



**UNIVERSIDADE FEDERAL DO CEARÁ**  
**CENTRO DE HUMANIDADES**  
**DEPARTAMENTO DE ESTUDOS DA LÍNGUA INGLESA, SUAS LITERATURAS E**  
**TRADUÇÃO**  
**CURSO SUPERIOR DE LICENCIATURA EM LETRAS - INGLÊS**

**TOMAS ALBUQUERQUE LOMÔNACO**

**‘HARDLY HUMAN’: AN ANALYSIS OF PORTRAYALS OF PHYSICAL  
DISABILITY IN *FRANKENSTEIN* AND *STRANGE CASE OF DR. JEKYLL AND MR.  
HYDE***

**FORTALEZA**

**2024**

TOMAS ALBUQUERQUE LOMÔNACO

‘HARDLY HUMAN’: AN ANALYSIS OF PORTRAYALS OF PHYSICAL DISABILITY  
IN *FRANKENSTEIN* AND *STRANGE CASE OF DR. JEKYLL AND MR. HYDE*

Trabalho de conclusão de curso apresentado ao  
Curso de Licenciatura em Letras-Inglês, do  
Centro de Humanidades da Universidade  
Federal do Ceará, como requisito parcial à  
obtenção do grau de Licenciado em Letras -  
Inglês

Orientador: Prof. Dr. Paulo Roberto Nogueira  
de Andrade

FORTALEZA

2024

Dados Internacionais de Catalogação na Publicação  
Universidade Federal do Ceará  
Sistema de Bibliotecas

Gerada automaticamente pelo módulo Catalog, mediante os dados fornecidos pelo(a) autor(a)

---

L837h Lomônaco, Tomas Albuquerque.

Hardly human : An analysis of portrayals of physical disability in Frankenstein and Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyd / Tomas Albuquerque Lomônaco. – 2024.  
26 f.

Trabalho de Conclusão de Curso (graduação) – Universidade Federal do Ceará, Centro de Humanidades, Curso de Biblioteconomia, Fortaleza, 2024.

Orientação: Prof. Dr. Paulo Roberto Nogueira de Andrade.

1. Disability. 2. Gothic. 3. Contrast. I. Título.

CDD 020

---

TOMAS ALBUQUERQUE LOMÔNACO

‘HARDLY HUMAN’: AN ANALYSIS OF PORTRAYALS OF PHYSICAL DISABILITY  
IN *FRANKENSTEIN* AND *STRANGE CASE OF DR. JEKYLL AND MR. HYDE*

Trabalho de conclusão de curso apresentado ao  
Curso de Licenciatura em Letras-Inglês, do  
Centro de Humanidades da Universidade  
Federal do Ceará, como requisito parcial à  
obtenção do grau de Licenciado em Letras -  
Inglês.

Aprovada em: 24/09/2024.

BANCA EXAMINADORA

---

Prof. Dr. Paulo Roberto Nogueira de Andrade (Orientador)  
Universidade Federal do Ceará (UFC)

---

Prof. Dr. Carlos Augusto Viana da Silva  
Universidade Federal do Ceará (UFC)

---

Prof. Dr. Diego Napoleão Viana Azevedo  
Universidade Estadual do Ceará (UFC)

To my grandmother Edite and my aunt Leninha

## ABSTRACT

This paper has the objective of analysing the works *Frankenstein* (1818), by Mary Shelley, and *Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1886), by Robert Louis Stevenson, particularly the characters of the Creature and Hyde as portrayals of physical disability during their respective times and contexts. By using the history of disability in the nineteenth century and studies regarding the subjectivity of the Gothic body (Halberstam, 1995) as a theoretical background, this research argues that both the Creature and Hyde can be seen as disabled people within their own narratives, especially considering how they are seen and treated by those around them — for instance, they are constantly dehumanised and othered by their peers. These analyses are then contrasted to examine their unique subjectivities as well as their similarities, observing how portrayals of physical disability differed between distinct Gothic works and their relevance not only to discussions of disability at the time, but to today's debates too.

**Keywords:** disability; gothic; contrast.

## RESUMO

Essa pesquisa tem como objetivo analisar as obras de *Frankenstein* (1818), por Mary Shelley, e *O Médico e O Monstro* (1886), por Robert Louis Stevenson, em particular os personagens Criatura e Hyde como retratos de deficiências físicas durante seus respectivos tempos e contextos. Ao usar a história da deficiência no século dezenove e estudos a respeito da subjetividade do corpo gótico (Halberstam, 1995) como base teórica, esse trabalho argumenta que ambos a Criatura e Hyde podem ser vistos como pessoas com deficiência em suas próprias narrativas, especialmente considerando como eles são vistos e tratados por aqueles em sua volta — por exemplo, eles são constantemente desumanizados e postos como o “outro” por outros personagens. Em seguida, essas análises serão contrastadas para examinar suas subjetividades únicas assim como suas similaridades, observando como retratos de deficiência física se diferenciam entre textos góticos distintos e suas relevâncias não apenas para as discussões sobre deficiência da época, mas também para os debates de hoje em dia.

