyde abandons Jekyll. The ultimate theme of the two novels is that the monstrous side of living creatures is unavoidable and will be triggered in some way. In the case of Victor’s monster, it is triggered
by rejection, a type of harm. The harming of a creation causing disaster for the perpetrator
is a Romantic idea best exemplified by the senseless crime against God’s creature, the
albatross, committed by the title character in Coleridge’s “The Rime of the Ancient
Mariner.” Stevenson fashions the idea of harming God’s creation into the context of
scientific fervor. Jekyll is met with disaster because he harmed what is God’s in the sense
that he brought forth and sought to manipulate deep-seated aspects of creation that only
God ought control. Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, then, stands in contrast
to Frankenstein in that it is not about the consequences that come with creating life, but
with revealing life: life, whose natural mechanisms are tantalizingly curious, yet
incomprehensibly hideous, like Mr. Hyde.

Throughout The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, Stevenson expresses an awareness
of the consequences that are sure to arise should psychology be able to incontrovertibly
define the origins of human character. If it is true that evil is inherent in all people or at least
the result of people’s experience rather than divine providence, then it becomes more
difficult to say with certainty that God had any role in forming the hearts and minds of
human beings. Using his own experience with religious hypocrites as well as flawed but
good people, Stevenson crafts a story that represents the world as both horrific and curious
in the way it affects humans.

Stevenson does not dismiss Romantic explanations of nature and human influence, but
rather inverts and darkens them that they may reflect the godlessness of science. Jekyll’s
experiment is indeed fanciful, “transcendental,” as he names it, but it cannot match the
tranquil acceptance of a mysterious, Romantic world. The age has simply changed, and
people yearn to satisfy curiosity, but as Jekyll admits, “It is one thing to mortify curiosity,
another to conquer it” (Stevenson 850). Science might not fully satisfy all humanity yearns
to know, Stevenson suggests, and if it continues to cast doubt on the existence of God,
perhaps the Romantics were right in leaving some mysteries unsolved.

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Gothic Elements in 'The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde'

Charlotte Barrett

The relationship between scientific discourse and the Victorian Gothic is greatly emphasised when reading Robert Louis Stevenson's 1886 novella *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*. The work is now associated with the mental condition of a 'split personality', where two personalities of differing character reside in one person. However, the text was written before the science of psychology was firmly established, and the novella itself appears to be influenced by a variety of scientific theories predominant in the late-Victorian era.

Atavism

Cesare Lombroso's theory of atavism (discussed in greater detail in 'The Victorian Gothic' essay on this website) appears to have greatly influenced Stevenson's novella. The unsettling, dwarfish appearance of Edward Hyde and the violent behaviour he exhibits are clear atavistic traits. The Italian Criminologist Cesare Lombroso[Public Domain], via Wikimedia Commons *Jekyll and Hyde* is not the only text in which Stevenson manipulates Gothic tropes. In his short story 'Olalla', elements of atavism and heredity curses are woven into the story to create terror; the central protagonist becomes the victim of a bestial attack committed by the atavistic mother of the family with whom he is lodging.

Doubling

The Gothic element of *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* is represented via the theme of doubling. This is revealed to the reader by the horrifying transformation of Dr Henry Jekyll into the atavistic murderer Edward Hyde. The transformation is generated by the fear of regression, as both men are revealed to be the same person. Stevenson's depiction of the respectable gentleman Dr Jekyll as capable of the terrible behaviour exhibited by Mr Hyde, is evidence of his manipulation of Victorian anxieties and social fears. It shattered the veneer of class-conditioned respectability that covered and controlled the lives of respectable members of the population. As the text demonstrates, it is not only the impoverished, working classes living in the slum areas of the city that are capable of committing crimes; criminals are also found in educated, wealthy, and seemingly respectable echelons of society.

The theme of doubling is symbolised throughout the text. The city of London is split in two. The one side where Dr Jekyll, Mr Utterson and their contemporaries live and work is represented as smart, wealthy and educated area, identified as such in Utterson's referral to Cavendish square - the home of Dr Lanyon - as 'that citadel of medicine.' In contrast, the other side of London is represented by the district of Soho, a slum area of the city that symbolises an atavistic playground, where immoral behaviour is expected and therefore much less noticeable. Mr Hyde has a house in
this district, assumingly so his detestable appearance and violent behaviour go unquestioned and unnoticed.

