

AQA English Literature GCSE

Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde

Context

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Religion

Religious allusion

The text is rife with **biblical allusion**. At the time, the **majority of the population would have been religious** so by referencing (arguably) the most influential book the Bible, Stevenson is using a **universally recognised system of symbolism**. Religion also invokes an intense feeling of **tradition and history**, and on the whole makes the text feel much more serious. This adds power to the text.



https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Bible_paper.jpg

Examples of **biblical and religious allusion**

within the text include:

- **“really like Satan.”**
- **“that human Juggernaut”** - which likens Hyde to a powerful Hindu God.
- **“if ever I read Satan's signature upon a face, it is on that of your new friend.”**
- **“I incline to Cain's heresy”** - this refers to the Biblical story of Cain and Abel (the first two sons of Adam and Eve). In the story Cain murders his brother Abel as he is jealous that God prefers the sacrifices Abel makes to please God. Some people believe that Cain is therefore the origin of greed and evil. The comparison to the two brothers, one good and one evil, is symbolic of the duality found within Jekyll and Hyde.

Religious allusions also work to **solidify the theme of religion vs science within the text**, and **ensures that the reader is always aware of this juxtaposition** within their own society.

Transmorphism

Transformation and changing state is central to the text, as it deals with the connection between Mr Hyde and Dr Jekyll. In the Victorian era, many people were religious and would have focused on a **biblical reading of transmorphism to assess it's morality**.

Transformation is mentioned briefly in the bible:

- Corinthians 5:17 - *“therefore if any man [be] in Christ, [he is] a new creature; old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new”*
- Colossians 3:10 - *“and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator”*

In these passages, it is implied that **only Christ has the power to perform change** in society, and that transformation **should always have a positive impact**. In Jekyll & Hyde, this sentiment is clearly disregarded when Jekyll firstly changes himself without Christ's input, and secondly when he utilises the ability to transmorph for destructive and detrimental reasons.

Stevenson's attitude to religion

Stevenson was exposed to both scientific and religious influences through his family and socialisation. His **father was a Calvinist**, so when Stevenson announced that he no longer chose to believe in God, it seemed to significantly damage his family relationships.

Calvinism

The church of Scotland is largely based on **Calvinist principles**. Calvinism is a type of **protestantism** based on John Calvin's teachings. As an infant, Stevenson was read Old Testament scripture. Calvinism frustrated Stevenson because **morality requires a perfection which was impossible for people as it contradicted human nature**. In this respect, he felt it was very **hypocritical**.

Stevenson's father himself was a Calvinist and upon Stevenson telling him of his rejection of religion he was angry, causing Stevenson great anguish.



https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Truro_Old_Church.jpg

Impact of religion on the characters

Stevenson's characters are clearly impacted by religion, this is shown by their actions as well as dialogue.

- Utterson's **schedule is set according to the ring of the church bells**, which implies the **significant religious influence on his life** and on his routines. "***It was his custom of a Sunday, when the meal was over, to sit close by the fire, a volume of some dry divinity on his reading desk, until the clock of the neighbouring church rang out the hour of twelve, when he would go soberly and gratefully to bed.***"
- "***He was now no less distinguished for religion***" - suggests Jekyll previously completed religious work and study.
- Jekyll goes to God for redemption when he realises his profound mistakes; "***had fallen upon his knees and lifted his clasped hands to God.***"

Changing religious beliefs

Over the course of the 1800s, many started to become skeptical of both spirituality and religion. This waning in belief was caused by a variety of factors such as:

- **Thomas Huxley and Agnosticism**: Huxley was a scientist in the 1800s, and an advocate for Darwin's teachings and research. He **coined the term 'agnostic'** to describe someone who thinks it isn't possible to know if there is a/are God(s), or not. He relied upon empirical evidence to support knowledge about the world, and thought that **faith and science were mutually exclusive**.
- The industrial revolution meant that new products were increasingly available, in particular to the wealthier classes. For many, **material comforts came to replace**

spirituality and religion. Urbanisation caused a massive shift in routines and general living, so attitudes towards religion shifted massively as well.