**Palavras-chave:** deficiência; gótico; contraste.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

1	INTRODUCTION .....	9
2	LITERATURE REVIEW .....	10
3	METHODOLOGY .....	13
4	ANALYSIS .....	14
4.1	The Creature .....	14
4.2	Edward Hyde .....	19
5	FINAL REMARKS.....	25
	REFERENCES.....	27



## 1 INTRODUCTION

This paper has the main objective of analysing the portrayals of physical disabilities present in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1994) and in Robert Louis Stevenson's *Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (2008). The original texts were first published respectively in 1818 and 1886, but the respective versions of 1994 and 2008 were used for these analyses. The specific objectives are to identify relevant segments in both books, elaborate on the works' context and connect them to the analysis and questions, and finally, compare how each book handles the topic, contrasting how these characters are portrayed and listing their similarities and differences. In summary, this research aims to analyse how the Creature and Mr. Hyde, from *Frankenstein* and *Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, respectively, can be interpreted as disabled characters when taken the historical and literary context of people with disabilities at the time of publication of each work into consideration.

Furthermore, by taking these interpretations into account, this paper will further examine them by analysing how these two characters are treated within their own stories when considered to be a representation of disabled people, and how they reflect the relations of this group with able-bodied people that still echoes in the current social context. The main hypothesis raised is that both portrayals will be most similar in relation to other characters' treatment of the Creature and Hyde, and will be the most differing regarding the historical justifications that characters around them had to react to them as they did, particularly how they reflect social values in the Regency period and in the late-Victorian era (Holmes & Huff, 2020). It is important to note that there is no intention to define which portrayal of physical disability is "better", "worse", "more accurate", "inaccurate", or any other judgment of this sort, as not only they are highly arbitrary, but there are all sorts of physical disabilities, therefore it would be exceedingly difficult if not unproductive to try to sort these interpretations into any of these labels.

The reasoning behind this theme is that nineteenth-century Gothic literature proves itself to be of increasing relevance despite its age, as every year there are countless new adaptations (including but not limited to cinema, theatre, and TV shows) as well as a plethora of references in almost every aspect of western culture. In addition, as discussions surrounding physical disabilities, particularly literary discussions, grow in visibility and in quantity both in and outside of academia, more research pertaining its topics is warranted, especially to expand and give further visibility to disabled voices who were previously not given enough space to voice their thoughts on the subject of disability.

## 2 LITERATURE REVIEW

*Frankenstein* (1994), by Mary Shelley, and *Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (2008), by Robert Louis Stevenson, are both incredible works of Gothic fiction that are still highly popular and influential to this day. Their narratives, themes and critiques, not only reflect their respective times, but offer glimpses of the current era as well. Naturally, they are also the focus of a plethora of diverse interpretations and analyses so vast that one does not need to be a scholar to come across them — the sheer volume of retellings, references and adaptations of these stories, ranging from films to musicals to videogames, is ever growing and nearly inescapable, even in the twenty-first century.

This paper will analyse the characters of the Creature and Mr. Hyde, respectively from the above mentioned novels, as physically disabled characters. This is justified primarily by Jack Halberstam's text "Skin Shows: Gothic Horror and the Technology of Monsters" (1995). Halberstam argues that Gothic fiction relies on horrifying the reader with an excess of meaning that is represented by the subjectivity of the deviant "other", this "other" being the monster that poses a perceived threat to bourgeois society.

[...] the emergence of the monster within Gothic fiction marks a particularly modern emphasis upon the horror of particular kinds of bodies. [...] If the Gothic novel produces an easy answer to the question of what threatens national security and prosperity (the monster), the Gothic monster represents many answers to the question of who must be removed from the community at large (Halberstam, 1995, p. 3).

As will be discussed, both the creature and Hyde fit this definition of Gothic monster. While the author only mentions possible analyses pertaining to race, gender, class, and sexuality, this paper argues that this and the author's analysis of *Frankenstein* could easily extend to other groups marked as deviants, particularly physically disabled people.

Furthermore, it can be argued that some concepts in Kelly Hurley's "The Gothic Body: Sexuality, materialism, and degeneration at the *Fin de Siècle*" (2004), although not focused on the novels *Frankenstein*, *Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, or on the theme of disability, can be used to further define the Creature's and Hyde's places within their stories as deviant gothic bodies. For instance, the idea that the monster, the Thing, represents the abhuman, which in turn represents that which cannot fit in material categories — it is a chaotic, unstable state of being that reaffirms what is "fully human" (and therefore acceptable) while

simultaneously reflecting the fear of losing their stability, which defines what is human, and becoming the unruly body of the Thing, the Gothic monster. Some other ideas, such as the abnormal being, which cannot be defined or categorised, will be developed further when analysing the character of Hyde. These ideas, the chaotic uncategorised body and its relation to what is considered normal, can be very much extended to disability, not only in a literal sense — what are random flare ups of chronic pain and fatigue, the multiple ways one can be perceived by each able-bodied person who comes across, the backhanded “accessibility” of disability resources provided by institutions that are paradoxically inaccessible, and many other aspects of living as a disabled person, if not chaotic? — but also in the context of the characters’ narratives. Both the Creature and Hyde are defined by their state as the Thing, abhuman bodies of defilement that can only bring horror to the “fully human” people around them, a condition that, as will be discussed, may be linked to their physical disabilities.

As for the Creature’s analysis specifically, a few texts will be used as references. Firstly, the historical context of physical disability when *Frankenstein* was written and published, and the link of it to the portrayal of the character of the Creature will be discussed using the works of Lacom (2005) and Holmes & Huff (2020). To do so, it will be discussed the particular way of how physically disabled people in the early 19th century were shunned for reasons that rely mostly on what was considered aesthetical and beautiful, yet were seen as a spectacle at the same time, as it is the case of what were called “freak shows” at the time. Then, to investigate the Creature’s relation to his own disability and how people around him perceive him, the works of Marchbank (2010) will be cited, as well as Halberstam’s (1995) aforementioned text. Marchbank not only discusses Mary Shelley’s connection to writing disabled characters, but also what these characters represent in her many works, including *Frankenstein*. Halberstam, while not focusing on disability, analyses the Creature’s otherness and how it relates to his perceived monstrosity. As previously stated, it can be argued that what Halberstam considers a potential symbolism of class and race markers can also be applied to physical disabilities.