Dr Jekyll's home also represents the Gothic in its double aspects. The house provides a contrasting space, used both for Dr Jekyll's domestic purposes and his scientific experiments. The laboratory at the end of the garden provides a convenient way of concealing his dubious experiments, and the side door onto the back-alley enables an appropriate means by which Hyde can come and go, without disturbing the household or being associated with Dr Jekyll.

Stevenson's skilful manipulation of Victorian anxieties is evident in the book's success. As testament to the book's popularity, there appeared in 1887 a stage version of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde, adapted by T.R Sullivan and Richard Mansfield. Mansfield was cast as the double-lead role, playing both Jekyll and Hyde. The adaptation was staged in London during the spate of unsolved murders committed by the infamous Jack the Ripper in the Whitechapel district. There were multiple theories circulating as to the identity of the murderer, with many suggesting he was highly educated or of royal birth. This fear parallels the shattered social veneer Stevenson presented in his novella thorough the revelation that the respectable Dr Jekyll is also the immoral murderer Mr Hyde.

Richard Mansfield depicted in double exposure as Jekyll and Hyde. Similar photographic trickery was used in the promotion of Spiritualism. Stevenson's text had resonating influence even in its stage form. Such was the terror felt by the public that Mansfield's ten-week performance at the Lyceum Theatre was shut down; his transformation into Mr Hyde was so convincing that his name was mentioned in the newspapers as a potential suspect.

Stevenson's *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* is one of many texts in the late-Victorian period that uses the Gothic genre to display Victorian cultural fears. Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897) employs the theory of atavism to render the central protagonist, Count Dracula himself, all the more terrifying. Like Hyde, the Count is a version of the degenerate. He was once a Transylvanian aristocrat, but the story portrays him in a state of regression killing others and feeding off their blood. The vampire is an embodiment of otherness, and, in Stoker's tale, Dracula becomes the site of Gothic horror, where late-Victorian cultural anxieties are manifested. The degenerate otherness of the Count also reveals a fear of decline and its link to imperial anxieties.

Regression and the fear of imperial decline is seen in H.G Well's 1895 text *The Time Machine*. The novel is narrated by the unnamed Time Traveller, who ends up in the year 802,701. The text expresses a fear over the future and an anxiety over the identity and purpose of human beings. The race of humans the Time Traveller encounters, the Eloi, have degenerated. They have lost the intelligence and scientific endeavour held by the Time Traveller and the human race in general; in the year the Time Traveller finds them, the Eloi are merely a food source for the sinister Morlocks, pale, blind cannibals who have evolved to adapt to their underground environment.
Source 8

The Figure of the Gentleman in 19th century Victorian England: The re-Fashioning of a Manhood Ideal

Alexandra Galakof

The Victorian Age is considered to be the heyday of the gentlemanly ideal, both in society and in literature. Indeed, the Victorian period developed a quasi-obsession with gentility and gentlemanliness. In the late 18th century, Edmund Burke already emphasized ‘the spirit of gentleman’ and complained that ‘the age of chivalry [was] gone… and the glory of Europe [was] extinguished’ (Reflections on the Revolution in France, 1790). The next generation of novelists in the 19th century, Thackeray, Dickens and Trollope, were also all fascinated by his image, and impressed upon society their views on gentlemanliness. The problem of the self-made or would-be gentleman -and the contradictions of the English class system- were some of the subjects they explored.

ETYMOLOGY AND ORIGINS

First used in 1413, it originated in feudal society. Thus the medieval knight, as a just righter of wrongs following a code of moral conduct and courteous toward women can be considered the forerunner (Berberich). Originally, the gentleman was the man of noble birth with his pure gens, but also the Church of England clergymen, members of Parliament and army officers.

From its earliest usage in English, the term “gentle” carried both social and moral connotations, as did “noble”. It was always a complimentary term. A man of gentle disposition (‘gentil’), as early as Chaucer’s time, meant “charming”, mild and tender, as well as “worthy”, noble, and well-bred. These qualities embodied a chivalric ideal, whereby men of high rank justified their superiority by their gracious and courteous bearing. In the 15th century, as land was the main source of status and power, the term certainly applied mainly to freehold landowners (Corfield).

