

LESSON 12.

ROMANTICISM AND VICTORIANISM IN ENGLISH LITERATURE

Symbolism, Sensation, Adventure, and High Fantasy in the Victorian Novel: from Oscar Wilde to Bram Stoker

AIM OF THIS UNIT: The unit introduces the three movements formative of the late 19th century artistic views: Symbolism, Decadence, and Aestheticism. It demonstrates – through the example of Oscar Wilde’s fiction – how the sophisticated symbolism of the decadent aestheticist agenda may fuse with the more popular entertainment mode of gothic fiction’s pleasurable thrills. It also provides a brief overview of the Victorian era’s most popular novelistic forms, including the sensation novel, the adventure novel, detective fiction, and fantastic fiction.

KEY FIGURES: Oscar Wilde, Bram Stoker, Robert Louis Stevenson, Wilkie Collins, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle

RECOMMENDED READINGS: Oscar Wilde’s *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, *The Happy Prince and Other Stories*, Bram Stoker’s *Dracula*, RL Stevenson’s *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle’s *Hound of the Baskervilles*

KEY WORDS & TOPICS: symbolism, aestheticism, art for art’s sake, decadence, orientalism, epigram, dandy, double, degeneration, Faustian deal, mad scientist, shapeshifter, ekphrasis, “the love that dares not speak its name,” penny dreadful, urban gothic, epistolary novel, uncanny, fear of degeneration, horror romance, sensation novel, Newgate novel, invasion fantasy, new woman, pseudosciences, unreliable narrator

SYMBOLISM, DECADENCE, AESTHETICISM



Aubrey Beardsley’s illustration to Oscar Wilde’s *Salome*

✚ Symbolism:

- ✓ was an artistic movement of the 2nd half of the 19th century.
- ✓ turned against realism by rejecting the naturalistic, mimetic representation of everyday reality.
- ✓ was more interested in the Ideal than the Ordinary.
- ✓ favoured spirituality, imagination, dreams, mysticism, other-worldliness, esoteric affinities, revived mythical themes.
- ✓ celebrated the prophetic might of imagination as a token of the escape from monotonous, mundane reality.
- ✓ was hostile to plain meanings, declamations, false sentimentality and matter-of-fact description.
- ✓ was fond of powerful visual imagery, stimulation of multiple sense impressions (synaesthesia), ambiguous associations, metaphorical, suggestive writing
- ✓ aimed to express indirectly Absolute Truths

Symbols stand in for abstract ideas or emotions. They convey universal truths on complex levels of meanings which need a certain cultural background knowledge for their decoding that will inherently activate a network of associations, and hence fuse certainty (Truth/Ideal) with uncertainty (ambiguity, sense of evanescence).



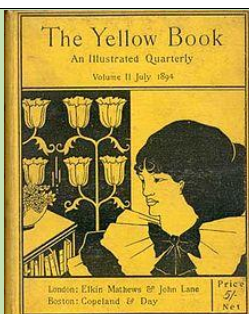
Félicien Rops.
Pornocrates, 1878

✚ Decadence

- ✓ The Decadent movement dates of the same period as Symbolism and is closely connected to it.
- ✓ Minor differences: while Symbolists were more interested in the explorations of dreams and ideals through metaphorical imagery, the Decadents were obsessed with morbid and taboo topics, including the darker side of sexuality, self-destructive passions, the sublime beauty of decay.
- ✓ The decadent artist's world weariness revived the Romantic moods of Byronic spleen and pleasurable thrills of the Gothic.
- ✓ Further characteristics include a general scepticism, delight in perversion, crude morbid humour, sacrilegious revelations.
- ✓ The movements praise the superiority of human imagination over logical reasoning and natural laws. (This is another difference: Symbolism used natural imagery to transcend beyond banal reality of everyday existence while Decadents belittled nature in the name of the celebration of artistry and the excessive pursuit of unnatural delights.)

