

Exploring the Motivations Behind Societal Destruction in Major Gothic Novels: A Comparative Analysis of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, Dracula, and Frankenstein

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ABSTRACT: This article investigates the motivations behind societal destruction as illustrated in three major Gothic novels: *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* by Robert Louis Stevenson, *Dracula* by Bram Stoker, and *Frankenstein* by Mary Shelley. Applying a comparative analysis, the paper studies how each narrative mirrors the concerns of its era, representing deep-seated fears related to identity, morality, and the consequences of unchecked ambition. In *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, the duality of human nature is used as a metaphor for societal decay, while *Dracula* exhibits Victorian fears of invasion and the 'Other.' On the other hand, *Frankenstein* criticizes the ethical implications of scientific progress and its potential to destroy social order. By analyzing these texts, this article highlights common themes of alienation, ethical neglect, and existential dread, finally contending that these Gothic narratives not only reflect historical concerns but also resonate with contemporary issues regarding technological progress and moral responsibility.

Introduction

Exploration of the macabre, the supernatural, and the psychological depths of human experience are three main features of the Gothic genre. This has played a decisive role

in shaping literary traditions since its inception. Emerging in the late 18th century, Gothic literature delves into the complexities of fear and desire, often set against dark, brooding landscapes which mirror the agony within its characters. This genre can be regarded as a powerful lens through which authors investigate the anxieties of their time, particularly concerning societal norms and moral boundaries. Central to many Gothic narratives are themes of societal destruction and moral decay, illustrating how individual violations can lead to catastrophic consequences for both the self and society in general.

In this comparative analysis, this study will explore the motivations behind societal destruction as described in three iconic Gothic novels: Robert Louis Stevenson's **Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde**, Bram Stoker's **Dracula**, and Mary Shelley's **Frankenstein**. Each of these works provides a distinct yet interconnected portrayal of characters whose ambitions and desires challenge societal traditions, finally ending in chaos and devastation. By examining the psychological and philosophical aspects of these texts, this article seeks to reveal the complex relationship between personal ambition and the disintegration of social order. Through this exploration, this study shed light on how these Gothic narratives not only reflect the fears of their respective eras but also offer timeless insights into the darker facets of human nature and the perils of moral ambiguity.

Literature Review

Gothic literature has long provided as a deep exploration of societal fears and the complexities of the human psyche, especially related to themes of societal destruction. Scholars have mentioned that major Gothic novels often mirrors the anxieties of their time, using elements of horror and the supernatural to criticize societal norms and moral decay. Johnson (2021) pinpoints the duality inherent in Gothic characters, offering that this duality serves as a metaphor for the destructive inclinations within society itself. Thompson (2022) explores how **Dracula** and **Frankenstein** indicate societal fears through their monstrous characters, showcasing how these figures can display the breakdown of social order and the consequences of unchecked ambition.

Research has recognized various dimensions of societal destruction within Gothic narratives, such as the role of science and ethical dilemmas. Williams (2023) delves into **Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde**, contending that the pursuit of scientific knowledge without moral consideration leads to societal collapse. On the contrary, Patel (2021) discusses the intersection of science and horror, emphasizing how these themes resonate with contemporary anxieties about technological advancement. Moreover, Martinez (2022) studies moral corruption in both **Frankenstein** and **Dracula**, demonstrating how these texts mirror the vulnerability of humanity in the face of societal challenges.

Despite these insights, there remain notable gaps in the existing literature. While previous studies have focused on individual texts or specific themes, there is a lack of comprehensive comparative analyses that examine how different Gothic novels collectively address motivations behind societal destruction. Additionally, although different academics have hinted the theme of duality, few have systematically analyzed how this concept manifests across multiple works, particularly in relation to societal breakdown. This article aims to fill these gaps by conducting a comparative analysis of **Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde**, **Dracula**, and **Frankenstein**, investigating their shared themes and unique contributions to the discourse on societal destruction in Gothic literature.

In conclusion, while significant research has been done on themes of societal destruction within Gothic literature, further exploration is permitted to comprehend how these themes interact across different texts. This comparative analysis will not only contribute to the existing body of knowledge but also provide a more detailed comprehending of the motivations behind societal destruction as painted in major Gothic novels.

