

Dr jekyll and mr hyde and the body snatchers essay sample



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The novels *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*, written in 1885, and *The Body Snatchers*, written in _____ can be seen as novels with a gothic genre as well as mystery stories. They allow the reader to become captivated and absorbed within the text so that they can find out the intriguing nature of the novel, coming across as the story unfolds via clues and hints as to what twists are involved in the plot and characters to unveil the mystery. In the era these novels were written, they were the first in their kind in terms of the gothic genre and as mysterious texts where the turn of events or the characters' behaviour was not predictable.

They can be considered as novels which look at the darker side of a person's capabilities, this was a new concept to the Victorians in the 19th Century. The book, *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* raises issues of and supports the concept of the dual nature of man, Victorian hypocrisy, the bestial nature of man and the experimentation with science and drugs. The issues within the book created a whole new genre in the nineteenth century for such books including *The Body Snatchers* and Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, which can also be categorised into this genre. In this essay I will explore *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* as a mystery and a gothic story.

I will include historical, social and cultural knowledge of the Victorian era and compare this to *The Body Snatchers* as both mystery and gothic stories. I will also discuss the meaning behind the stories and the effect it has on the reader. In the Victorian era the concept of a man having or being able to have a dual nature was unthinkable. They did not believe that something like that could be possible, where a person could combine both the good self and the bad self within one individual, this theory was not supported by the
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beliefs they had, unlike today where the possibility of a split personality is not unknown or unthinkable.

This was until a social scientist, James Hogg introduced the concept of the individual psyche = externalisation verses internalisation, the second self. It is from this theory that 'doppleganger' originates from, In Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde Stevenson introduces this theory into 19th Century literature where Dr Jekyll is the good, which from Hogg's theory says is controlled by the right side of the brain and Mr Hyde is the evil character, which according to the theory is controlled by the left side of his brain, it is the one person with the two very different personalities struggling against each other.

Stevenson has shown reflected this theory through the characters, Dr Jekyll being good and Mr Hyde being the evil side of the same person. In The Body Snatchers, this concept of the dual nature of a man, Stevenson portrays through Fettes as a young man, who when he awakens after the ordeal as an older man, his evil side comes through while he is under the influence of Dr Macfarlane. The Victorians were very religious people, for centuries it was believed that people had originated or created directly by God, the thought of evolution had never occurred until Darwin's theory, the Theory of Evolution in 1859.

This shocked the Victorians the thought that they had evolved and where in a sense the descendents of primates, revealing that they were no longer 'superior beings' would have been the biggest shock to people in that era. Darwin's theory and beliefs were rejected and associated with both blasphemy and evil. The theory had been rejected and placed to one side, however the

thought and the fear associated with Darwin's work lived on with the people. Stevenson brings a hint of Darwin's theory of evolution to his novel in the form of Hyde's character.

The 'bestial nature' of a man is portrayed in the evil side, as he is described as 'ape-like' with descriptions of his stance compared to an animal, he 'stoops like a monkey' and he was heard 'making grunting noises like an animal'. These descriptions would drive fear into the reader in the 19th Century as it reflects on Darwin's theory of Evolution. In *The Body Snatchers*, Stevenson has used the bestial nature again to describe the actions of the characters to enhance the evil quality of their actions.

'As two vultures may swoop upon a dying lamb, Fettes and McFarlane were to let loose upon a grave. This description compares the characters' actions to animals desecrating corpses, it is descriptive of what they are about to do, which reflects the bestial nature of a man. The movements of McFarlane reflect his bestial nature, 'dart like a serpent', Stevenson's use of similes create both atmosphere and clear images of the characters involving the reader. Stevenson uses animal words to describe the characters and their actions which do reflect Darwin's theory and would be very significant for a reader in the Victorian era.

During the Victorian times, society and a person's social standing was very important, it was highly regarded, with more emphasis put on it than in today's society. Men who demanded respect in society, the upper class or the professional were expected to appear to be gentlemen at all times, they had a certain standard they had to uphold when in public. Noblemen looked the

part as they were well bred, upstanding and respectable within their social class with the manners and the educational background to match.

This was somewhat different to the activities that took place behind closed doors, where they could be who they really were and fulfil all their whims of drinking, gambling and whatever else they desired regardless of how it would be viewed in society. It was acceptable as it was going on behind closed doors. Noblemen did not practise what they preached and were in fact, hypocrites, a person who pretends to be more virtuous than they really are. The behaviour was known in society, however it was never acknowledged or mentioned that they hid dark secrets.