The analysis of Hyde’s character will follow a similar path. First and foremost, like the analysis of the previous character, a few texts will be used to establish the historical context of the novel *Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* and how it is relevant to interpret Hyde as a physically disabled person: Paul’s “Darwin, social Darwinism and eugenics” (2003) and Reid’s “Robert Louis Stevenson, Science, and the *Fin de Siècle*” (2006), to first explain the proliferation of social darwinism and eugenics in the late 19th century in general; then, Lacom’s

“‘The Time Is Sick and out of Joint’: Physical Disability in Victorian England” (2005) and Holmes’s and Huff’s “A Cultural History of Disability in the Long Nineteenth Century” (2020) to further explore the rapid spread of the need to further associate these people to a sort of pathology and its relation to the poor treatment of disabled people, such as the creations of workhouses, and how this affected their public perception. In addition, Julia Reid’s work (2006) will be used again to examine Stevenson’s relation to the medical *zeitgeist* of late Victorian times and how it most certainly affected his writing. Then, to proceed with the analysis of Hyde as a character amidst this historical context and his portrayal within *Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, the works of Halberstam (1995) and Hingston (2019) will be used, further supporting the interpretation of Hyde as a physically disabled person in his narrative. For instance, Hyde is consistently described as having some sort of undiagnosable deformity (STEVENSON, 2008), and Hingston (2019) argues that this constant scrutiny of his body not only is the source of other characters’ horror, but also part of what makes Hyde a disabled person. All of these formidable works create a sound structure to build and solidify the arguments present in this analysis.

### 3 METHODOLOGY

This research will be of an exploratory nature, and it will take form as a bibliographic study, despite containing historical aspects to some extent. The data collection and analysis process will be qualitative and interpretative, for it tackles elements and themes that are of a subjective nature as well. In addition, the objects of study of this paper are the characters of Edward Hyde, from *Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, and the Creature, from *Frankenstein*, which will be examined as portrayals of physical disability that pertain to their respective works and social historical context, as well as their similarities and differences.

The steps taken in this research to successfully achieve the aforementioned objectives are as follows: firstly, excerpts that are relevant to the characters' relation with physical disabilities were selected from their respective books. Then, to help contextualise these segments, a brief examination of the historical context of the books will take place, which will revolve around the treatment of the disabled population during the early and late 19th century. The reason for this introductory analysis is that it can be argued that these historical views of disabled people influenced (intentionally or not) the writing of the novels, objects of study. Afterwards, by using the excerpts as evidence and works discussed in the previous section as a basis, each character will be analysed individually at first, and it will be argued that both the Creature and Hyde can be seen as a representation of physically disabled characters in their own contexts. Finally, these individual interpretations will be contrasted, and their similarities and differences will be examined along with a reflection as well as a conclusion and an answer to the hypothesis posed in this paper. It is relevant to note that there is no intention to categorise any of these books' portrayals as objectively a "better" or "worse" approach, but to study the variety and scope of representations of this kind in Gothic fiction.

By taking these steps, it will be possible to understand how both these characters can be comprehended as physically disabled people, not only the time they were created, but also in the present time as well, and how many of the aspects of the treatment of this often forgotten section of the population are still reverberating in current, primarily Western cultures, being relevant to their present-day fictional portrayals, public perception, and the importance of disability studies.

## 4 ANALYSES

### 4.1 The Creature

In the early nineteenth century, disabilities did not yet have the visibility as a medical pathology that is familiar to this day. In fact, the term “disabled” only started being used in Victorian times, therefore most who would be considered disabled today were lumped into categories such as “defected”, “crippled”, “deformed”, and many others, depending on bodily variations and defined how disabled people were seen by the dominating able-bodied majority (Holmes & Huff, 2020). In addition, a lot of this majority’s only contact with the disabled was through so-called “freak shows”, which were events where disabled people and other individuals with bodies considered atypical for that society exposed themselves and their subjectivities to the general public for profit. Ever since freak shows first appeared, there has been debates about whether they harnessed a net positive or negative view of the people being presented. By discussing that, Lacom (2005, p. 548) says “Such exhibitions erased the differences among deviant bodies, which, because they were seen to threaten England's national security, were managed by being made spectacle, controlled through ritual containment”. As we can see, she is arguing that these atypical bodies were considered a threat to national security, and freak shows served as a way to contain them. Holmes and Huff (2020), also discussing the issue, argue that freak shows were not merely exploitative, but also a way to negotiate the relations to physical diversity and a way to bring some sort of agency and independence that those disabled people did not have previously. For instance, it showed that many of the people who participated in freak shows were capable of doing things and living as freely and as well as their able-bodied peers.

Yet, all of the aforementioned authors agree that freak shows “forced” the people who usually uphold the standards of normalcy to deal with the existence of other types of people and that disabled people do live their own lives, as Holmes and Huff (2020, p. 25) reinforce: “By exposing these bodies for all to see, rather than segregating and silencing them through the practices of institutionalization, freak shows demanded that society engage with the fact of corporeal variation”. Furthermore, by representing the body as something ambiguous, they challenged perceptions of disability, as well as race, gender, sexuality, and such (Holmes & Huff, 2020).