MAJOR PUBLICATIONS

1857	Charles Baudelaire. <i>The Flowers of Evil (Les Fleurs du Mal)</i> (FR)	poems deal with themes relating to decadence and eroticism (spleen and ideal, revolt, death, wine)
1873	Walter Pater. <i>The Renaissance: Studies in Art and Poetry</i>	British essayist, stylist, art critic, influential on aestheticism: celebrates ideals, sensuous pleasure, cult of beauty
1884	Joris-Karl Huysmans. <i>Against Nature (A rebours)</i> (FR)	representative book of Parisian decadence: eccentric, reclusive, neurotic aesthete tries to retreat into artistic world of his creation, a catalogue of his musings on art, literature, painting, religion, and hyperaesthetic sensory experiences
1894-1897	<i>The Yellow Book</i>	British quarterly literary periodical associated with "impressionism, feminism, naturalism, dandyism, symbolism and classicism [which] all participate[d] in the politics of decadence in the 1890s," founder of a culture of scandal (→The Yellow Nineties)
1899	Arthur Symons. <i>The Symbolist Movement in Literature</i>	monograph that brings French symbolism to the attention of Anglo-American literary circles



READ

[CLICK here to consult the digitized version of *The Yellow Book's* issues at the website of Heidelberg Bibliothek.](#)

WATCH

[CLICK here to watch virtual tour of Aubrey Beardsley exhibition at Tate Britain](#)

LISTEN

[CLICK here to listen to Claude Debussy's symphonic poem *Prelude to the Afternoon of a Faun*, and *Claire de Lune \(Moonlight\)* examples of symbolism in music](#)

✚ Aestheticism

- ✓ was an intellectual and artistic movement more interested in aesthetic values and the **CULT OF BEAUTY** than socio-cultural critical messages or political ideology
- ✓ rejected moralising, didacticism, rationality, pragmatism, usefulness
- ✓ argued for the self-sufficiency of the artwork (“**All art is quite useless**”):
- ✓ embraced the idea of **ART FOR ART’S SAKE** (*l’art pour l’art*)
- ✓ fused w philosophies of **LIFE FOR ART’S SAKE** (the wish to turn one’s life into art) and **SEX FOR SEX’S SAKE** (shameless hedonistic aspect of the cult of beauty)
- ✓ was largely influenced by Immanuel Kant’s philosophy: the pure aesthetic experience = disinterested contemplation of an object that pleases for its own sake without any reference to reality or external ends of utility or morality
- ✓ shaped by elitism, irrationalism, Hellenistic ideals, orientalism,
- ✓ largely affected decorative arts, arts and crafts movement, **dandy** fashion, ornamental aesthetics (feathers, flowers, shells)
- ✓ suggested rather than stated, overflows with **sensuality, symbols, synesthetic effects**

➤ OSCAR WILDE (1854-1900)



AESTHETE

Oscar Wilde was an Irish poet, playwright and novelist. He became acquainted with **aestheticism** during his university studies (at Trinity College Dublin and Oxford) through his tutors John Ruskin and Walter Pater, and his love for Neo-Platonism. After moving to London, Wilde became one of the most popular authors of his times, a real celebrity figure and fashion icon. He embraced the idea of **Art for Art’s Sake**, the anti-utilitarian, non-mimetic cult of beauty.

DANDY

As a dandy figure Wilde cultivated the **idea of beauty in his own person**: a stylized physical appearance, a refined language, cynical witticisms, and leisurely hobbies. His idea was to turn Life into Art via a **cult of the self**. For the dandy, fashion, clothing and vestimentary items held the potential to communicate political, social-critical, aesthetic messages. The legendary **green carnation** Wilde wore in his buttonhole, and urged young followers to decorate their vests with, represented one of his favourite ideas: that **Nature should imitate Art**, and not the reverse, and artists should embrace unnatural, decadent passions. Some cultural historians suggest that the green carnation was a secret code, an identificatory marker used by gay men (‘inverts’ as they were referred to) at a time when **same-sex desire** was illegal and punishable by law.

WRITER

Throughout the 1890s Wilde earned literary fame through a variety of genres.