Many critics even suspect that Jekyll and Hyde was a self-administration by Stevenson of his own dark nature. Victorian hypocrisy is an underlying theme in *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*, with it being represented by Dr Jekyll " I was the first that could thus plod in the public eye with a load of genial respectability, and in the moment, like a schoolboy, strip off these lendings and spring headlong into the sea of liberty. " In this quote he is explaining that with Hyde is able to behave how he really wants to, by acting freely to fulfil all desires and not losing any of his social standing or grace.

The hypocrisy here lies with the main character, Dr Jekyll represents the respectable nobleman while Mr Hyde reflects Dr Jekyll's acts behind closed doors, he is the side that can be ruthless in society as he cannot be recognised as Dr Jekyll and therefore he does not lose any social grace within his social circle or in society. Dr Jekyll makes excuses for what his evil side does, either something cruel and harmful or something appalling by saying '

It was Hyde, after all and Hyde alone that was guilty. 'This is Jekyll's' way of clearing his conscious of all the unsocial crimes he commits.

He accepts no responsibility for his own creation, Hyde and is therefore a hypocrite because he wants to have the social standing and respect in society in addition to fulfilling his darker side. Stevenson shows us how he deals with his own hypocrisy by paying for Hyde's actions, paying a cheque for trampling on the little girl. Through his actions of payment he is trying to keep his respectable image as an upstanding citizen that he portrays, although it is due to his own guilt of knowing about Hyde's actions and not stopping them in some way.

In *The Body Snatchers*, Stevenson has not included this theme of Victorian Hypocrisy so extensively, he touches on it slightly, with Fettes, the young doctor with the respect and social standing who changed himself from being young and irresponsible, who was highly influenced by peer pressure, 'After a night of turbulent pressures' the ordeal changed him for the better, the author is reflecting and portraying the different sides of a person and how man can be influenced especially when it is for the worse.

The author also uses, Dr Macfarlane to portray hypocrisy, who "breathing, as he did, of wealth and consideration", was a murderer with a 'black soul' underneath, this quotation represents the hypocrisy of the character because in society he is viewed as a respectable nobleman who is wealthy and is well to do, however he is committing a huge social crime by being a murderer. A character who is well known can commit such crimes and get

away with them this represents hypocrisy. Both these novels by Stevenson fit into the gothic genre.

This is depicted through the descriptions and images the author creates for the reader to use. Atmosphere and settings are also important for the gothic genre as it is used to set the scenes and allow the reader to visualise the backdrop to where the crimes or the acts of horror are taking place. The settings allow the author to build up tension and suspense for the reader adding to the gothic nature of this genre in the novels. Within the gothic genre are the authors' use of setting and scenery, which contribute largely to the essence of it.

Both the novels have been set in Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde is set in London, while The Body Snatchers is set in Edinburgh. This has relevance to the genre as a gothic story will usually have the background setting of a major well known city, which the people who read the novel or story will be able to relate to. The concept of Pathetic Fallacy, the weather descriptions are very important to this genre as the settings and the descriptive nature set the scene for what is going to happen.

The weather is significant as bad or horrific scenes are associated with bad weather, setting the atmosphere and mood for the events of the story. In Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde the concept of pathetic fallacy provides a major connection in this novel as the gothic atmosphere allows the reader to visually set the scene. The weather references are gothic in nature, descriptions of the rain, the extensive grey skies and clouds.

The descriptive detail of the town the 'abandoned street', the broken down area surrounding them, the atmosphere created allows the reader to experience what it would feel like, the dark nights with the faded distant sounds allow the reader to feel involved. 'The fog still slept on the wing above the drowned city, where the lamps glimmer like carbuncles; and through the muffle and smother of these fallen clouds'. This quote represents the way in which the author engrosses the reader into the text with a very effective atmosphere surrounding detailed description.

Stevenson has achieved a very descriptive image of the town, the context important to the concept of pathetic fallacy are the weather words of 'fog' and 'clouds'. The Body Snatchers weather descriptions and atmospheric settings are consistent with this genre, they are continuous through out the novel, which reinforces the idea and the gothic nature of the novel at all times to the reader. With the descriptions Stevenson is able to set the scene of the town with the atmosphere enclosing it.

There was a thin, bright moonshine, it was bitter cold windy and frosty' 'the town had not yet awakened'. This quote tells us that the town was yet to know the events of the night before. When an author uses pathetic fallacy, it allows them to convey future events to the reader as it enables them to connect the mood of the events or actions in the novel with the weather conditions. In gothic genre novels, the worse the weather conditions the worse the event which is or has taken place.

If the weather conditions are foggy, stormy, windy and generally unfavourable it makes the reader think that something bad or disturbing

might occur, under a blanket of bad weather. It adds to the reader's anticipation, holding their interests with the descriptions allowing the reader to actually feel and visualise the background settings, 'into the black night'. Another part of the gothic genre is the use of descriptive words which creates imagery in the mind of the reader. Stevenson's opening in *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* begins with a character description of Hyde.

