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A City of Doubles:

The Urban Environment As Represented by London in *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* and *Dracula*

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Decadence and Dread: *Dracula*, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* and *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*

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The nineteenth century saw the rise of London as a massively successful center of industry and commerce. The city grew significantly over the course of the century in terms of geographical size, population, and global relevance, eventually becoming "the greatest urban centre the world had ever seen" (Hitchcock) and the cultural pinnacle of urbanity at large. Along with this economic success came high rates of poverty, crime, and moral degradation, and popular culture of the era—*fin de siècle* fiction especially—was forced to reconcile with a new society that brought prosperity to some but simultaneously wreaked the despair of others. Two Gothic works of literary fiction, *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* and *Dracula*, embody this struggle to represent properly the urban environment in their varying portrayals of London: while the first depicts it as a deceptively sinful setting of hidden vices, the second defends it as an advanced city worthy of saving.

In his 1886 novella *Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, Robert Louis Stevenson sheds light on this darker aspect of the metropolitan setting. He characterizes London as a city of sin masquerading as one of joy, wealth, and upright values by connecting it to the larger theme of doubles—which is most prominently represented in the novella by the morally conflicted Dr. Jekyll and his despicable double, Mr. Hyde. Throughout the narrative, Stevenson orchestrates subtle adjustments and dramatic transformations in the mood or physical appearance of the city, gradually revealing that just like Dr. Jekyll, the urban environment too has a wretched nature buried underneath.

The city at first seems ordinary and pleasant as the narrative follows Mr. Utterson and his friend as they stroll through London. The usually busy trade street welcomes them, and Mr. Utterson sees that "the shop fronts stood along that thoroughfare with an air of invitation, like rows of smiling saleswomen" (Stevenson 4) and that the street's "freshly painted shutters,

well-polished brasses, and general cleanliness and gaiety of note, instantly caught and pleased the eye of the passenger" (Stevenson 4). The very first reference to setting portrays a well-maintained line of buildings with a charming atmosphere that evokes thoughts of smiles and geniality, immediately establishing a favorable view of the city. This scene also depicts the economic benefit of high-population urban living, noting that the street "drove a thriving trade on the weekdays" (Stevenson 4) and that "[its] inhabitants were all doing well, it seemed" (Stevenson 4). Prosperity and economic growth, alluring key aspects of the developing urban environment, take a prominent position in this brief description. In the story's very first interaction with London, the city appears clean, fresh, and conducive to financial gain, leaving a decidedly positive impression on the reader.

However, Stevenson shortly thereafter exposes the reader to London's darker side. After a minute, the two men reach "a certain sinister block of building" (Stevenson 4). This structure bears "a blind forehead of discoloured wall" (Stevenson 4) and "in every feature, the marks of prolonged and sordid negligence" (Stevenson 4), demonstrating a distinct sense of oversight and even creepiness that sharply contrasts with the feeling of hospitality elicited just one paragraph prior. The surrounding residents further represent the state of disrepair into which the block has fallen: "Tramps slouched into the recess and struck matches on the panels; children kept shop upon the steps; the schoolboy had tried his knife on the mouldings" (Stevenson 4). The selfsame London that was only moments ago a cared-for center of commerce has now shifted into a dilapidated center for vagrants, one in which the novella's introduction of Mr. Hyde takes place. By setting the first meeting with Mr. Hyde in this suddenly ominous quarter of London that was moments ago warm and friendly, Stevenson draws an apparent connection between the physical decay of the city and the moral decay of the eponymous double.

The urban environment's reflection of Mr. Hyde as a villainous double extends beyond the initial scene of the derelict quarter. When Mr. Utterson lays to sleep that night, he does so while troubled with dreams of the terrible creature described to him by his friend. Stevenson narrates, "The figure in these two phases haunted [Mr. Utterson] all night; and if at any time he dozed over, it was but to see it…move the more swiftly and still the more swiftly, even to dizziness, through wider labyrinths of lamplighted city, and at every street-corner crush a child and leave her screaming" (11). Mr. Utterson now envisions London as an eerie maze with many twists, turns, and darkened corners in which the demonic Mr. Hyde may lie ready to attack. The city is a refuge for evil; its great size is no longer a sign of growth and progress but is instead the promise of a monster hidden within.