- Strauss wrote **Das Leben Jesu**, which criticised Christian teachings about Jesus' miracles, causing many Victorians to lose their faith.
- Overall, the Church lost a lot of its influence within society.
 - In 1829, a law instructing anyone wanting to hold public office to pledge an oath dismissing Catholic beliefs was lifted.
 - In 1851, **40% of the population went to church**, according to the public census.

The changing role of religion in many people's lives would have led to great anxiety, something Stevenson manipulates in his writing to create fear in the reader.



https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Strange_Case_of_Dr._Jekyll_and_Mr._Hyde

Novel's reception by religious communities

The novella was interpreted by many contemporary critics and readers as much more powerful than a 'shilling shocker'. A sermon preached in St Paul's Cathedral even used text from the novel around the time it was published as it was seen as concerning the essential tale of good vs evil. One paper likened it to the writings of the Apostle Paul, as it concerned the "two-fold nature of man".

Science

Effect of Science and Technology on society

In Victorian society, the **advancement of technology and other scientific discoveries led to a great improvement in the everyday lives of the population**. The industrial revolution brought about a new era of prosperity - through the actual benefits were really limited to the upper and middle classes.



During this era, the population skyrocketed - increasing from 8 to 30 million between 1800 and 1900. This was due to the improvements in medical understanding and better infrastructure in the cities.

In addition to this the railway network expanded which enabled many less-wealthy people to access new places.

Exports also grew from £25 to £75 million, which reflected an economy which could provide this array of technological and scientific advances funded by both industry and the government.

Darwinism

Charles Darwin claimed that **evolution** occurs by **natural selection**. In 1871, Darwin published his book, "The Descent of Man" in which he applied his theories of evolution by natural selection to human evolution.

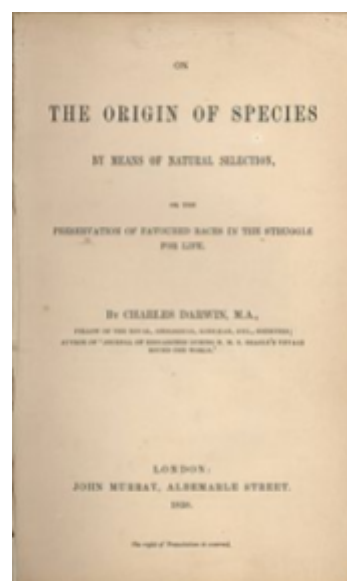
There was a sense of **fear of this scientific development going against religion**, as creationism (the concept that God created everything and everyone in the world) was pitted against evolution - this led to a rise in atheism.

Stevenson plays on fears of **degeneration** or **devolution** by giving Hyde ape-like and caveman esque features. In the novel, Mr Hyde is labelled as a "**troglydite**"; perhaps this is a comment on the theories of evolution - he is a regression to the primitive and violent stage of development.

The fear of "devolution" was prevalent in **fin de siècle gothic literature**.

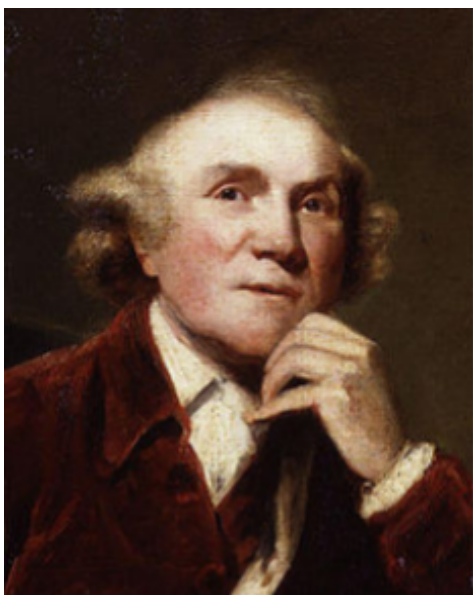
John Hunter

John Hunter is often considered Stevenson's **inspiration for the character of Dr Jekyll**. He was a doctor of a high status who was well regarded within his circle of friends in London. Hunter's wife often threw large parties in their large house in the fashionable Leicester



https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/On_the_Origin_of_Species

Square however, the other side of the house contained Hunter's specimens and student's accommodation. It was these quarters which backed onto a dingy alley from which grave-robbers provided Hunter with bodies to experiment on.



https://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Hunter

Jekyll's house is much the same as Hunter's. By having this duality within houses, Stevenson is showing how the **upper class in London are unable to completely isolate themselves from the lower class.**

Hunter dissected over 2000 human bodies, so had an incredible knowledge of anatomy. The bodies were stolen from cemeteries by grave robbers, which was a wealthy business.