This context had a noticeable impact on literature at the time, particularly in Romantic writing: Wordsworth, Coleridge, Hawthorne, and Dickens are just some examples of writers who engaged with disability in some way or another. In addition, this engagement has a strong connection to the aesthetic notions that dominated the Romantic world at the time (Holmes & Huff, 2020). With Romanticism came an increasingly popular trend, based on the neo-Socratic idea of *kalokagathia* to associate the beautiful to the morally good, which was then used to justify a considerable percentage of prejudice against disabled people. This did not escape the Shelleys, as their thoughts seem to corroborate with this notion, as it can be easily observed in many of Percy Shelley's works, and in Mary Shelley's diaries (Marchbanks, 2010), as observed in her short story "Transformation", as well as in her most popular work, *Frankenstein*, of course. With the ascension of Gothic writing, a style that Halberstam (1995) defines as narratives that employ a rhetorical style which aims to induce emotions such as fear and desire in the spectator, these connections of the beautiful to the moral and the ugly to the immoral were heavily used when creating the Gothic monster. This relation, however, was not exclusive to the authors, but with the public as well, who heavily resonated with these ideals:

But monsters do indeed sell books and books sell monsters and the very popularity of the Gothic suggests that readers and writers collaborate in the production of the features of monstrosity. [...] The Gothic, in fact, like the vampire itself, creates a public who consumes monstrosity, who revels in it, and who then surveys its individual members for signs of deviance or monstrosity, excess or violence (Halberstam, 1995, p. 12).

With that in mind, it is safe to assume that the rhetorical use of disability as a violation of aesthetic codes, and therefore as a moral failing, depended (and arguably still does) on authors feeding their readers with these preconceived notions of monstrosity and audiences regurgitating this rhetoric on their own lives, which in turn would feed the authors, thus forming a cycle of self-perpetuating prejudice. Despite this, as will be seen in the following paragraphs, Mary Shelley often seemed to challenge this form of prejudice that ran rampant during her time and that unfortunately is still present to this day.

For the sake of this argument, the novel *Frankenstein* as a whole can be divided in two parts: before, and after the Creature first awakes. The first part is a collection of Victor Frankenstein's ambitions, his goal of not only being a modern Prometheus by creating life, but of making a life that followed the standards of beauty at the time. However, as the Creature first

opens his dull yellow eyes, indicating the transition between the first part and the second, Frankenstein's expectations are shattered at once. His description of the Creature after the fact is marked by his surprise, his acute astonishment due to the fact that his creation suddenly did not meet his aesthetic standards.

How can I describe my emotions at this catastrophe, or how delineate the wretch whom with such infinite pains and care I had endeavoured to form? His limbs were in proportion, and I had selected his features as beautiful. Beautiful! Great God! His yellow skin scarcely covered the work of muscles and arteries beneath; his hair was of a lustrous black, and flowing; his teeth of pearly whiteness; but these luxuriances only formed a more horrid contrast with his watery eyes, that seemed almost of the same colour as the dun-white sockets in which they were set, his shrivelled complexion and straight black lips. (Shelley, 1818, p. 55)

As we can see, in his first minute of life, the Creature is already scorned and set aside by his own creator. The Creature's deformity is never fully described in the entire book, and is particularly mysterious if Frankenstein's account of creating a beautiful being can be trusted. Thus, this paper argues that this elusive physical mark can be interpreted as a physical disability. Considering that many would consider any sort of disability to be against the morally beautiful, it would make sense that Victor Frankenstein, upon seeing that his creation bears some type of physical disability which was up to that point unbeknownst to him, would disown and despise the Creature to such a quick and cruel extent that he would almost immediately abscond his own chamber in fear. Therefore, the first part of Frankenstein is defined by an able-bodied ideal of a world free of physical disabilities, while the second part represents the real world as, at least in Victor's perspective, one "tainted" with deformity and bodily diversity. In that sense, the presence of the Creature as a disabled individual to Frankenstein's view of the world is akin to that of people who presented in freak shows to expose types of bodies considered deviant to the able-bodied majority.

Furthermore, not only does the Creature's birth set him up as a physically disabled person, but it also marks the beginning of his constant dehumanisation. Other than the circumstances of his birth, the Creature has everything an average human has, such as human organs, capacity for reasoning, ability to think for himself, even a progenitor. Yet, he is never considered one to those around him, such as in this excerpt:



A flash of lightning illuminated the object, and discovered its shape plainly to me; its gigantic stature, and the deformity of its aspect, more hideous than belongs to humanity, instantly informed me that it was the wretch, the filthy daemon to whom I had given life (Shelley, 1818, p. 73).

In only this small section, the Creature is already denoted to be abhuman in a couple of ways: firstly, by describing his deformity to be so horrid that it transcends humanity, and secondly by being called a wretch and a demon. This sort of treatment only continues to escalate throughout the book. People around the Creature constantly assume he has evil intentions or ulterior motives, even when he has done nothing to warrant that, by fleeing upon meeting his gaze, or even attacking him, even when he saved a young girl from drowning. Strikingly, the only person who doesn't dehumanise or think ill of the Creature on sight is another physically disabled man. Although it can be argued that the only reason the blind man did not flee or attack the Creature was because he couldn't see his body, the brief moment of connection between them contains powerful symbolism. Marchbanks observes the following:

In many ways, the elderly musician seems a likely conduit between the creature and the society that has hitherto rejected him. De Lacey's musical skill with the guitar and his disability both suggest a figure accustomed to alternative modes of intercourse (Marchbanks, 2010, p. 28).

