

# Gothic a revival of culture

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The Gothic, through the motif of the double explores the struggle between the good and evil within man" To what extent are Poe's short stories, Coleridge's Christabel and R. L Stevenson's Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde explorations of the duality of man. The gothic, as a fictional genre, came about as a result of cultural changes in the eighteenth century; these cultural changes began to form through the renaissance. This transitional period between the Medieval Era and the modern world changed the way of thinking. The word itself means " revival" or " rebirth".

Moving further away from religious devotion it allowed new ideas to form, thus the development of the gothic. " Historically, the Goths were one of several Germanic tribes instrumental in the fall of the Roman Empire... [they] left no literature or art of their own, [and were] remembered only as the invaders and destroyers of the great Roman civilization. " 1 This historical aspect allowed the development of the new boundary pushing form of literature, introducing elements of horror and romance into newly formed gothic texts.

The first gothic novel published was The Castle of Otranto, subtitled as " A Gothic Story" written by the English author Horace Walpole. This new style of writing was imitated both through prose fiction and theatrical drama through the texts; Coleridge's poem Christabel, many of Edgar Allan Poe's short stories and R. L Stevenson's Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde. Through time the interpretations of a gothic text changes, allowing the readers to challenge what they read. All three texts were published in the 19th century, except the first edition of Christabel (published 1797).

This time period was primarily based around religion and Biblical Interpretations. And so, these new strange ideas may have angered the audiences due to the lack of religious devotion from the authors onto the characters, The 'double', otherwise known as the 'Doppelganger,' was defined by Federick S. Frank as " a second self or alternate Identity, sometimes, but not always, a physical twin. The Doppelganger in demonic form can be a reciprocal or lower bestial self" 2 The double motif suggests that we are burdened with a dual, for example, Dr.

Jekyll and his evil double Mr. Hyde are contrasted to represent the battle between the rational, intellectual self (Jekyll) and the irrational, foul self (Hyde). The double characters featured In texts are often paired within common relationships, such as family relations, hero/villain, creator/creature, etc. R. L. Stevenson's novel. Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde expresses the idea of the duality of human nature; however this motif did not arise fully until the last few chapters, when the relationship between Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde is revealed.

We have already witnessed Hyde's overriding violence and have seen the contrasting gentle and honorable Dr. Jekyll, One of the main themes of the double is physical appearance as Hyde is portrayed in animalistic terms: " short", " hairy, and like a " troglodyte" with " gnarled hands" and a " horrific face". But, In contrast, Jekyll is described in the most elegant manner - " tall", " refined", " polite," with " long elegant fingers" and a " handsome appearance". This suggests Jekyll's experiment reduces his being to its most basic form, allowing evil to run freely, ignoring the unwritten rules of society.

Stevenson explains the motif of duality toys using the character of Jekyll as he claims, "Man is not truly one, but truly two," as every soul contains traits of both good and evil, but one is always empowering. This novel is perhaps one of the most renowned examples of literature using the doppelgänger idea; another theme stemming from the duplication of man is the psychoanalytical interpretation and the presentation of Freud's theory of the id and superego. Dr. Jekyll represents the superego and Mr. Hyde the id. It is in fact his mind that is the ego, bringing him back and forth between the two characters but Dr.

Jekyll acknowledges and does what is morally best. The ego, hidden in his unconscious, is constantly debating between the superego and the 'id', it's the good vs. evil and conscious vs. unconscious. The term 'unconscious' is similar to that of the unknown, leading to a scary factor of a 'double' as the living being is simply unaware of their instincts and desires, making them equally unaware of their capabilities. Sigmund Freud developed the theory of mental life called psychoanalysis, emphasising the psychodynamics of the mind.

His most important assumption was the force driving a person's mental life, affecting their behaviour operating at an unconscious level; in one part of the personality called the id. The id works primarily on the pleasure principle bound up in self-gratification and uncaring to others- again operating entirely at an unconscious level. Two other types of personality were assumed: ego and superego. The ego functions the reality principle, while the superego represents the person's ideal self, presenting the moral standards of society.

The juxtaposed types of personality; id and the ego are initially the two results we are left with when a character has a 'double'. Similarly, In Coleridge's *Christabel*, the character of Geraldine becomes Christabel's evil double- arguably her id. The cause of " a shudder in [his] blood" from Dr. Jekyll in the presence of Mr. Hyde is not simply one characteristic of his nature. It is the combination of evil and disability. " Mr. Hyde was pale and dwarfish; he gave an impression of deformity... a sort of murderous mixture" the realisation of obtaining " murderous mixture" expands Freudian theories of evil, the id, taking over the person.

This uneven ratio of personalities causes such malevolence ideas of murder to form. Likewise, the perception of the divided self is also presented in Coleridge's *Christabel*. In this poem, the character of Geraldine becomes Christabel's evil double. Arguably, the poem explores the, " struggle of evil and innocence, [and] the manner in which evil works upon and transforms innocence,"<sup>3</sup> as in the extended poem we see Geraldine attempts to use Christabel's innocent image as an advantage: clearly demonstrating the divide between good and evil within the two female characters.

The same sex double is equally shown within the two male characters of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde. The idea of a same sex double, accentuates the concept of similarities between the actual self and the duplication. The same psychoanalytical approach, as used to interpret Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde's doubling, can also be used to argue many concepts, from Coleridge's poetry. The poem, *Kubla Khan*, according to Coleridge, he claimed the visions highlighted in the poem, occurred to him in a dream demonstrating -Freud's

hypothesis of the unconscious, as the development of dreams is prominent in the unconscious region of the mind..

Setting is also, a very important aspect of Gothic literature. The Garden of Eden is often used as a symbol in western literature; to show life before sin and corruption, the serpent and its temptations towards Eve, explore the corruption of the innocent, temptations and evil. This religious interpretation of the setting featured in *Christabel* differs to that of *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*. As Stevenson describes Dr. Jekyll's laboratory as, " a certain sinister block of building... [This] bore in every feature the marks of profound and sordid negligence. With its decaying disguise and air of neglect, the laboratory quite neatly symbolizes the corrupt and perverse Hyde. The idea of the " laboratory' indicates the influence of the renaissance and the new science interpretations being made, unlike the religious, Garden of Eden imagery. The city of London itself is also represented in contrasting terms, as " both a foggy', " dreary', as a " nightmarish place", and a " well-kept", " bustling centre of commerce. Just as the characters Jekyll and Hyde and *Christabel* and *Geraldine*, have both positive and negative qualities, so does society.

Doubling is yet again present in the second part of the poem of *Christabel*, whereby the dove being strangled by " the bright green snake" presents the spell casted from *Geraldine* onto *Christabel*, to mute *Christabel*'s true speech and emotions. The image of the white dove shows *Christabel*'s innocence, which had lost the battle between the envious serpent (*Geraldine*). The imagery of the serpent emphasises how religion was a prominent influential

factor towards this poem, symbolizing the Biblical translation of the serpent in the story of Adam and Eve.