Stevenson's presentation of London in his novella most clearly illustrates the theme of concealed corruption through its continuously changing mood. Whereas the city appears perfectly welcoming when first described, it is later shown in a more ambiguous tone, hinting at the gradual manifestation of London's underlying rot. When Mr. Utterson learns of Sir Danvers Carew's murder, which he believes Dr. Jekyll's loathsome double perpetrated, London feels rather depressing. Mr. Utterson watches the scene for a minute, observing that a "great chocolate-coloured pall lowered over heaven…here, for a moment, the fog would be quite broken up, and a haggard shaft of daylight would glance in between the swirling wreaths" (Stevenson 21). The specific references to light shifting through the fog, as well as the mention of Soho's "changing glimpses, with its muddy ways" (Stevenson 21) emphasize the murkiness and confusion clouding Mr. Utterson's experience: he knows that his dear friend Dr. Jekyll is somehow involved with Mr. Hyde, but he knows not how the two are connected or how he may

best help the situation. The light intermingles with the dark; neither Mr. Hyde nor the city has yet reached the final stage of corruption.

Nevertheless, the dangerous Mr. Hyde has stooped to a new moral low after being so long suppressed—and the urban environment reflects that. In Stevenson's description of the "great chocolate-coloured pall" that befalls Soho, the word play of "pall" to suggest death enhances Mr. Utterson's misery and reinforces the oppressive effect that Sir Carew's murder has had on the atmosphere. While coming to grips with the clear escalation of the rampant monster's evil, Mr. Utterson notes a particular "mournful reinvasion of darkness" (Stevenson 21) throughout the streets. The constantly reappearing motif of darkness and shadow juxtaposed against light reaffirms this moment's hopelessness as the emotional fallout of a man's death permeates the city. Stevenson further writes that the scene "seemed, in the lawyer's eyes, like a district of some city in a nightmare" (21). Just as Mr. Hyde's criminal behavior has devolved, so too has the urban setting.

By the conclusion of Mr. Utterson's investigation, London has fallen into a horrific state, most plainly evidenced by the writing's treatment of solitude at nighttime. Stevenson illustrates two nights of empty streets near the beginning and end of the story and uses paralleled language to emphasize the dramatic shift that has taken place in the time between them. Of the first case, early in Mr. Utterson's inquest into Mr. Hyde, Stevenson pens: "It was a fine dry night; frost in the air; the streets as clean as a ballroom floor…By ten o'clock, when the shops were closed, the by-street was very solitary and, in spite of the low growl of London from all round, very silent" (12). The avenues are currently clean and comfortable. With the busy city grumbling softly in the background, the setting is very calm, and the lack of human presence seems rather welcome.

This stands in stark contrast with the much later description of the night on which Dr. Jekyll's butler informs Mr. Utterson that he suspects foul play. The anxious butler asserts that he believes "there is something wrong" (Stevenson 35) with Dr. Jekyll and asks Mr. Utterson to come along and see for himself. Mr. Utterson, himself "a good deal frightened" (Stevenson 35), goes with the butler to see the doctor. Stevenson writes, "It was a wild, cold, seasonable night of March…[and] Mr. Utterson thought he had never seen that part of London so deserted. He could have wished it otherwise; never in his life had he been conscious of so sharp a wish to see and touch his fellow-creatures" (36). This night, like the first, consists of a low temperature and empty roads. And yet, despite the nights being so similar in theory, this one is significantly more sinister in practice. The solitude—now stained by Mr. Utterson's fear and the dreadful mystery surrounding Dr. Jekyll—is no longer comforting but threatening. A once-desirable feature of the city has deteriorated and turned into a wholly negative aspect.