This is a strong opening, shocking the reader from the start, as he is not a pleasant figure. This opening sets the tone for the whole novel, making the reader curious as to who or what that figure is. Questions are put in the mind of the reader from the descriptive gothic nature of the novel. Stevenson combined the gothic genre with Darwin's theory of Evolution successfully with reference to Hyde. He is numerous times referred to as 'bestial', this is supportive of the theory that humans are 'superior beings' but have evolved from animals.

His nature is not human-like, he has behaviour void of any emotion towards the people he attacks, like an animal. Stevenson uses words relating to his 'bestial' nature to describe particular aspects of him like his voice, enhancing the overall image the reader has created, as 'husky'. It creates imagery of a dog / wolf-like creature making Hyde more real to the reader as they can imagine what he sounds like. Hyde's presence made people fear him because of his appearance, when he was sighted he was described as 'ugly' but his features were 'indescribable' but somewhat 'deformed'.

This shows that he cannot be described clearly there is a sense of mystery to him, with no one being able to actually see him properly. His general

appearance was 'pale and dwarfish; he gave an impression of deformity without any nameable malformation' he something that they would not be used to seeing in their society, this is evident as he cannot be described. 'he had a displeasing smile'. Hyde is described as unconventional, he was someone who could not fit into society and was not going to be accepted.

The description of Hyde is very vague allowing the reader to create their own image of what he looks and sounds like. 'Loathing and fear with which Mr Utterson regarded him' shows that people feared him at first sight as his appearance was intimidating. They disliked him without knowing exactly why, people felt uncomfortable around him and were able to sense the evil contained inside him, the 'devil' or his darker side through and through.

Atmosphere is essential to the gothic genre; it sets the scene and the mood for the story.

In Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde, Stevenson's use of darkness and night create the atmosphere surrounding the characters, setting the scene as chilling or disturbing which all relates back to the gothic nature of the novel. The chapter of 'The Door' is particularly effective as it is very descriptive, 'a wild cold, seasonable night of March, with a pale moon' this quote gives the reader atmospheric awareness as they will know the weather conditions of the month, they would have seen the moon before and can create an image of a pale moon, while feeling the cold.

The use of the moon and the temperature is typical of the gothic genre. An important part is being able to create the right setting for the reader, so they can visualise the area and the atmosphere surrounding it. 'It seemed to

have swept the streets unusually bare of passengers'. This description tells the reader that something has happened or is about to occur. Stevenson has successfully built up the atmospheric surroundings of *The Body Snatchers*, with the use of darkness and night to portray to the reader that something is going to occur.

This effect allows the author to create moods and tension within the novel, when Macfarlane walks to the hotel with no light on, apart from the dim hotel lamp, 'into the black night' which creates a feeling of the unknown as he is unable to see what is ahead of him, it is building anticipation for the reader to find out what is ahead of him. The gothic genre also contains the use of colour in the novel, as this sets the tone. The use of or the lack of colour aids the reader to create images of the scenes or the characters set.

Stevenson's lack of colour in *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* is effective as it increases the emphasis on the events that occur, creating cold bleak settings, with the lack of colour infusing the scene, the reader is aware that the events are not pleasant. This is achieved by the emptiness of colour, which can be associated with bleak and dull surroundings, with the emphasis on the events. Within the gothic genre the lack of colour invites the reader to visualise dark colours which are related to the unknown. *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* shows elements of the mystery genre, throughout the entire novel there is signs of tension, suspense and suspicion.

In the first chapter, 'Story Of The Door', the door is the main mystery. It is contrasted against the entire street. It is described as 'equipped with neither bell nor knocker' This creates suspense because no one knows who lives in

that house; it has never been seen to be entered or exited by anyone.

However, when a poor child is trampled on witnessed by Mr Enfield and Mr Utterson, they demand they pay the girl an amount of money as compensation, but they are horrified when they see that this man has just entered and exited that suspicious door with a signed cheque by a very respectable man of the community.

Other clues such as the fact that whenever Hyde is around, Jekyll is nowhere to be seen, the same handwriting but slanted the other way, when Dr Jekyll goes into seclusion, it's the first time Hyde is seen round the house. All servants have orders to obey Hyde's wishes in Jekyll's house, and the way Mr Hyde's house is furnished is similar to Jekyll's. A modern audience knows the story of Jekyll and Hyde because it is popular and has been reused again and again. Therefore we would pick up the clues and predict the ending well in advance.