Hare and Burke were renowned body snatchers, and they would target graves because hanged criminals' bodies would be directly donated to medical schools or the anatomist, Dr Robert Knox. The trade was lucrative so they began to murder individuals in Edinburgh in order to make more money. Eventually they were discovered however, only Burke was prosecuted and he was sentenced to death.

Scientific Procedure & the novel

Because there are two doctors in the novel, reflective of Stevenson's background in medicine, **much of the language and premises used are relevant to scientific procedure.**

- When Mr Hyde comes to Lanyon's house to collect the materials he needs for the transformation back into Dr Jekyll, he is received in the consulting room like a patient.
- In his recollection of the events of that night in chapter nine, his writing is very characteristic of medical writing at the time.
- Dr Lanyon turns Mr Hyde into a case, and treats and comments about him as if he were an insane patient.
- However, upon Mr Hyde's transformation, the roles switch as patient is reverted back into physician. It is at this point that the case of Jekyll and Hyde transforms into a "Strange Case".

Psychology and Sigmund Freud

Victorians were obsessed with the **supernatural**.

Sigmund Freud was a neurologist, centering his work on human behaviour and mental illness. One of his biggest achievements was creating psychoanalysis, and he was one of the most influential people at the time, and introduced many new words and ideas during his lifetime.

Many believed in Freud's **Structural Theory of the Mind**. A person's personality is made out of three elements: the id, the ego and the superego. These systems develop at different rates as an individual matures.

- **The id** is the primitive and instinctual part of the psyche which contains hidden sexual and aggressive desires.
- **The superego** is an individual's moral conscience.
- **The ego** represents the outward version of a person and is often a balance between the id and the superego. ego is a sort-of neutral ground which balances both the desires (from the id) and the moral thought (of the superego).



https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sigmund_Freud

In the novel, it can be interpreted that **Hyde could be argued to be representative of an individual wholly controlled by the id**, whereas **Dr Jekyll could be viewed as a character symbolising the ego**. By setting up this conflict between the id and the ego, Stevenson will be including information relevant to readers at the time of the novel's publication, as Freud's work had become very popular.

If you talk about, for example, Hyde being wholly controlled by the id, you can write in your essay that you are analysing from a *Freudian perspective*. This will give you marks for AO3.

The Gothic

Fin de siècle

Fin de siècle refers to the end of the nineteenth century. The imminent change which people believed a new century would bring caused great social anxiety due to a fear of the unknown. The effect of this is commonly observed in late 19th century art. However, the same phenomenon occurred towards the end of the 20th century with people worrying about technology being unable to cope with the change in date. The change from the 19th to 20th century also coincided with **large technological and scientific advances**, leading to a greater sense of fear surrounding a rapidly changing society.

Literary Context

Darwin's theory of evolution was seen to be at odds with creationism, a key Christian belief. As the result of the two being depicted as polar opposites, people felt bound to choose between them. **This led to people beginning to reject religion** or hold it at a lower significance. The changing role of religion in society as a result of this would have led to fears of the unknown which is reflected in the contemporary gothic literature.

In the early 1800's, art was significantly influenced by the **Romantic movement**. Gothic literature reflected the principles of this by including themes which championed human **emotionality over reason**. Towards the end of the 19th century however, **people became more interested in the darker side of the human mind**, this is reflected in Stevenson's work.

Key characteristics of the genre

Gothic literature tends to have certain characteristics:

- References to the **supernatural**, such as ghosts and vampires - this is a reflection of the theme of "the unknown" and **reflects feelings of uncertainty about the future**.
- **Intense emotions** heightened by a foreboding atmosphere - this creates fear in the reader by indicating a breakdown in rationality.
- Dealing with the concepts of **madness and insanity** - people with mental illnesses have historically been demonised in mainstream society, madness is a tool which writers often employ to evoke fear of something readers typically do not understand.
- There is often an inherently 'evil' character, who typically has some kind of link to **the supernatural**, this same character may also fulfil the archetype of "**the other**" - A character who is not bound by the morals dictated by society is able to act in any way they like, this unpredictability creates terror in the reader as well as linking to the theme of "the unknown".



