

AQA English Literature GCSE

Jekyll and Hyde: Themes *Violence*

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Violence

The **horrific violence** in the novella is key to the text's reputation as a **shocking piece of gothic fiction**. Violence is also used to characterise Mr Hyde as it is only him who commits it. **Hyde's victims are characterised as passive** in order to make his acts of violence more shockingly unprovoked.

Hyde's violence

Innocent victims

Stevenson deliberately depicts **innocent victims** to highlight Hyde's barbaric acts.

- The trampling of the girl is made more brutal by her young age, however, the unembellished language used in ***“the man trampled calmly over the child's body and left her screaming on the ground”*** could be interpreted to imply that this is less an act of deliberate malice and more a **passive disregard for human life**.
- Hyde's murder of Carew shows a **disregard for the upper class**. Stevenson highlights Carew's status in the **metaphor** and **auditory imagery** in ***“this will make a deal of noise,”***. This disdain from a member of a lower class towards the upper classes could be seen as **symbolic of proletarian revolution**.

Lexis

Stevenson uses **lexis from the semantic field of violence** in ***“All of a sudden he broke out in a great flame of anger, stamping with his foot, brandishing the cane, and carrying on like a madman”***. The ordered **series of clauses** depicting Hyde's behaviour contrast with the violent and irrational nature of the action. His **volatility** is shown by the **metaphor of his violence** as a ***“flame”*** which also has natural connotations, suggesting that this is intrinsic to his character.



Hyde's innate **lack of morals** are shown by the **animalistic connotations** of ***“The man trampled calmly over the child's body and left her screaming on the ground”***. The **verb “trampled”** **connotes animalistic aggression** whilst the **adverb “calmly”** emphasises Hyde's detachment from his actions

Violence in the setting

The description of the setting reflects how out of place Hyde is in society. ***“A certain sinister block of building thrust forward its gable on the street”*** suggests that the building, like Hyde, is out of place in society. The jarring nature of the building which is not in line with the others is



emphasised by the **plosive alliteration** of “**block of building**”. Stevenson furthers this by using **sibilance** in “**certain sinister**”.

The building is also described to be in a state of “**prolonged and sordid negligence**’. This could be reflective of Hyde as it suggests that his violent behaviour is rooted in his isolation.

Violation of innocence

Innocence is said to be violated if a naïve or young character is exposed to something horrific and they can no longer be called innocent. Both the maid and the child are exposed to shocking violence which they would assumably not have previously been exposed to.

Female characters

The maid and the young girl fulfil the **gothic character archetype** of **the innocent female**.

- Like many female gothic characters, the girl is reduced to an object in “**the man trampled calmly over the child’s body**”.
- Stevenson again uses stereotypes by describing the maid’s “**streaming tears**” in order to characterise her as an irrational woman.

Whilst not a woman, Carew’s character is **feminised** by the description of him as an “**aged beautiful gentleman with white hair**”. Stevenson’s use of colour in “**white hair**” provides **angelic connotations**, and makes him appear as a vulnerable individual whom Mr Hyde takes advantage of.