The Creature sees in De Lacey the possibility of liberation, he understands that there exists an opportunity for him to regain his agency. Before he met the blind man, he spent his days as a mere observer, longing to be like the people he watched, horrified by his own appearance, hiding himself from others trying not to get attacked once again due to some nonsensical, deeply ingrained prejudice that he had discovered the hard way. Unfortunately, that moment of communion is short lived, as the elder De Lacey's able-bodied son sees the Creature, and assuming that he has bad intentions yet again, drives the Creature away. However, this is arguably a tipping point in the Creature's story, when he realises the great amount of injustice that he has suffered and decides to reclaim his status of monstrosity and assert himself as his own being. This is observed in a few different ways. Not long after he was chased away by the De Laceys, he decides to burn down their property as his first act of transgression. Then, he recognises the subjectivities of his own body as not something inherently negative:

I was, besides, endued with a figure hideously deformed and loathsome; I was not even of the same nature as man. I was more agile than they and could subsist upon coarser diet; I bore the extremes of heat and cold with less injury to my frame; my stature far exceeded theirs. When I looked around, I saw and heard of none like me. Was I, then, a monster, a blot upon the earth, from which all men fled and whom all men disowned? (Shelley, 1818, p. 116)

Afterwards, he compares himself to Satan in the poem “Paradise Lost”, by John Milton. This has great significance within the text itself, as well as in a way that transcends the text and bleeds into the creation of the second generation of Romantics. The former happens because he reclaims the insults Victor had previously thrown at him, such as “wretch” and “demon” by relating to the most powerful demon in the Christian canon. The latter is especially significant because of the implications this comparison would give to fellow adherents of second generation of Romanticism, as many Romantics as Percy Shelley (1840) thought that Satan from “Paradise Lost” could be seen as an antihero of sorts, who was more sympathetic than Milton’s God. Therefore, by directly comparing the Creature to Satan, Mary Shelley would make many readers feel a lot more compassion for the Creature than they did beforehand. Another way she would do this, and perhaps the most important, is by having the Creature be able to converse directly with Victor Frankenstein, telling his side of the story. This makes it so that the reader is more receptive to hear the Creature’s reasoning behind his actions and make him increasingly sympathetic to them by making him an antihero instead of a villain. Jack Halberstam notes that:

The architecture of fear in this story is replaced by physiognomy, the landscape of fear is replaced by sutured skin, the conniving villain is replaced by an antihero and his monstrous creation, and the antihero as well as his offspring are both writers and readers (Halberstam, 1995, p. 28-29).

These events fully transform the Creature into a transgressive character in the story, one that challenges the status-quo by using the fear others feel when looking at him to harness power. The other characters in the story are not only afraid of the Creature because of his appearance, but because of what he represents. In other words, he uses his status as a disenfranchised, chaotic being who is capable of taking back the narrative, making it so that the reader can feel empathy and compassion towards him. He symbolises the Thing-ness of the body, the abhuman, as previously explained by Hurley (2004) in previous sections of this paper.

This connection also mirrors the relations of autonomy that disabled people who participated in freak shows in the early nineteenth century had with the able-bodied public.

## 4.2 Edward Hyde

As the nineteenth century progressed, so did scientific endeavours and the pursuit of knowledge. Although theories for the origin of life, especially that of the human species have been discussed for practically as long as philosophy existed, this topic had found its way back to the forefront of many scientific minds, including that of Charles Darwin, who published one of the most important and fundamental works on evolution in 1859, *On the Origin of Species*. Darwin did not talk specifically about human evolution in the text and would only discuss it in 1871 with “The Descent of Man, and Selection in Relation to Sex”, but the idea of natural selection and its implication relating to humans was spread like wildfire, clinging to multiple sectors of Victorian society, such as the economy and the political *zeitgeist*. Many seemed to share a common notion: competition was something inherently positive to humanity, ensuring that those with traits considered superior, virtuous, and more desirable would remain the majority, while those with characteristics considered inferior and weak would eventually die out (Paul, 2003). However, this perspective then shifted: people feared, erroneously, that, due to social welfare policies that aided those considered “undesirable”, the “inferior” were outnumbering the “superior”, which presumably indicated that humanity was devolving rather than evolving. This idea is known as degeneration theory. As Julia Reid puts it:

*Fin-de-siècle* Europe was famously haunted by the fear of degeneration. With its roots in pathological medicine and biology, and drawing on the Darwinian mechanism of natural selection, the theory of degeneration amounted to a reassessment of progressive narratives of evolution, and a recognition that life did not always advance from the simple to the complex. Elaborated by scientists [...], degeneracy was variously envisaged as disintegration of the highest levels of nervous organization, as arrested development, or as atavistic reversion (Reid, 2006, p. 56).

Among those considered “degenerates” and “undesirable” were physically disabled people (as well as the mentally disabled, the poor, people of colour, prostitutes, any who deviated from sexual and gender norms, and many other marginalised groups). Conditions and support for the disabled were already scarce: the Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834 sought to put disabled people, among others, in institutions such as workhouses, places that Cindy Lacom

(2005, p. 547) describes as “prisonlike [...] where conditions were purposefully made so bad that they encouraged people to starve rather than live there”, which was one way to keep those seen as “ugly” out of sight of abled-bodied individuals. Additionally, physically disabled people who weren’t in workhouses were still shunned and discriminated against due to their deviancy from the norm — a rather extreme example of this would be the policies called “ugly laws”, which is simultaneously a result of discriminatory perceptions and a catalyst for the continuous dissemination of such views (Holmes & Huff, 2020). In other words, society’s treatment of the physically disabled was paternalistic at best. However, with the propagation of social Darwinism, degeneration theory and eugenicist ideals, people were under the impression that discrimination against the disabled was not only morally correct, but scientifically proven to be beneficial for society.