His collection of **fairy tales**, *The Happy Prince and Other Stories* (1888) contained five children’s stories rich in religious allegory, moral didacticism, and aestheticist, symbolical layers of meaning, as well as gay sub-textual significations.

He combined aesthetic details with social themes in his **dramas**. His **tragedy** *Salome* (1891) written in French told the story of the Biblical evil enchantress femme fatale figure who asked for the head of John the Baptist in return for her dance of seven veils. The play was never shown on the English stage because of its immoral subject matter. His **society comedies** including *An Ideal Husband* (1895) and *The Importance of Being Earnest* subtitled “A Trivial Comedy for Serious People” (1895) mocked Victorian social mores and manners (hypocrisy, the marriage market, maintaining fictitious **alterego** personas in the country and the city to escape burdensome social obligations; discrepancies between public and private honours and corruptions). His comedies abound in **verbal fencing games**; the comic effect arises from the characters trying to outsmart each other with **witticism**: clever, often ironic remarks, punning, even bordering on language games. Wilde was famous for his wit, his bon-mots or **epigrams** – brief, interesting, memorable, surprising or satirical statements -- are often quoted and cherished for their timeless comic quality.

some of OSCAR WILDE'S WITTICISMS
"The world is a stage, but the play is badly cast."
"I can resist anything but temptation."
"Always forgive your enemies; nothing annoys them so much."
"Some cause happiness wherever they go; others whenever they go."
"The only thing to do with good advice is pass it on. It is never any use to oneself."
"Anyone who lives within their means suffers from a lack of imagination."
"True friends stab you in the front."
"Fashion is a form of ugliness so intolerable that we have to alter it every six months."
"There is only one thing worse in life than being talked about, and that is not being talked about."
"A gentleman is one who never hurts anyone's feelings unintentionally."
"My own business always bores me to death; I prefer other people's."
"I like men who have a future and women who have a past."
"Work is the curse of the drinking classes."
"Quotation is a serviceable substitute for wit."

In his **non-fiction essays**, like *The Soul of a Man under Socialism* (1891) he combined his aesthetical critical views on art with **libertarian socialist** ideas. He argued that charity rooted in sentimentalism is a waste of time that sustains the capitalist system. Instead of altruistic virtues he urged more radical gestures “to reconstruct society on such a basis that poverty will be impossible.”



His only novel *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890) revisited **Gothic fantasy** themes of the double, the Faustian deal, the cult and the corruption of beauty. The title character, as a genuine Narcissus figure, becomes aware of his own beauty and realizes that it must fade when he faces his portrait painted by Basil Hallward, an artist infatuated with his charms. Dorian – influenced by the hedonistic philosophy of art lover dandy Lord Henry Wotton – expresses his desire to sell his soul in return for eternal youth



[CLICK HERE TO WATCH TRAILER OF FILM DORIAN GRAY \(2009\)](#)
AND [THE PICTURE OF DORIAN GRAY \(1945\)](#)

and beauty, wishing that the picture would age and decay in place of him. His wish is miraculously granted: he pursues an immoral, libertine life full of vanity, debauchery, and crimes, and all his evil deeds leave their imprint on the picture rather than him. In the end, when he wants to destroy the portrait as an evidence of his sinfulness, artwork and living being exchange places. The servants entering the room find lying on the floor an unknown withered old man stabbed in the heart, and a magnificent painting of an irresistible youth restored to its former beauty.

The novel embraced the tenets of **aestheticism** while studying the relation of beauty and the evil from a moral, philosophical, and artistic perspective. In an **ekphrastic** narrative, one form of art describes another: the verbal description of a visual artwork stimulates an intermedial dynamics. The point of Dorian's Faustian deal is that he exchanges mortality for vanity, strangely confusing the invisible (his corrupted soul and secret crimes hidden on the painting) with the spectacular (his 'false' beauty attracts all eyes.) In the 1891 revised edition, the preface to the novel contends that **"the artist is the creator of beautiful things;"** it denies the distinction between moral and immoral book and prefers value judgment based on the good or bad literary qualities; and concludes that **"all Art is quite useless."**