The virtuous shroud blanketing London has finally lifted, and it is only after Mr. Utterson has opened his eyes to the evil plaguing it that he can finally see London is far from the honorable haven it at first appears to be. Stevenson paints a depraved city operating under a facade—a not uncommon assessment of Victorian London. In his 1890 book of proposed social reforms titled *In Darkest England and the Way Out*, William Booth describes London as a center of corruption in which "the ghastly devastation is covered, corpselike, with the artificialities and hypocrisies of modern civilisation" (13). In this period, urbanity represented not only the growth of the economy and the population but also the growth of societal failings such as poverty and moral deterioration. Stevenson's portrayal of London captures the rising uncertainty and concern about these failings.

However, Stevenson's and Booth's shared perspective on London as an epicenter of social degradation was not the sole popular view of the era. Despite the city's faults, to some it remained a symbol of forward progress and innovation, including to Bram Stoker. *Dracula* presents a version of London that rejects Stevenson's notion of underlying rot and celebrates the value of a developing metropolis. While Stevenson draws a parallel between Dr. Jekyll/Mr. Hyde and London to demonstrate the city's duplicity (in both the modern and the archaic meanings of the word), Stoker uses Count Dracula and Transylvania as foils for London's modernity, thus depicting urbanity in a positive light.

When considered as he relates to the urban environment, Count Dracula becomes a symbol of the ancient, embodying "the primitive nature of the past as it permeates the present and challenges modernization" (Lohnes). He plays the role of an old and foreign force seeking to contaminate and to corrupt the ideal developed society for his own gain by moving to London. To this end, he invites a solicitor named Jonathan Harker to Castle Dracula in order to purchase a property in the city. Jonathan soon discovers Dracula's vampiric condition and nefarious plan, and he realizes the hideous imminent consequences of his actions: "This was the being I was helping to transfer to London, where, perhaps, for centuries to come he might, amongst its teeming millions, satiate his lust for blood, and create a new and ever-widening circle of semi-demons to batten on the helpless" (Stoker 52). London's steadily expanding population, a defining marker of the urban environment, typifies a major source of energy and power—one so great that Dracula plans to leech off of it in order to enlarge his own influence. In his moment of reflection, Jonathan recognizes that he cannot allow Dracula to take advantage of this power lest the Count cause irreparable harm to London and its residents.

Dracula further exemplifies the ancient's invasion of the modern through his means of takeover. Dracula's plan hinges on the "fifty cases of common earth" (Stoker 219) he ships to England: in order to rest, the vampire requires foreign soil from his home in Eastern European Transylvania. He begins his infiltration of London by physically bringing the uncivilized land into the civilized city, hence concretizing the metaphorical notion of the old contaminating the new. Dr. Van Helsing, the leading expert on vampire mythology, informs Jonathan and the rest of their vampire-hunting crew that they must "sterilize the earth, so that no more [Dracula] can seek safety in it" (Stoker 233). Dracula must recuperate in the dirt of his homeland, and the only way for England's defenders to safeguard their modern society is to purify the archaic earth by ritual means. Additionally, the precise word choice of "sterilize" implies an inherent filth or wrongness in Transylvanian land and makes English earth appear refined by contrast.

Aside from Dracula himself, Stoker primarily praises the urban environment through his harsh treatment of Transylvania. As London stands in for urbanity at large, Dracula's remote homeland of Transylvania (as Stoker paints it) epitomizes a primitive society. The very first words of Jonathan's journal record his departure from Munich and subsequent journey to Castle Dracula, located in what Jonathan describes as "one of the wildest and least known portions of Europe" (Stoker 3). Jonathan travels by coach and train, eventually reaching the castle "reared high above a waste of desolation" (Stoker 365) in an isolated landscape with a foreboding air. His journal tells of wailing dogs initiating "a wild howling…which seemed to come from all over the country, as far as the imagination could grasp it through the gloom of the night" (Stoker 13). This auditory imagery creates a stark sense of dread and looming danger, using the sounds of untamed, uncontrollable creatures to emphasize the threat of the uncivilized forest. Jonathan later transparently records his fear of this environment when he makes his decision to escape

Count Dracula: “Away from the cursed spot, from this cursed land, where the devil and his children still walk with earthly feet!” (Stoker 53). Jonathan connects Dracula’s evil to the location, projecting the vampire’s corruption onto the land itself.