This increasingly pathologized and objectified perspective of the disabled body that came with the popularisation of evolutionary science permeated many, if not all, aspects of Victorian life, so naturally it quickly made its way into literature. One writer who was particularly keen on engaging with such subjects was Robert Louis Stevenson: it can be easily argued that his works were highly influenced by his interactions with evolutionary scientists, and that his writings both reflect and engage with the scientific *zeitgeist* of the late Victorian period. According to Reid (2006), Stevenson was heavily involved in discussions of evolutionary psychology and anthropology and knew figures such as James Sully and Andrew Lang. His multiple acquaintances allowed for plenty of nuanced discussions on multiple theories of evolution. One topic Stevenson was particularly fascinated with was degeneration theory — both his autobiographical and fictional works reveal feelings of anxiety and tension relating to evolutionary regression. This is particularly observable in the 1886 novella *Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* through the character construction of Edward Hyde.

To some, Hyde may appear to be a simple and straight-forward character: an embodiment of pure evil which stands completely severed from any act of goodness. However, if we were to consider the Gothic monster to be a symbol of interpretation (Halberstam, 1995), particularly that of deviant bodies that oppose and threaten the hegemony of normalcy, then the character becomes infinitely nuanced, as is evidenced by the plethora of discussions about Hyde ever since the publication of the narrative. In these discussions, Hyde can be interpreted under the lens of race, sexuality, nationality, mental illness, addiction, and many other aspects. In the following paragraphs, it will be argued that Hyde can also be a portrayal of physical disability,

exploring the implications of this perspective within the text and how it relates to Victorian perceptions of the “other”.

Firstly, Hyde is marked as deviant by the people around him ever since his first appearance in the story, before he could utter a single word. He is first described as “a little man who was stumping along eastward at a good walk”, but, only a few lines later he is given another description that immediately strips him of humanity: “It wasn’t like a man; it was like some damned Juggernaut” (Stevenson, 1886, p.7). This sudden jump from one description to another seems disproportionate to circumstances, and can indicate some sort of bias coming from the speaker. Enfield himself remarks:

Well, the child was not much the worse, more frightened, according to the Sawbones; and there you might have supposed would be an end to it. But there was one curious circumstance. I had taken a loathing to my gentleman at first sight. [...] Well, sir, [the doctor] was like the rest of us; every time he looked at my prisoner, I saw that Sawbones turn sick and white with the desire to kill him (Stevenson, 1886, p.7).

In this passage, it is already implied that there is something about Hyde’s appearance that repulses those around him, which only becomes clearer as the book goes on, such as the following:

He is not easy to describe. There is something wrong with his appearance; something displeasing, something downright detestable. I never saw a man I so disliked, and yet I scarce know why. He must be deformed somewhere; he gives a strong feeling of deformity, although I couldn’t specify the point. He’s an extraordinary-looking man, and yet I really can name nothing out of the way. No, sir; I can make no hand of it; I can’t describe him. And it’s not want of memory; for I declare I can see him this moment. (Stevenson, 1886, p. 9)

One of the most remarkable and important parts of this paragraph is that this is the first time in the book that Hyde’s unusual appearance is linked to some form of “deformity”, as Enfield puts it, which is a word that is continuously echoed throughout the story as will be seen in the following paragraphs. Not only that, but also this certain deformity is apparently not entirely explicit and quite mysterious. These descriptions immediately mark Hyde as a deviant, and arguably a disabled individual, especially considering the multiple uses of the word “deformity”. Even if one argues that Hyde isn’t explicitly physically disabled and thus cannot be perceived as such, someone’s body or appearance aren’t the only thing that configure

disability — other people’s perceptions of that individual, particularly those of able-bodied people. As Kylee-Anne Hingston puts it:

I identify Hyde as a disabled character—not by his atypical body, but by the repulsion that characters feel towards him. Disability resides in the social and cultural environment rather than in the body, of course, and one way in which disabling takes place is through intense looking: the gaze and the stare (Hingston, 2019, p. 165).

Hyde is constantly having his character judged by others appearance-first, rather than his actions. The characters around him seem much more focused on gawking at his countenance than on any of his terrible deeds, and are inclined to connect the nature of his evilness to this mysterious deformity instead of his actual antics. At one point, later in the book, his appearance is directly linked to his evilness: “Even as good shone upon the countenance of the one, evil was written broadly and plainly on the face of the other. Evil besides [...] had left on that body an imprint of deformity and decay.” (Stevenson, 1886, p. 55). However, going back to earlier instances of this sentiment, there are excerpts such as this:

Mr. Hyde was pale and dwarfish, he gave an impression of deformity without any nameable malformation, he had a displeasing smile, he had borne himself to the lawyer with a sort of murderous mixture of timidity and boldness, and he spoke with a husky, whimpering and somewhat broken voice; all these were points against him, but not all of these together could explain the hit be something else,' said the perplexed gentleman. 'There is something more, if I could find a name for it. God bless me, the man seems hardly human! Something troglodytic, shall we say? [...] O my poor old Harry Jekyll, if I ever read Satan's signature upon a face, it is on that of your new friend. (Stevenson, 1886, p. 15-16)