According to Dorian's new hedonism, the only things worth in life are beauty and sensual satisfaction. Yet this "Life for Art's sake" agenda raises **moral philosophical, ethical questions**: What is the meaning of life if you are a sinner? Is there a redemption? Can crime escape punishment? Wilde offers a vivid, picturesque description of the Victorian underworld, the corrupted delights of the privileged elite, **forbidden pleasures** of opium dens, public houses, lives distorted by ennui, vanity, hypocrisy, and manipulative games. The novel had a real **shock value**: it was coined "a poisonous book with odours of moral, spiritual putrefaction," and was deemed controversial for violating the laws guarding public morality.

Wilde claimed that the novel depicts a **triple self-portrait** in which all his identity facets were fused: Narcissus, the immaculate youth + the artist aesthete + the witty dandy. As he put it: **"Basil Hallward is what I think I am, Lord Henry is what the world thinks me, Dorian is what I would like to be—in other ages, perhaps."**



„This portrait would be to him the most magical of mirrors. As it had revealed to him his own body so it would reveal to him his own soul... he would keep the glamour of his boyhood. Not one blossom of his loveliness would ever fade. Not one pulse of his life would ever weaken. Like the gods of the Greeks..." (Wilde, 136).

In 1895 Wilde was prosecuted with charges of “sodomy” and “acts of gross indecency,” and after a humiliating trial that became a celebrity scandal of the time. When cross examined at court he spoke eloquently of “the love that dares not speak its name,” yet his statement was counter-productive in so far as it served to reinforce charges of homosexual behaviour.

While in prison, he wrote [“The Ballad of Reading Gaol”](#) (1897) in which he identifies symbolically with all the prisoners who share the common burden of brutal punishment. The proletarian ballad form was meant to address his kind, the criminal classes. In [“De profundis”](#) (1897), a poetic letter addressed to his lover poet Lord Alfred Douglas “Bosie,” his spiritual journey through trials and his identification with Jesus Christ as an individual romantic artist offered a counterpoint to his former hedonistic lifestyle and philosophy of pleasure. He died alone and deserted in Paris, and was buried in [Père Lachaise cemetery](#) where his grave is still a pilgrimage site of his readers.



[CLICK HERE TO WATCH A TRAILER OF THE BIOGRAPHICAL FILM WILDE \(DIR. BRIAN GILBERT, 1997\)](#)

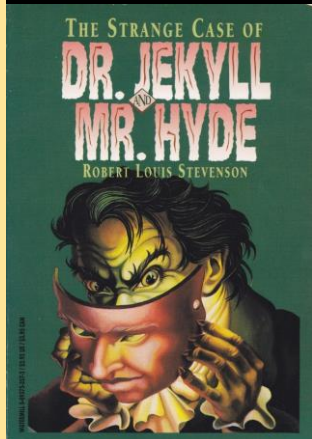
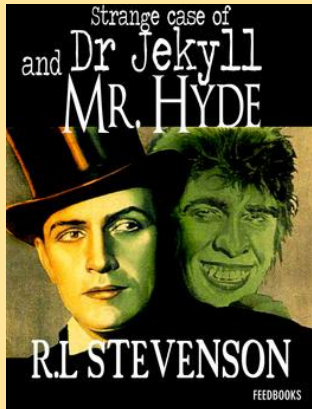
Charles Gill (prosecutor): *What is "the love that dare not speak its name"?*

Oscar Wilde (defence): *"The love that dare not speak its name" in this century is such a great affection of an elder for a younger man as there was between David and Jonathan, such as Plato made the very basis of his philosophy, and such as you find in the sonnets of Michelangelo and Shakespeare. It is that deep spiritual affection that is as pure as it is perfect. It dictates and pervades great works of art, like those of Shakespeare and Michelangelo, and those two letters of mine, such as they are. It is in this century misunderstood, so much misunderstood that it may be described as "the love that dare not speak its name," and on that account of it I am placed where I am now. It is beautiful, it is fine, it is the noblest form of affection. There is nothing unnatural about it. It is intellectual, and it repeatedly exists between an older and a younger man, when the older man has intellect, and the younger man has all the joy, hope and glamour of life before him. That it should be so, the world does not understand. The world mocks at it, and sometimes puts one in the pillory for it.*