By the 16th century it had become into general use as the Renaissance was an era of men’s self-fashioning. The self-fashioned man is associated with the self-made man, in the sense that he knowingly models himself according to certain behavioural rules; he builds-up a career, business or fortune from scratch. Central to this new man, manners were then required to impress at court and closely connected with gentlemanly behavior. Edmond Burke already wrote in his ‘First Letter on a Regicide Peace’ (1796) that they were “of more importance than laws…”

THE NEW 19TH CENTURY GENTLEMAN: A TWO-PHASE EVOLUTION
– The Family Evangelical Gentleman (Early Victorian Period)
The first decades of the 19th century were dominated by the austere, deeply religious
gentleman, primarily a family man, under the influence of the “Evangelical reform”. The Evangelists aimed at improving society corrupted by the excess of the aristocracy during the Regency (roughly 1795 to 1837, characterised by the freedom and extravagance of George IV and a world of glamorous elegance and follies) and the “hell raisers” of “the Grand Tour”, the club society in London and the scandalous behaviour of “Restoration Rakes”. The evangelical reformers prized sincerity and earnestness (i.e. seriousness) and stressed the importance of morality, particularly chastity, piety, and charity for others. On the other hand vanity, frivolity, and foppishness were condemned.
They called for austerity and severity in behaviour, claiming that a ‘sincere appearance was, like conduct, defined most importantly as a visible manifestation of a well-ordered, morally consistent inner self.’

In the second half of the 19th century, after decades of home education, boys were now increasingly sent to the newly formed or reformed public schools. In Eton, Rugby, Harrow, among the most prestigious, boys learnt above all else to be men: to grow muscles (by playing rugby and soccer) and to fight for their rightful place. This promotion of sport, classical education, religion and discipline introduced the concept of Muscular Christianity. It stood for neo-Spartan virility as exemplified by stoicism, hardness and endurance – qualities instilled in the famous aforementioned public schools. In his famous poem ‘If’ Rudyard Kipling typifies this masculine ethos by celebrating British stoicism and masculine rectitude: the classic British stiff upper lip as he came to be known. In other words a strong and self-reliant man in control of his emotions (self-control). The stress was no longer on educating refined gentlemen and etiquette books, but on raising hardened empire-builders, and tough adventurers ready to conquer new worlds.

Nonetheless, the Victorian gentleman was still a Romantic at heart, deeply embedded in rose-tinted medieval notions of chivalry and knight-errantry.
Girouard points out that the goal of the revival of the chivalry tradition was to produce a ruling class self-justified by its moral qualities deemed necessary to rulers. Therefore, gentlemen were to run the country because they were morally superior. The public schools then institutionalized this new ideal with service to the nation as a long-term goal.

Another important factor brought about by the Victorian period and industrialization regarding the definition of the gentleman was the growth of a wealthy middle-class (despite the rampant poverty of the working class). In their quest for social esteem and prestige, in a society still dominated by the land-owning aristocracy, the “rank” of gentleman proved to be very attractive to them as the “ultimate benchmark”. Unlike most of Europe at the time, they did not feel any aspiration to overthrow the old order even though they were eager to establish their own cultural identity.
Refinement and intelligence became key to signify not necessarily a distinction of blood but a distinction of position, education and manners. Character, courtesy, and cultivation were declared to be replacing birth and wealth (which remains however important in terms of lifestyle) as the hallmarks of the ‘natural gentleman’.
Hence the formation of two kinds of gentlemen: the man of noble birth or good family, who
was a gentleman by right, and the self-made gentleman (or ‘nature’s gentleman’). This distinction came to be dubbed the ‘gentleman of birth’ as opposed to the ‘gentleman of worth’.

Mason points it out as well and stated that the latter was devoid of class connotations: everyman could aspire to it, provided he adhered to the set code of manners advocating honour, charity and social responsibility. Thus, despite the pressures of an increasingly competitive and capitalistic world, the gentlemanly ethic as a bonding credo for men, fosters certain ideals of honesty and generosity.

The dual nature of gentlemanliness led to a constant debate and redefinition. One of the problems the Victorians faced was to preserve its exclusiveness while making it more inclusive.