There are a few things to dissect within this passage. Firstly, there is another description of Hyde’s appearance where a mention of deformity is found once again, this time adding “without any nameable malformation” (p. 15), which is arguably part of the reason that characters are so horrified by Hyde. However, before examining this aspect further, there are other paramount pieces of information in this section, such as the dehumanisation of Hyde as a whole which is seen all over this segment, such as in Utterson calling him “hardly human”, “troglodytic”, and saying that his face bears Satan’s signature. If conversations about Hyde in the text weren’t so focused on his appearance, these descriptions wouldn’t have much importance, but it is the persistent association of his misdeeds to his perceived disability that

make this troubling and part of the main argument of this paper. Besides, the use of atavistic words such as “troglodytic” as well as multiple instances of the expression “ape-like” (seen many times in the novella) bring the previously discussed context of eugenics and degeneration to the forefront of Hyde’s image. If, as Hingston argues, Hyde can be considered a disabled character by the way other people perceive him, then it's only natural that characters — especially characters who partake in at least some sort of intellectual discussion in late 19th century Britain — would link Hyde’s disability to degeneration theory, as they would be well-aware of the place disabled people occupied within a society fixated on weeding out the “genetically inferior”. In turn, it can be argued that seeing a person of such low societal standing in a position of relative power (like having considerable connections to a well-regarded doctor) only adds to the characters’ horror of Hyde. Thus, it is important to take these arguments into consideration when regarding Hyde as a disabled character.

Another important perception that further strengthens this argument is that a great part of the horror experienced by Hyde’s counterparts is due to the mysterious nature of his deformity. No character in *Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* is entirely capable of pinpointing what is precisely “wrong” with Hyde’s appearance. Not even Lanyon can give Hyde an exact diagnosis:

He was small, as I have said; I was struck besides with the shocking expression of his face, with his remarkable combination of great muscular activity and great apparent debility of constitution, and — last but not least — with the odd, subjective disturbance caused by his neighbourhood. This bore some resemblance to incipient rigour, and was accompanied by a marked sinking of the pulse. At the time, I set it down to some idiosyncratic, personal distaste, and merely wondered at the acuteness of the symptoms; but I have since had reason to believe the cause to lie much deeper in the nature of man, and to turn on some nobler hinge than the principle of hatred. (Stevenson, 1886, p. 48)

We can note that, even under the gaze of a seasoned medical professional, Hyde’s condition — his symptoms, as Lanyon puts it — is linked to his hateful actions. But, going back to his diagnosability, Hyde is seen by his peers as some sort of medical curiosity and use their anxieties relating to the chaotic, unclassifiable body as a justification to reinforce the normalcy of a reality tainted by eugenics, thus creating a moral barrier between the normal and the abnormal. As Hingston (2019, p. 168) says: “I argue that the narrator as well as the focalizers nonetheless do diagnose and map Hyde’s indescribable body — by classifying their responses

to him as natural and by using the scientific discourses of physiognomy and degeneration". In other words, there is a surprising amount of emphasis on Hyde's peculiar yet seemingly undiagnosable "deformity", which is so thoroughly linked to the characters' reactions of disgust upon first laying eyes on him, that it heavily implies that this fear of Hyde comes partially out of the possibility that, even in an era branded by scientific discoveries, not everything can be easily be assigned within a neat set of labels. This, as Hingston continues to argue, is seen as unthinkable by characters such as Lanyon or Utterson, who then try to justify their negative reactions by using physiognomic discourse as a support. Furthermore, this idea of Hyde as a vessel for the impossibly chaotic and unlabelled body fits well with Hurley's view of the uncategorizable in a Gothic setting:

The *fin-de-siecle* Gothic, witness to the rupture occasioned by the sciences, like them responds with revulsion to the loss of human specificity, deploying many of the same mechanisms — disavowal, displacement, assertions that abhumanness is the condition of others but never of oneself-visible in the sciences (Hurley, 2004, p.28).

Hurley also asserts that the Thing, that is a material body with no recognisable form, also brings fear to the observer because all matter, including the human body, is capable of becoming undifferentiated and disorganised, which threatens the very structure of what is considered normal. Therefore, in this context, by reminding his peers that they can also become an ungovernable being who cannot be confined within a particular definition of existence defined by the status-quo, Hyde acts as a fountain of dread to those around him.

To summarise, Hyde can be interpreted as a disabled character not only by his descriptions, but also by how other characters see and react towards him in the context of late 19th century Britain — how he is constantly robbed of his agency by those around him primarily because of how his mere existence as a deviant being challenges other characters' beliefs and conceptions of what classifies someone as normal, and his actions being only secondary to the narrators' motivations to view him as an abhuman, inferior being. By focusing so much on Hyde's appearance more so than his actions, it can be argued that Hyde is antagonised mainly by his position in society rather than by his deeds, and that the fear that he may bestow upon observers can be seen as a reflection of how late Victorian society saw disabled people.