GOTHIC FANTASY

Gothic tropes used in 18th century frightening fiction – Ann Radcliff’s *Mysteries of Udolpho* or Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* – were interwoven in Victorian fantasy novels. These tropes included **psychological and physical terror**, encounters with mysterious or supernatural phenomena, the fear of insanity, hereditary curses, invasive other worldly powers, doublings, mad scientists, monstrous shapeshifters, evil enchantresses. Gothic components were often transferred into an urban, modern setting. (Think of the gloomy, melodramatic atmospheres of many of Dickens’ novels.) Hence the **uncanny** effect was heightened through the combination of the familiar (recognisable London setting) and the unfamiliar (monstrosity invading homely spaces). Shilling shockers, penny dreadfuls, “fine bogey tales” often referred to as crawlers enjoyed a tremendous popularity. A growing number of readers were avid fans of these sensational tales of supernatural, scary incidents which were designed to produce **pleasurable chills** through the fictionalisation of the **era’s anxieties**.

✚ R.L. STEVENSON: *THE STRANGE CASE OF DR JEKYLL AND MR HYDE* (1886)



✓ *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*, set in a recognisable yet eerie version of present day London, is an **urban gothic** novel that explores the strange, shameful shadow world within the heart of a civilised metropolis.

✓ The novella by the Scottish author can be interpreted within the framework of a variety of genres, **religious allegory, fable, detective fiction, sensation novel, Doppelgänger literature, Scottish devil tales, and gothic novel.**

✓ The **ambiguity** – a trademark feature of the genre responsible for causing cognitive dissonance & affective confusion in the reader – is already present in the **title**. While “strange” refers to unusual, surprising, and incomprehensible, the word “case” has more down-to-earth legal, medical, rational connotations.

✓ The protagonist embodies the stock character of the **overreacher mad scientist** who aims to reach beyond the boundaries of human knowledge and usurp divine privileges of creation with the help of morally dubious scientific technological discoveries. Dr Jekyll is pursuing experiments on himself in his secret laboratory, behind the blue door of his London domicile. As a doctor he enjoys a prestigious, respected social position but under the influence of a potion he creates and tests on himself, his inner demons are released and he is transformed into the evil, bestial, remorseless, monstrously hideous creature.

✓ The **double/doppelgänger** figure – the clandestine bestial self that is hiding within an intelligent, respected doctor – illustrates the duplicity of the human being. Jekyll and Hyde’s **pair fuses in one** the positionalities of physician and patient, abnormal hysteric and skilled health-care professional, corrupted criminal and respectable citizen.

✓ Moreover, the **city and society are also doubled** into a lighter and darker version.

✓ Hyde’s “troglodytic,” “ape-like,” “hardly human” figure represent the **fear of Darwinian degeneration** and the anxieties related to Evolutionary theory’s contention that humankind descends from lesser species. Hyde’s looks match Victorian criminologist Lombroso’s depiction of the atavistic criminal type.

✓ Doublings stage the **unspeakable horror of the other taking over the self-same**. It is all the more disturbing since Jekyll’s horrific looks have an indescribable quality: “**There is something wrong with his appearance; something displeasing, something downright detestable.**” His air of deformity bears an unnameable monstrosity, a “**je ne sais quoi**” quality. His sight – and the recognition that a murderous beast exists within a respectable scientist – contributes to the premature death of Dr Lanyon.

✓ The novella can be interpreted as a **cautionary tale** warning readers that one should **never trust appearances**. The aura of **suspicion** permeates the entire text. Utterson is a **strange detective** because he is a man of reason but he does not work to reveal a crime and serve justice, but to cover it, to save the reputation of his friend, Dr Jekyll, and assists him in keeping secret his sins. His behaviour illustrates the **hypocrisy of bourgeoisie** and the **uncanniness of pretence**. Speculations concerning the curious relationship of Jekyll and Hyde suspect a hideous, unspeakable sin/ crime (an illegitimate son? a homosexual lover? a dishonest business partner?) for which Utterson believes Jekyll is being blackmailed.