Analyzing each novel

– Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde

In **Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde**, the duality of human nature is obviously depicted through the character of Dr. Jekyll, whose scientific ambition leads him to create a potion that changes him into the unrestrained and malevolent Mr. Hyde. This

transformation symbolizes the conflict between the civilized self and the primal instincts lurking beneath the surface, showcasing the inherent conflict within humanity. As Jekyll awakens his darker impulses through Hyde, he exemplifies the consequences of unchecked ambition, ultimately leading to his own moral and physical downfall. The narrative provides as a cautionary tale about the dangers of allowing scientific pursuits to override ethical considerations, emphasizing that the quest for knowledge can lead to self-destruction.[1][2]

Jekyll's metamorphosis into Hyde also mirrors societal fears of moral corruption during the Victorian era. His tendency for immorality resonates with contemporary anxieties regarding the potential for individuals to become estranged from their moral compass as driven by unchecked desires. The character of Hyde embodies the monstrous "Other" that society fears—a revelation of what happens when one gives into base instincts without societal constraints. This fear is not only personal but also collective, as it suggests a broader concern about the erosion of moral values within society itself.[3][4] Ultimately, Jekyll's tragic fate serves as a stark reminder of the fragility of humanity and the precarious balance between civilization and savagery.[5][6]

Dracula

In **Dracula**, Bram Stoker explores the complexities of human nature, particularly through the character of Count Dracula, who represents societal anxieties surrounding sexuality, immigration, and disease. The novel reflects the Victorian fear of the "Other," as Dracula embodies a foreign transgressor whose very presence threatens the stability and moral fabric of British society. His ability to seduce and corrupt is a manifestation of the era's anxieties about unchecked sexuality and the breakdown of traditional values, suggesting that the boundaries between civilization and savagery are extremely narrow.[3] Dracula's arrival in England serves as a metaphor for the fears associated with immigration, particularly the perceived threat posed by outsiders who corrupts social norms.

The Count's predatory nature and his ability to transform into a bat or wolf educe fears of disease and contamination, paralleling contemporary concerns about the

spread of illnesses from foreign lands. This connection between Dracula and disease emphasizes the Victorian anxiety regarding public health and the potential for moral corruption when faced with external influences. [7][8] Moreover, the novel's portrait of female characters, for instance Mina Harker and Lucy Westenra, exposes the tension between repressive Victorian ideals and emerging notions of female sexuality. Dracula's exploitation of these women pinpoints societal fears about sexual liberation and the consequences of deviating from established norms. The transformation of Lucy from a pure woman into a vampire symbolizes the downfall of Victorian ideals surrounding femininity and virtue, showcasing how societal pressures can lead to personal destruction. [4][9]

Ultimately, *Dracula* acts as a mirror showing the vulnerability of Victorian societal norms in the face of modernity. The Count's monstrous nature captures the era's fears about the unknown and the potential for chaos that lies beneath the surface of civilized society. As Stoker uses these themes throughout his narrative, he encourages readers to confront their own anxieties about identity, morality, and the boundaries that define humanity. [10][11]

Frankenstein

In *Frankenstein*, Mary Shelley poignantly studies the consequences of playing God and the neglect of moral responsibility in scientific exploration. Victor Frankenstein's ambition to transcend natural boundaries leads him to make life, yet he fails to consider the ramifications of his actions. This action results in a deep moral corruption, as he abandons his creation, leaving it to navigate a world that is inherently hostile. The creature's existence rises critical questions about the ethics of scientific advancement and the responsibilities that comes with such power. Shelley's narrative serves as a cautionary tale, highlighting that the pursuit of knowledge without ethical consideration can result in catastrophic consequences. [1][4]