Moreover, under the influence of the figure of the dandy (sort of evil twin of the gentleman, who advocated idleness and uselessness), the gentleman should be able to live without working (and free from « base » business preoccupation) so that he could dedicate himself to leisure and the cultivation of style in accordance with gentlemanly life. This view clashed with the idea that it was out of the gentleman’s character to live off other people’s toil but also economic ambition, thrift (like Scrooge minus his stone-hearted character) and responsibility (running into debt was shameful). Thus, it challenged the dignity of (hard) work and thereby undermined the building blocks of the new industrial society. The letter from The Complete English Tradesman by Daniel Defoe written in 1726 exemplifies well this ideological dispute.

Oscar Wilde contributed of course famously to the figure of the ‘gentleman-dandy’, prominent in his comedies of manners. He used him both to poke fun at the hypocrisy and superficiality of the upper class along with its strict code of morals through his hilarious cynicism, but also to call for a life motivated primarily by pleasure, as contended by Jack in The Importance of Being Earnest: ‘Oh, pleasure, pleasure! What else should bring one anywhere?’, while Algernon mocks especially the -boring- institution of marriage, one of the tenets of the family gentleman. Miss Prism unites these two themes by commenting -reproachfully- that ‘people who live entirely for pleasure usually are [unmarried]’, echoed by her niece Cecily who praises ‘one who leaves the pleasures of London to sit by a bed of pain’. These two views represent the straitlaced Victorian society in opposition to self-indulgence. Wilde’s voice can be heard in Algernon’s statement/plea that his ‘duty as a gentleman has never interfered with [his] pleasures…’, that can be read as an attempt to show that the two were not incompatible contrary to the common belief and that having a good time was not immoral. Ultimately he echoes the author’s dandy philosophy that living should be a kind of art in which one creates oneself, fashioning themselves as art with refines tastes and values (dandy-aesthete). An elite class who stood beyond the dictates of everyday life and also allowed to transgress it if they desired it (same-sex intimacy or womanizers).

Finally the late 19th -fin de siecle- scandals associated with the rise of criminality, prostitution (including children) and homosexuality observed in seemingly perfectly
respectable Victorian gentlemen also tarnished and threatened this ideal by revealing his hypocritical facade and degeneration. The gentleman turned to be a ‘scoundrel’ (Dryden). This is embodied in the character of Dr Jekyll (representing the quintessential bourgeois gentleman, an affluent and educated member of an established profession) and Mr Hyde who symbolizes the -repressed- dark side of the gentleman in complete contradiction to his moral standards and decency... We find also this duplicity, in a more lighthearted way, in the character of Jack by Oscar Wilde who lives a double life (upstanding in the countryside and hedonistic in London under the fake name of Ernest, which serves also to satirize the earnestness of the traditional gentleman). ‘The revelation of corruption and abuse on the part of respectable gentleman, (...) shook English moral complacency to its foundations’, comments Dryden.
Dr Carolyn Burdett explores how Victorian thinkers used Darwin’s theory of evolution in forming their own social, economic and racial theories, thereby extending Darwin’s influence far beyond its original sphere.

Charles Darwin’s *On the Origin of Species* did not include human beings in its discussions of species evolution. However, Darwin’s ideas were soon being applied to human groups and organisations. The shorthand term ‘Darwinian’ appeared very quickly after 1859 and was used in loose ways to refer to many different accounts of social development and progress. Some of these had little in common with Darwin’s theory, other than the belief that biological concepts could be applied to human communities. By the late 1870s, the phrase ‘social Darwinism’ began to be heard and, in the following decades, ‘Darwinism’ was used to describe and justify a whole range of competing political and ideological positions.

Many Victorians recognised in evolutionary thinking a vision of the world that seemed to fit their own social experience. The scale of change during the 19th century, and the impact on people’s lives of industrialisation, urbanisation and technological innovation, was unprecedented. The idea of a ‘struggle for existence’ that was central to Darwin’s theory of biological evolution was a powerful way to describe Britain’s competitive capitalist economy in which some people became enormously wealthy and others struggled amidst the direst poverty.

Traditional liberal ideas valued the independence and autonomy of individuals and argued that, wherever possible, the state should adopt a ‘laissez-faire’ (or ‘leave alone’) position. Economically, too, markets should be allowed to operate freely, allowing wealth creation to flourish through competition. Evolution seemed to confirm this view: species compete and struggle and only some – the fittest and best – survive. In fact, Darwin was convinced that cooperation was also important, especially for those creatures, including humans, who live in groups. Others, though, were convinced that competition was the key to development.