✓ The story abounds in mysterious incidents and ominous signs, but – in line with the sensation novel tradition – it aims at **authenticity**.

✚ BRAM STOKER: *DRACULA* (1897)

✓ Bram Stoker's *Dracula* combines Gothic **horror romance** and the **invasion fantasy** genre in the most popular vampire story of the Victorian era. Count Dracula, endowed with supernatural powers and diabolical ambition, moves from Transylvania to England so that he may find new blood and spread the undead curse. He is fought by Dr Van Helsing and a group of monster hunters.

✓ Literary predecessors to the novel include **Sheridan Le Fanu's *Carmilla*** (about a lesbian vampire) and **Dr Polidori's *The Vampyre*** (authored by Lord Byron's secretary at the same horror fiction writing competition where Mary Shelley wrote *Frankenstein*).

✓ Dracula is a highly **ambiguous** figure, a **metamorphic shapeshifter**: he oscillates between incompatible states and **breaks boundaries** between life and death, humanity and animal bestiality (he can turn into bat, rat, wolf), civilisation and barbarism, reason and madness, home and abroad, reason and madness. A complicated creature, the vampire is both **horrifying and fascinating**; a deadly predator with an irresistible erotic lure; "a repellent blood-sucking creature crawling from the grave, and a strangely alluring embodiment of nocturnal glamour and potent sexuality."

✓ The vampire embodies the **anxieties haunting 19th century society bourgeois frame of mind**: fears of immigration, sexual promiscuity, moral degeneration, sexual licentiousness, venereal disease (syphilis also referred to as the French disease), new formations of femininity and masculinity (the New Woman, the dandy, homosexual decadence).

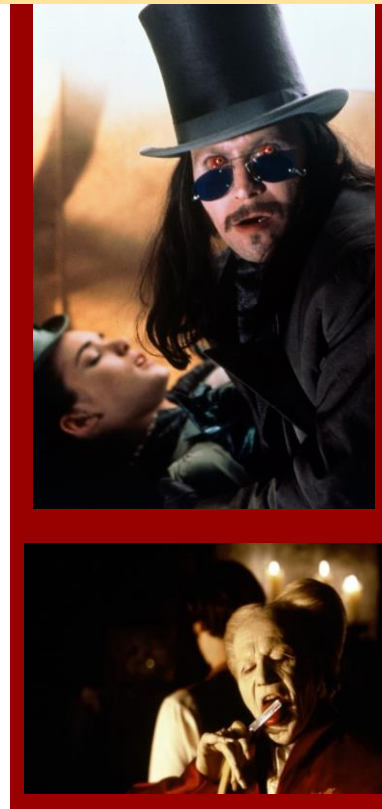
✓ Dracula represents **ultimate otherness**: ethnic, genetic, moral, religious, gender difference. He can also be interpreted as an inverted, profane Christ figure if we think of the symbolical significance of blood in the story. He sucks the blood of his victims, but by making them drink from his own blood, he can also transform them into vampires.

✓ The **vampire hunters** – Dutch professor, Dr Van Helsing, "a philosopher and metaphysician, and one of the most advanced scientists of his day," lawyer Jonathan Harker, and psychiatrist John Stewart, among others – mostly use rational means to defeat the unknowable supernatural beast. However, the variety of the weapons they use illustrate the **coexisting conflicting Victorian belief systems**. They fight the vampire with a combination of cross/ holy water, garlic, and blood transfusions: this shows how religious, superstitious, and scientific views of paranormal powers converge.

✓ Dracula's victims, Lucy and Mina represent mirror images/ doubles of each other as embodiments of **opposing stereotypes of Victorian femininity**. Lucy falls under Dracula's spell, and becomes a vampire, a horrid beast who feeds on children's blood, a dark grotesque alter ego of the mother ideal, who is killed by a stake driven into her heart. Schoolmistress, smart, virginal Mina preserves her virtues despite her suffering at the vampire's hands. She stays alive, marries, and becomes a mother in the end.