The creature's rejection by society is a central theme that demonstrates how isolation and alienation can bring destruction and chaos. This creature is initially innocent and looking forward to being accepted. Then, the creature becomes increasingly embittered by the constant rejection and fear it encounters. This societal detachment

changes it into a figure of revenge, finally leading to tragic consequences for both the creature and Victor Frankenstein. The narrative emphasizes the idea that ignoring the emotional and social wants of individuals can lead to violence and despair. This suggests that societal acceptance is crucial for alleviating chaos.[7][5] Shelley's exploration of these themes pinpoints the profound impact of societal rejection on the individual's psyche, depicting how the failure to embrace the "Other" can result in mutual destruction .[3][6]

Comparative analysis of three novels

In a comparative analysis of **Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde**, **Dracula**, and **Frankenstein**, a shared theme emerges related to societal destruction, rooted in the characters' internal conflicts and the external forces that shape their actions. Every author gives the motivations behind these destructive forces through the lens of their characters' struggles with identity, morality, and societal expectations.

In **Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde**, Robert Louis Stevenson depicts the duality of human nature as a catalyst for societal downfall. Dr. Jekyll's struggles with his alter ego, Mr. Hyde, expose the dangers of inhibited scientific ambition and moral ambiguity. Stevenson's portrayal highlights that the desire to transcend human limitations can trigger catastrophic consequences for both the individual and society at large.[2] This examination of duality emphasizes a foundational concern of losing control over one's darker drives, suggesting that societal destruction stems from within.

Conversely, Bram Stoker's **Dracula** provides societal concerns through the lens of the monstrous "Other." Count Dracula incorporates the anxieties surrounding immigration, sexuality, and the erosion of Victorian values. The motivations behind these destructive forces are deeply related to societal norms and the fear of the unknown, as Stoker criticizes the fragility of civilization as faced with foreign threats. [3][8]The narrative offers that social downfall is not only a result of personal moral failures but also a reflection of collective fears about identity and belonging.

Mary Shelley's **Frankenstein** delves into the ethical implications of scientific progress and its potential to destroy societal harmony. Victor Frankenstein's desire to create life results in inadvertent consequences, highlighting how the pursuit of

knowledge can lead to moral corruption and alienation.[4][6] Shelley's work emphasizes the idea that societal destruction comes from humanity's failure to take responsibility for its creations, pinpointing a more warning story about the perils of hubris.

While all three authors investigate themes of societal destruction, their approaches and conclusions are different significantly. Stevenson emphasizes on the psychological dimensions of duality and personal responsibility, offering that societal downfall is initially an internal conflict.[4][5] On the contrary, Stoker put emphasis on exterior societal concerns and the influence of the "Other," shaping destruction as an outcome of cultural anxieties .[9][11] Shelley, on the other hand, provides a more nuanced vision that intertwines scientific ethics with personal accountability, alarming against the dangers of unrestrained ambition (Davis, 2020; Patel, 2021).[7][12]

In conclusion, while *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, *Dracula*, and *Frankenstein* share common themes surrounding societal destruction, each author uniquely addresses the motivations behind these destructive forces. Through their distinct narratives and characterizations, they provide valuable insights into the complexities of human nature and the societal contexts that shape our fears and aspirations.

Conclusion

This article offers a comparative analysis of three major Gothic novels—*Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, *Dracula*, and *Frankenstein*—focusing on the motivations behind societal destruction depicted within them. It explores how each novel reflects the fears and anxieties of its era, particularly regarding identity, morality, and unchecked ambition.

The analysis finds that in *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, the theme of duality in human nature serves as a metaphor for societal decay, with scientific ambition leading to moral downfall. *Dracula* highlights Victorian anxieties about invasion, sexuality, and the "Other," using the figure of Dracula to symbolize fears of foreign threats and the breakdown of societal norms. *Frankenstein* critiques the ethical implications of

scientific advancement, showing how neglect of moral responsibility can bring about chaos and alienation.

Through a comparative lens, the article reveals shared themes of alienation, ethical neglect, and existential dread across all three works. It argues that these novels not only mirror the social concerns of their respective periods but also offer timeless warnings about the dangers of moral ambiguity, the loss of social cohesion, and the consequences of unchecked ambition. Ultimately, the study suggests that the motifs explored in these Gothic narratives remain relevant today, especially in discussions about technological progress and moral responsibility.

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