Transylvania further serves as a foil for London’s modernity via the appearance of Castle Dracula. Stoker constantly illustrates the stronghold as old and decrepit—when first witnessed by Jonathan, Stoker characterizes it as “a vast ruined castle, from whose tall black windows came no ray of light, and whose broken battlements showed a jagged line against the sky” (15). Jonathan recalls of this moment, “I felt doubts and fears crowding upon me. What sort of place had I come to, and among what kind of people?” (Stoker 16). The mere vision of the castle immediately upsets Jonathan and calls into question the decency of its residents. Near the narrative’s conclusion, Jonathan’s wife Mina experiences a similar apprehension and anxiety toward the building when the party returns to destroy Dracula once and for all: she documents that “[t]here was something wild and uncanny about the place” (Stoker 360). The castle’s derelict composition highlights its old origin and neglect over time. Meanwhile, London prevails as the archetype of progress and growth, all the more so against the backdrop of Transylvania.

Even while Stoker lauds London for its modern advancements, he recognizes that it nonetheless has its faults. Lucy, a tragic victim of Dracula’s attack, dies and is buried “away from teeming London, where the air is fresh, and the sun rises over Hampstead Hill, and where wild flowers grow of their own accord” (Stoker 170). She finds a fleeting peace (before herself transforming into a vampire) in a churchyard removed from the overwhelming excitement of London. Stoker describes the air here as fresh, contrasting the city’s industrial smog. Periods of fog saturated with coal smoke were not uncommon in the late 1800s (Urbinato), and Stoker’s inclusion of this detail acknowledges that Victorian London was not without its flaws. Yet,

Dracula remains staunchly in favor of the city, stressing that these flaws have lessened over time and that London continues to improve. When Van Helsing arrives in London to assist in protecting Lucy from Dracula, he comments that "the smuts of London were not quite so bad as they used to be when he was a student here" (Stoker 111). The city is a work in progress and, its issues notwithstanding, represents evolution, achievement, and positive change.

Throughout his novel, Stoker uses the thematically ancient Dracula, his castle, and Transylvania to emphasize London's advantageous modernity. As Dracula informs Jonathan, "you dwellers in the city cannot enter into the feelings of the hunter" (Stoker 20); there is a very tangible division between all that Dracula represents and the progressive, civilized city, and Stoker uses this sharp divide to herald London as the successful pinnacle of human advancement. On the opposite end of the spectrum, Robert Louis Stevenson utilizes the similar divide between Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde to criticize the city as a monument to human immorality and hypocrisy. In their essay collection *Visions of the Modern City*, William Chapman Sharpe and Leonard Wallock recognize this duality: "As it symbolized human faith and aspirations, the contemporary metropolis took on aspects of the Heavenly City, the New Jerusalem; as it embodied the failure of these hopes, it partook of the depravity of Babylon or Sodom" (6). Thus, not only did London set the stage for such literary doubles as Dr. Jekyll/Mr. Hyde and the ancient/modern, but it also was itself a double: it was at once wealthy and poor, virtuous and wicked. The complete polarization of Stevenson's and Stoker's views exhibits London's disparate nature as well as the difficulty of *fin de siècle* literature accurately to portray the urban environment. Victorian London with all its facets and contradictions could only be captured when one considers—as Dracula articulates—"its life, its change, its death, and all that makes it what it is" (Stoker 21).

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