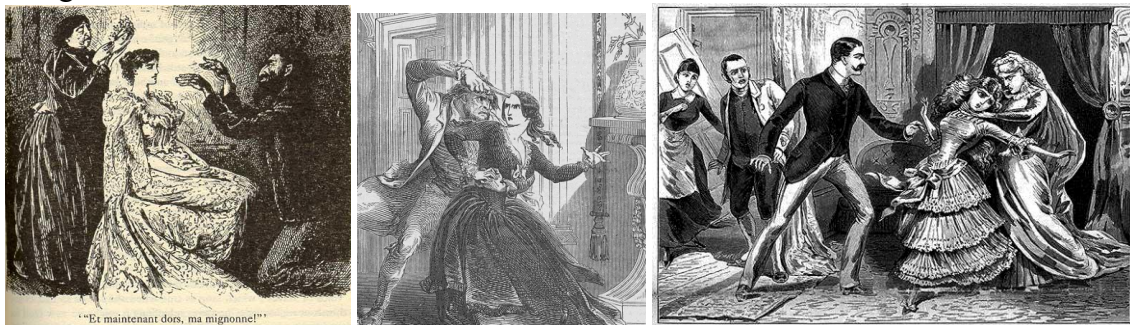
✓ The credibility of this fantastic story is enhanced by the **epistolary form**, the letters, diaries, newspaper cuttings, and ship logs nested within the narrative.

✓ The ending shows how **cultural memory** works, and how societies commemorate traumatic events: as the vampire hunt is retold as a story by the survivors, the gothic horror is tamed into **adventure story**.



SENSATION NOVEL

- ✓ The *Sensation novel* genre reached the peak of its popularity in the 1860s-1870s' Britain.
- ✓ Its literary predecessors were the **melodrama** (fusing romance w dramatic action), **Newgate novels** (glamorised biographies of famous criminals), **crime mysteries**, and **gothic fiction**
- ✓ “the quintessential novel with a secret,” traces a mystery that must be solved by the reader
- ✓ “complicated, mysterious plots, involving crime, bigamy, adultery, arson, & arsenic” (Pykett)
- ✓ **Themes:** loss of identity (common social anxiety), adultery, theft, kidnapping, insanity, bigamy, forgery, seduction, murder, vengeance
- ✓ **Leitmotifs:** disclose hypocrisy of society, misdirected letters, romantic triangles, drugs, potions, coincidences, suspense, “feeds on fear that one’s respectable neighbour might be concealing an awful secret”
- ✓ **Stock characters:** dangerous beauty adept at disguise and deception, endangered virgins, aristocratic villains, madmen
- ✓ **Embodied reading experience:** design to grip, shock, and haunt the reader: “extremely provocative of that sensation in the palate and throat which is a premonitory symptom of nausea..,” “preaches to the nerves instead of judgment,” according to the satirists of *Punch* humour magazine, was conceived for ‘Harrowing the Mind, Making the Flesh Creep, Causing the Hair to Stand on End, Giving Shocks to the Nervous System, Destroying Conventional Moralities, and generally Unfitting the Public for the Prosaic Avocations of Life’
- ✓ **Reasons of genre’s popularity:** [notorious trials](#) (Poisoner Palmer, Jack the Ripper), tabloid journalism, reforms in divorce procedures, public education, increase of journals and readers, constitutes counterpoint to domestic novels and conduct books (safety valve, a release of psychic energies necessary for repression by well-behaved, self-disciplining bourgeoisie), escapism from monotony of the age
- ✓ Heavily **criticised** for discussion of improper, taboo topics: “called into existence to supply the cravings of a diseased appetite,” novels were “creeping upwards from the gutter into the drawing room.”