A Victorian audience would however have been kept in complete suspense all the way through, perhaps picking up the clues but not believing that anything so scandalous could happen. When they read the ending they would have been appalled and excited. Nothing like this had ever been written before. The most mysterious situation in each book is the unlikely link between a respectable person and a lower person. In *The Body Snatchers*, Dr Macfarlane, is important and seemingly good but is in fact a scoundrel. Fettes is 'parlour sot - bald, dirty, pimped, and robed to his old camlet cloak,' Fettes is the good character.

Jekyll is the respectable one and the good character, and Hyde is the evil character with the appearance of deformity. What is the connection between these opposites? The clues in *Body Snatchers* are: 'the singular freshness of the bodies', the argument between Fettes and McFarlane, the declaration by McFarlane that 'all our subjects have been murdered' and the death of Jane Galbraith who was alive and well the day before, McFarlane does nothing about the strange circumstances. All of these clues leads the reader to believe that the way the bodies are obtained is corrupt and Dr McFarlane encourages it.

Stevenson's novels *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* and *The Body Snatchers* are both appropriate to the gothic and mystery genres. They have the elements which make up a gothic novel and a mystery novel. Some of these elements are featured in both the novels. The gothic genre is depicted through the authors' use of pathetic fallacy which is evident in both texts in different ways. In *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*, the use of this is mainly on the descriptions of Hyde, mainly for his appearance as well as his character.

It is used to make the reader visualise his appearance so that they can imagine what the people around him see and feel. While in *The Body Snatchers* it is used for atmosphere and setting descriptions which engross the reader into the events of the novel, successfully giving the reader a feel for the events going on and the mood of the surrounding area. Stevenson is successful in creating dramatic images for the reader through the descriptions he uses. The imagery created in these novels is the main element which builds up and creates the gothic and mysterious genres.

As the gothic genre especially, was a new concept for the Victorians, Stevenson has successfully created the imagery necessary for the texts, in the form of the description of Hyde to the reader, as he is viewed by others that see him, who are unable to pinpoint his essence, leaving the reader with the ability to visualise him as they read the descriptions because the way in which he is described is very vague and not precise, this also adds to the element of mystery that surrounds him as a character throughout the novel, until his identity is discovered.

In *The Body Snatchers*, the imagery for the gothic genre is mainly related to the atmospheric surroundings of the area and the crimes that are taking place in the storyline. This is more crucial for this novel as it allows the reader to feel more involved within the events of the story. The descriptive nature makes the reader feel as if they are there, they are able to visualise and imagine the surroundings as, it is set in a well known city, and the reader can relate to this, they would have a picture in their mind of what this area is like.

The atmosphere is set with the views and images of the city and the weather conditions they are experiencing. As the reader would be aware of the different weather conditions, foggy, misty, cold and windy, they can feel like they are experiencing them as well, adding to the reader's interest in the text as well as the gothic nature, especially all the unfavourable weather conditions which are directly related to the gothic genre. This all contributes to the imagery the author is trying to create for the reader. These novels also fit into different genres.

Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde has elements of both the horror genre, which is evident through the murders that committed by Hyde. This is portrayed through the trampling of the child at the beginning of the text, which is horrific in nature. In the Victorian era men did not commit crimes against people especially against an innocent child, this has both a shocking and horrific element to it, which the reader would be shocked by. The effect of this on the reader is one of amazement, shock and curiosity as this would have not be the conventional type of novel to be written.

This novel also has elements of a science fiction genre as there is experimentation taking place with the use of drugs. This is shown through the metamorphoses experienced by Dr Jekyll as he becomes Mr Hyde and vice versa. The dual nature of a man theory is something that the Victorians had dismissed, this novel would have shown them that it is possible with the experimentation of drugs certain outcomes can be achieved even if it not seen to be acceptable in society, sometimes the inner self takes control over the external image and the desire to delve into the dark side cannot be controlled.

However, Dr Jekyll managed to achieve this and he kept his respectable external grace, which is accepted in society, while doing all the darker things he desired, without losing any social grace. The concept of this would have been unthinkable to the Victorians although they knew that behind closed doors actions take place which reflect both the good and bad or evil side of man. Stevenson's Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde allow the reader to see what goes on behind closed doors.

It is a sight into something that society knew about but it was accepted by the silence that surrounded the noblemen's actions behind closed doors as they were never challenged due to the respected they received in society. The Body Snatchers in comparison has more elements of the horror genre, this is due to the nature of the actions which take place in the novel. The murders and the general theme of the story would have a shock factor for the reader as the horrifying act of murdering a person would be quite unthinkable for the reader.

Although they would have been aware that people do get murdered, the shock element arises from the characters actually committing the crimes, which the reader is reading about from their point of view, not the victims. It gives an insight into how they think about what they are doing, rather than the reader always having the view of how it is portrayed in society; it would allow them to compare the crime from both sides.