The philosopher Herbert Spencer, who began to formulate his own evolutionary ideas before Darwin’s work appeared, influentially made this argument. He believed that the fundamental physical laws of evolution mean that progress of all kinds depends on struggle and competition. Only some can survive this struggle, and to try to help the weak flies in the face of nature. Attempts to aid the weakest in society, such as improving the living and working conditions of the poorest people, was dangerously mistaken. It risked impeding the forces of evolutionary advance. Spencer coined the phrase ‘survival of the fittest’ to describe evolution, a phrase Darwin was persuaded to add to his own book only at a later date.

This bleak vision of humanity struggling to survive was contested by alternative accounts that also claimed the ‘Darwinian’ tag. In a later work, *The Descent of Man* (1871), Darwin emphasised the powerful social instincts of group animals. Along with others, he saw that, far from diminishing a species’ chances in evolutionary struggles, cooperation may improve their ability to survive. In 1902, a book appeared called *Mutual Aid*, which gave a convenient phrase to this notion that the greatest evolutionary advantage enjoyed by a species was its sociability. It was by the Russian scientist and philosopher, Peter Kropotkin. Kropotkin was
an anarchist and he, like Herbert Spencer, favoured a society in which the state played a minimal role. Unlike Spencer, though, Kropotkin believed that cooperation and harmony would be the natural result, not competition and extinction of the unfit.

Empire and racial science

Notions of competitiveness also often appeared in justifications of Britain’s imperial ambitions. At the end of the 19th century there was fierce rivalry amongst European colonisers, who were keen to exploit mineral and other natural resources in Africa and to secure new areas for trade. Social Darwinists such as the mathematician, Karl Pearson, argued that indigenous populations unable to withstand the greater military and economic power of a colonising force must inevitably be pushed aside to make room for ‘fitter’ competitors.

This aggressive colonial competition at the end of the century drew support from supposedly scientific and biological ideas about racial superiority and inferiority. Darwin’s *Descent of Man* suggested a graduated evolutionary chain of development. It seemed to sanction ideas of ‘primitive’ peoples supposedly lower on the evolutionary scale than the white Europeans who were invariably presented as the model of evolved civilisation.

The 19th-century vogue for classification had resulted in theories arguing that human differences were so great as to suggest entirely different species of man. Georges Cuvier, the French naturalist and zoologist who helped establish the field of comparative anatomy, argued that all humans could be classified into a series of separate types. Similar ‘polygenist’ ideas were important for Robert Knox, whose 1850 book, *The Races of Man*, classified and evaluated all human beings according to their race, and insisted that race was the most important determining feature of behaviour and character. Arguments such as Knox’s were used to support the retention of slavery in the southern states of America. However, *On the Origin of Species* in fact challenged racist thought. Darwin was horrified by slavery and his countering ‘monogenist’ view of the common descent of all humans in *On the Origin of Species* eventually came to prevail – although ideas about evolutionary ‘superiority’ and ‘inferiority’ did too.

Prior to evolutionary theory, inheritance commonly implied the passing on of wealth, land, name and status. By the end of the 19th century, however, inheritance was being understood as a biological matter. The theory of genetics had not yet been developed, but Darwin and others were constantly puzzling over how attributes could be passed from parents to offspring.

Darwin’s cousin, Francis Galton, began to study eminent families in the 1860s, arguing in *Hereditary Genius* (1869) that mental and physical ability – and even morality – is inherited. He was a pioneer of statistical methods and collected data on families. He began to believe that the forces of natural selection no longer worked efficiently in modern, advanced societies like Britain, precisely because ‘civilisation’ valued ideas that tended to protect citizens and improve their conditions. Natural selection thus needed to be replaced with what he described as ‘rational selection’. Rational selection was central to what Galton
termed the new science of ‘eugenics’, a term that means ‘well born’. In Galton’s view, skilled professionals must manage reproduction in order to ensure that the ‘best’ people have most offspring while the poor (or those referred to as the ‘feebleminded’) should be discouraged or even prevented from having children.