Gothic Influence on Dr Jekyll & Mr Hyde

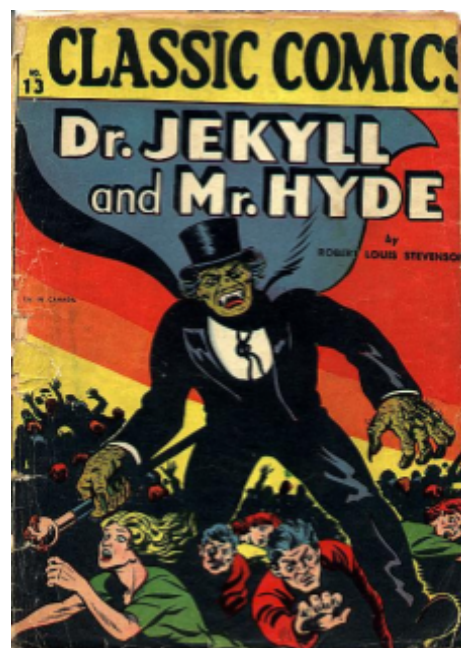
Secrets hold a lot of power in gothic literature. In Jekyll & Hyde, the connection between Jekyll and Hyde adds a great deal of suspense to the plot.

Mysterious settings, such as Hyde's apartment and Jekyll's laboratory also fulfil **gothic convention**.

Pathetic fallacy is employed in the fourth chapter, following the Sir Danvers Carew murder, creating a tense and suspicious atmosphere.

- The **visual symbolism** of fog serves to **highlight the mysterious nature of the text** as the truth is being obscured; "**the first fog of the season**"

Whilst Stevenson employs many stock conventions of the genre to reason with contemporary issues, he neglects the conventional isolated setting and instead sets the novella in London. This choice inspired many writers such as Wilde, Doyle and Machen to use the late-Victorian London as settings in their own work.



https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:CC_No_13_Dr_Jekyll_and_Mr_Hyde.jpg

The 'Urban Gothic' typically creates an intense atmosphere as the cityscape is used as the psychological focus of its narrative.

- **"A great chocolate-covered pall lowered over heaven"**
 - "**Pall**" serves to create a **theatrical scene**, but also has strong links to funerals, as the cloth lain over coffins.
 - References to "**heaven**", could suggest the death of morality and inherent good within the novel, and links to the murder of Sir Carew earlier in the scene.
- **"District of some city in a nightmare"**

There is also a clear **blend of realism and fantasy** within the novel, and this makes the characters realistic whilst also **producing terror and suspense throughout the events of the plot**.

Whilst there is very little inclusion of women in Dr Jekyll & Mr Hyde, women often play significant roles in Gothic novels - normally as victims of the evil male characters. The character of the maid in chapter four, who informs the police as to who killed Sir Carew, plays this role.

Other gothic texts

There are other texts written around the same time as Dr Jekyll & Mr Hyde which use the Gothic theme to explore similar themes.

- **Dracula** [1897, Bram Stoker]: Established many conventions of **vampire fantasy** and, like Jekyll and Hyde is told in the **epistolary form**. The theme of transformation

is present in Dracula's ability to transform into the shape of a bat or wolf. This further reflects the fears of a late Victorian audience, that the authors were attempting to target through their work within the gothic genre.

- **The Time Machine** [1895, H.G Wells]: This novel is similar to Jekyll and Hyde in that it investigates **class** and **masculinity**, as well as commenting on other societal issues such as a **fear of decline and decay**.
- **The Picture of Dorian Gray** [1890, Oscar Wilde]: This novel also focuses on the **moral degeneration** of a promising young man who becomes **hedonistic** and **corrupt**. Similarly to Jekyll, he indulges all of his impulses. This novel also contains the idea of **the double**, in this case it being the painting of Dorian. Similarly to Jekyll and Hyde, it is this double which allows the main character to indulge their dark desires.

Atavism

Lombroso's theory of atavism presents the idea that **some people are 'born criminal'**.

He studied the appearance of thousands of criminals and found they shared common physical characteristics such as a sloping brow, pronounced jaw, large ears, etc. He concluded that they were more primitive in an evolutionary sense than other people.