- ✓ Most popular texts:
 - **Wilkie Collins:** [The Woman in White](#) (1860): detective mystery, Gothic horror, psychological realism, secrets, mistaken identities, surprise revelations, amnesia, locked rooms, asylums, an unorthodox villain, damsel in distress
 - **Wilkie Collins:** [The Moonstone](#) (1868): mystical, supernatural, crime fiction, horror, romance, the theft of an enormous diamond originally stolen from an Indian shrine
 - **Charles Dickens.** [The Mystery of Edwin Drood](#) (1870): final, unfinished novel: mysterious disappearance of opium addict cantor choir master
 - **Georges du Maurier.** [Trilby](#) (1896): Paris bohemian setting, tone-deaf working class girl hypnotised by demonic musician Svengali becomes a diva, a talented singer performing in a trance-like state, launches fashion trend Trilby-mania, inspired *Phantom of the Opera*

✓ Typical sensation novel quote: "In one moment, every drop of blood in my body was brought to a stop by the touch of a hand laid lightly and suddenly on my shoulder from behind me. I turned on the instant, with my fingers tightening round the handle of my stick. There, in the middle of the broad, bright high-road – there, as if it had that moment sprung out of the earth or dropped from the heaven – stood the figure of a solitary woman, dressed from head to foot in white garments, her face bent in grave inquiry on mine, her hand pointing to the dark cloud over London, as I faced her. I was far too seriously startled by the suddenness with which this extraordinary apparition stood before me, in the dead of night and in that lonely place, to ask what she wanted. The strange woman spoke first. 'Is that the road to London?'" (Collins: *The Woman in White*)



READ

Check the British Library's website to learn more on

- [the sensation novel](#)
- [the rise of detective fiction](#)
- [Dracula & its critical discussion](#)
- [Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde & its critical discussion](#)
- [Dorian Gray](#)

DETECTIVE FICTION



Detective fiction centres on the investigation of a crime case or a mystery. The early fictional detectives in English literature include **Edgar Allan Poe's** eccentric and brilliant **Dupin** whose name is a pun on duping, deception (he features in three stories "[The Murders in the Rue Morgue](#)," "The Mystery of Marie Roget," "The Purloined Letter," (1841–1846), followed by the Charles Dickens' **Bucket** in *Bleak House* (1852–1853) and Wilkie Collins' **Cuff** in *The Moonstone* (1868), and culminating in the appearance of **Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes** in [A Study in Scarlet](#) (1887).

Between 1887-1927 Conan Doyle wrote 4 novels, 56 stories about Sherlock Holmes, the London-based brilliant consulting detective with abilities bordering on the fantastic (astute observation, deductive reasoning, forensic skills) which aid him in solving difficult cases). Holmes is a scientific detective, a man of reason and technology, as well as a gentleman, the epitome of Victorian imperial values. Most of the stories are narrated by Dr John H Watson Holmes's sidekick friend and biographer, who assists him during his investigations, and often stays with him at 221 Baker Street, London, where many of the stories begin. The famous line, "It's elementary my dear Watson." was never actually said by Holmes in any of the novels, but it reappears in numerous film adaptations as Holmes is explaining the deductions he made to his assistant. Conan Doyle tried to kill Sherlock Holmes in the Reichenbach Falls episode in his fight with Professor Moriarty, but had to revive him because of public demand.

EXPLORE



VISUAL EXTRAS

- [Watch trailer for Bram Stoker's Dracula film, directed by Coppola](#)
- [Watch trailer for CBC film adaptation of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde](#)
- [Watch trailer for BBC adaptation of Sherlock Holmes](#)



THINK

Compare the screenshot from Coppola's *Dracula* film with Fuseli's *Nightmare* picture. Think about why Coppola pays tribute to the Gothic painting in his cinematic portrayal of the monstrous seducer. How is the Gothic revived and modified in Victorian fantasy?



THINK

[TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE WITH A QUIZ BY CLICKING HERE](https://forms.gle/CKoCm4KM4Z9DqMgB9)

<https://forms.gle/CKoCm4KM4Z9DqMgB9>

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Készült az Európai Unió támogatásával, a Szegedi Tudományegyetem megbízásából.