Conservatives, liberals and socialists all embraced eugenic ideas. Socialists such as the writers H G Wells and George Bernard Shaw were attracted to the notion that the state, rather than individuals, would be charged with the task of managing the development of population. Only the state was in a position to be able to do so with the greater good in mind, they believed. Eugenics also featured in debates about the position of women. Eugenic enthusiasts argued that the middle-class feminists who campaigned for women’s access to education and employment opportunities were in fact being diverted from their most important role as child-bearers. Some women were hostile as a result, seeing eugenics as another justification for unequal and unfair treatment.

Others, however, saw eugenics as providing support for women’s emancipation. Women must be well educated to make rational choices about marriage. They must not be burdened by social conventions or by economic necessity. By the 1890s, these ideas were being taken up amongst what were called ‘New Women’. These women were modern and independent and, like the best-selling novelist, Sarah Grand, used fiction to upturn traditional marriage plots. Grand supported eugenic thinking, and her ‘New Woman’ heroines were prepared to deny love rather than risk having a child with an unsuitable husband. This ‘New Woman’ puts eugenic social duty before her own feelings and desires, proving as a consequence that she is fit to be man’s equal.

So-called ‘positive’ eugenics tried to encourage middle-class women to have more children. ‘Negative’ eugenics, however, was targeted at the poor, and suggested policies to prevent them from having children. Many Victorians feared that while the birth rate was declining among what was believed to be the ‘best’ groups, the poorest continued to have large families. The latter were characterised as either ‘feebleminded’ (a label that could include paupers, alcoholics and women on poor relief) or criminal. Large families meant these socially damaging traits were on the increase, some argued. Notions of biology and heredity were central to the work of figures like Cesare Lombroso, the Italian criminologist. Lombroso insisted that inherited bodily traits and abnormalities (even including the shape of ear-lobes) were reliable signs of an individual’s propensity to crime. This version of eugenics targeted under-privileged groups of people, arguing they were unfit to have children.

Eugenic ideas continued to be hotly debated into the 20th century. However, attempts to pass legislation criminalising procreation among the ‘feebleminded’ were eventually defeated. The traditions of individualism that had long been dominant in British political life perhaps had something to do with opposition to more extreme eugenic policies. Elsewhere, however, in Europe and the United States, aggressive policies were pursued, culminating in legislation passed by the Nazis in the 1930s that allowed for enforced sterilisation of those deemed ‘unfit’. In the aftermath of the Second World War, as the full horror of the Nazi state’s genocidal ‘Final Solution’ became known, eugenics became largely discredited.
**The spectre of degeneration**

Darwin’s evolutionary ideas helped many Victorians to imagine a dynamic world of progress. It seemed to fit perfectly, for a period of time at least, an image of Britain at the forefront of an industrialised and wealthy modern world in which man had definitively tamed nature for his own ends. Towards the end of the 19th century, however, theories of evolution were the basis of fears of social, racial and cultural degeneration and decline. Evolution was countered by frightening examples of ‘devolution’. Some of the most popular fiction of this period – including Robert Louis Stevenson’s *Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (1886), Henry Rider Haggard’s *She* (1887) and H G Wells’s *The Time Machine* (1895) – explored scenarios of frightening devolution. Stevenson’s erudite, gentlemanly and rather bored Jekyll turns into the beastly Hyde, who is cruel, lustful and murderous. Hyde’s squat, ape-like body, his dark, hairy hands, and his energy and appetite all signal his ‘primitive’ state.

Fears that modern European civilisation was on the brink of disaster and decline were, for some at least, given credence by the new literature and art. A German writer, Max Nordau, used scientific and evolutionary language to condemn much late 19th-century European music and writing. His book, *Degeneration*, translated in 1895, attacked a long list of writers, poets, dramatists, artists and composers, including Oscar Wilde. Wilde’s downfall from the height of his fame in the same year, when he was tried and imprisoned for ‘gross indecency’ seemed to illustrate Nordau’s case.

All manner of biological arguments about degeneration were extended to debate about social and cultural life in the late 19th century, as major European societies were buffeted by volatile economic conditions. Degeneration became an influential idea and a favourite trope for writers. However, notions of degeneration did not supersede other evolutionary ideas, but became a part of the extraordinary imaginative resource that Darwin’s theory – unwittingly, on his part – provided.