In the novella, Hyde clearly has some **atavistic traits**, demonstrated through his description as "**pale and dwarfish**"

Stevenson also tackles this gothic conventions in another novel *Olalla*. Here, the main character is attacked by the woman who he is staying with who also displays atavistic traits.



[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dr._Jekyll_and_Mr._Hyde_\(1887_play\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dr._Jekyll_and_Mr._Hyde_(1887_play))

Scotland, England and Victorian Britain

Contemporary Scotland - a divided Edinburgh

Edinburgh had been **separated into the historic 'old town', and the modern 'new town'**, which led to a divide in population split between the two. The aristocratic, wealthy



<https://www.visitscotland.com/info/towns-villages/old-town-and-new-town-p918411>

middle-to-upper classes gravitated towards the grand houses in the new town, leaving the old town to deteriorate. **Crime and illicit activities were very common in the old town**, and many younger gentlemen (including Stevenson) would go there at night to engage in drinking, prostitution and gambling.

Scottish impact on the novel

Many people believe that although explicitly **set in London**, the novella is in fact set in Edinburgh.

GK Chesterton said that "Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde", though "presented as happening in London", was "very unmistakably happening in Edinburgh". Whilst many critics have disagreed with this statement, it demonstrates the large influence many people feel Edinburgh has had on the novel, despite not actually being set in the city.

Victorian London

Many novels from the period were **set in London** as it was viewed as being at the **forefront of modern urban life**. This contrasted with the romantic and naturalist settings of the countryside, so was a particularly popular choice for mystery and gothic novels.

It was smoggy and industrial, which also meant it was very unhygienic and had a massive overcrowding issue from being unable to cope with the sudden increase in population. This led to a large class disparity.

- It was **crime-ridden**, especially in the colossal overcrowded poorer locations (such as Soho). These places were largely slums, particularly concentrated in the East End, which was poor quality and normally were without running water or appropriate sanitation.
- Other popular novelists at the time, such as Dickens, also set much of their work in the city.



- The Whitechapel murders (Jack the Ripper) occurred in 1888, after the publication of the novel, with some people believing that the novel inspired the killings. They also linked to the **concept of duality**, as many people speculated that the murderer was potentially of royal birth, or at least highly-educated.
- People were expected to maintain strong morals and be charitable, in order to maintain a good reputation.

As a man, **walking through public places would help keep up your appearance**,

which is reflected by Utterson and Enfield's frequent Sunday walks. This contrasts with Jekyll's increasing solitude as he decreases in reputation.

- Many critics think that Dr Jekyll's transition into the working-class Mr Hyde **emphasises both the geographical and class-based divide between East and West** in London.



https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:English_School_-_19th_Century_Snow_Hill,_Holborn_London.jpg

England and London

Discovery and expansion of the British Empire

Though not directly referred to in the novel, during the Victorian period, England was at the **peak of the empire**, often called 'the Golden Age'. This was vastly aided by massive leaps in travel and technological abilities.

- The British Empire had conquered a third of the world.
- People colonised many countries, including India, where (despite never visiting) Queen Victoria was empress.
- There was also a **massive increase in trade**, and Britain had a well equipped army which aided them greatly.

Civility and English National Pride

The people of the British Empire, on the whole, felt proud to belong to such a powerful nation. The government had a lot of money to invest in architectural and large scale engineering projects, and as a result many huge pieces of infrastructure (such as the London sewage system) were completed during this time.

There was an **intense and strictly-structured hierarchical system**, with restricted opportunities for social mobility therefore, individuals tended to be judged on their social class, job, wage, etc.

Homosexual law & interpretation in the text

Initially many readers undertake a homosexual reading of the passages. This **suspicion of erotic attachment** between the two characters link well to the subtle theme of blackmail in the text - these two themes are historically associated. Prior to 1967, the law in England against homosexual intercourse was known as the 'Blackmailers Charter' because many blackmail attempts revolved around an accusation of homosexuality towards the individual concerned.

It would have been unwise to directly refer to homosexuality when the novella was destined for a mainstream readership. However, the latent content nudges readers towards this potential interpretation of Dr Jekyll's interest in Mr Hyde.