## 5 FINAL REMARKS

Through this brief analysis of the portrayals of physical disabilities that can be seen in the characters the Creature and Mr. Hyde, a lot of similarities can be drawn. However, it is also possible to make a contrast between these two characters. Firstly, perhaps the most glaring similarities between them is that both are described as having some form of deformity. These “deformities” are barely elaborated upon in both works — their existence is simply mentioned — thus appealing to the reader’s perception of a “deformed” body, which is often connected to disabilities, particularly physical. However, the creature’s “deformity” seems much more apparent than Hyde’s, although it is still elusive and unspecified by the narrative. When describing the creature’s appearance, characters often use terms like “*the deformity of its aspect*” (Shelley, 1818, p. 73, emphasis added) and “*this miserable deformity*” (*Ibid*, p. 109, emphasis added) which imply that the deformity in question is evident and even specific. In contrast, Hyde’s descriptions are very keen on making his “deformity” ambiguous and unclassifiable, as in; “he gives a strong feeling of deformity” (Stevenson, 1886, p. 9), “he gave an impression of deformity without any nameable malformation” (*Ibid*, p. 15), and “the haunting sense of unexpressed deformity with which [Hyde] impressed his beholders” (*Ibid*, p. 23). In addition, there is a deeper, differing aspect between them — the anxiety and repulsion these observers feel towards Hyde also come from the fact that his disability does not fit into any box known to the characters. In contrast, the disgust and terror the observers from *Frankenstein* feel towards the creature come from his blatant disability. However, there lies another similarity in relation to other characters’ repulsion towards the Creature and Hyde — they both represent the abhuman, a protest that threatens the status-quo and therefore the relations of power of the dominating classes, which makes them dangerous to their counterparts who are a part of these elite groups.

Furthermore, both characters are highly dehumanised by spectators since their very first appearances. However, one of the main aspects of Hyde's dehumanisation relies on scientific ideas developed during the Victorian era, especially degeneration theory, his descriptions heavily contain atavistic language such as "troglodytic" and "ape-like". As seen previously, degeneration theory and other eugenicist ideals were often used against the disabled and other marginalised communities. Because such ideas did not yet exist during the Regency era, these aspects are not present in *Frankenstein*, making the creature's dehumanisation more

reliable in elements like the correlation between morals and beauty, which were more typical towards the early nineteenth century, including in literature.

In contrast, the Creature is presented in a much more sympathetic light, being able to tell his side of the story and justify his actions to his creator. In addition, the narrative of *Frankenstein* allows the Creature to have a significant amount of agency and visible intelligence, even being able to not only read John Milton's "Paradise Lost", but to compare himself to Satan and reclaim his own monstrosity to control the events of the story. Meanwhile, Hyde is only seen through the eyes of other characters, none of which feel anything other than disgust, hatred, and morbid curiosity towards him. Characters such as Utterson, Lanyon and Enfield focus a lot more on his mysterious deformity than his misdeeds, and would much rather judge him by his appearance than by his actions. Hyde is never given the opportunity to say his piece, the closest thing he gets to tell others his side of his story is through the mind of Dr. Jekyll, but he also dehumanises Hyde in his final account. However, both the Creature and Hyde have their appearance dictate how others feel towards them, rather than any of their antagonistic actions. Both of these characters are judged mostly by their physical disabilities, and a lot less by what they actually do in their stories.

Therefore, through this paper, it is possible to safely conclude that, although they have a lot of important differences, *Frankenstein* and *Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* have many similarities. Furthermore, by analysing them in relation to their respective social and historical contexts, these characters and works offer insightful reflections on how the relation between the able-bodied and disabled people occurred in previous centuries, how they were mirrored in literature, in turn how this literature then came to shape this relation even further, and how they came to shape current discussions of these characters and debates about portrayals of disability in many other mediums.

Yet, there are still many discussions to be had that pertain to other works of nineteenth century fiction, including those outside of the Gothic and outside of the anglosphere, as well as other perspectives from different authors and portrayals of different kinds of disability other than physical to fully grasp the diversity of these expressions, for academic explorations of themes regarding disabilities are still relatively new in relation to other fields of analysis. However, hopefully one day these important debates will have a greater visibility not only inside academia, but in other spheres of life as well.

## REFERENCES

- HALBERSTAM, Jack. **Skin Shows: Gothic Horror and the Technology of Monsters**. Duke University Press, 1995.
- HINGSTON, Kylee-Anne. **Articulating Bodies: The Narrative Form of Disability and Illness in Victorian Fiction**. Liverpool University Press, 2019. Available at <https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctvqmp1gs>
- HOLMES, Martha Stoddard; HUFF, Joyce L. **A Cultural History of Disability in the Long Nineteenth Century**. Great Britain: Bloomsbury Academic, 2020.
- HURLEY, Kelly. **The Gothic Body: Sexuality, materialism, and degeneration at the fin de siècle**. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004.
- LACOM, Cindy. 'The Time Is Sick and out of Joint': Physical Disability in Victorian England. **PMLA**, v. 120, n. 2, p. 547-552, mar. 2005. Available at <https://www.jstor.org/stable/25486182>
- MARCHBANKS, Paul. A Space, a Place: Visions of a Disabled Community in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* and *The Last Man*. In: ANOLIK, Ruth (ed.) **Demons of the body and mind: essays on disability in gothic literature**. Jefferson: McFarland & Co, 2010. p. 23-34
- PAUL, Diane B. Darwin, social Darwinism and eugenics. In: HODGE, Jonathan; RADICK, Gregory (ed.) **The Cambridge Companion to Darwin**. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003. p. 214-239
- REID, Julia. **Robert Louis Stevenson, Science, and the *Fin de Siècle***. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006.
- SHELLEY, Mary. **Frankenstein**. Penguin Popular Classics. Croydon: Penguin Books, 1994.
- SHELLEY, Percy Bysshe. **A Defence of Poetry**. Biblioteca Virtual Universal, 2008.
- STEVENSON, Robert Louis; LUCKHURST, Roger (ed.). **Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde and Other Tales**. Oxford World's Classics. New York: Oxford University Press, 2008.