

OCR English Literature GCSE

Jekyll and Hyde: Themes *Science*

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Science

The **industrial revolution** led to a rapid rate of **scientific development** in the Victorian era. These rapid changes in both technology and science started influencing everyday life. These rapid changes caused social unease, with people scared of what would happen in the future. Stevenson manipulates these societal fears throughout the text.

Charles Darwin's work particularly sparked fears of '**devolution**' in the Victorian era. These fears are manifested in the animalistic Mr Hyde.

Scientists

Stevenson **subverts** the contemporary reader's expectations of career stereotypes within the text (the same applies to a lesser degree to a modern reader).

Within Victorian society scientists were considered trustworthy whereas lawyers were considered deceitful, Stevenson reverses these traits in the text. This subversion serves to **heighten tension** for the reader.



Scientific experimentation

Stevenson builds upon a **Victorian reader's fears around science** by showing how far science can be pushed. Jekyll's work into the **metaphysical** makes the scientific community within the text uncomfortable, this anxiety will be transferred to the reader.

The **violent lexis** in "**war of attitudes**" depicts this **conflict within the scientific community** and later Lanyon describes Jekyll's work as "**unscientific balderdash**". These comments **highlight the conflict** between Lanyon and Jekyll, as Lanyon prefers to balance his religious thought and scientific study by remaining in the sphere of material science, whilst Jekyll extends his work into the metaphysical. This conflict mirrors the **tensions between religion and science** which was apparent within society.

Scientific experiments

The descriptions of Jekyll's scientific experiments tread a fine line between scientific experimentation and the supernatural. The scientific language "**added one of the powders**" could also be seen as akin to **spells and witchcraft**.

Stevenson **manipulates scientific syntactic structure** in the reference "**began, in proportion as the crystals melted, to brighten in colour**". This **illogical word order** is awkward and



emphasises the tension between Jekyll's inner irrationality and the rationality of science. The description also sounds like a witches chant.

Narration

The **narration** further adds to the feeling of unease. The text is narrated by three different voices who slowly unravel the mystery behind the identity of the criminal.

- Chapters 1-8 focus on the perspective of Mr Utterson who acts as the detective. These chapters are written in the **third person** which creates the impression that he is a **reliable narrator**. The reliability of the narration is reinforced by the characterisation of Utterson as educated and rational.
- Chapter 9 is in the form of **a letter** written by Dr Lanyon in the **first person**. As this is the first chapter of the novella which is in **first person**, it is indicative of an **unreliable narrator** and foreshadows the forthcoming irrational events which defy the reader's expectations.
- The text ends with a **first person letter** written by Jekyll in which he summarises all of the previously described events from his own viewpoint.

These different narrative viewpoints creates uncertainty in the reader as they have to piece together what happens as the story progresses and choose which parts to believe.

