The Violent Mr. Hyde Versus Feminism: Horror cinema’s response to female sexuality
in film adaptations of *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*

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Abstract

As one of the most adapted literary works of all time, filmmakers throughout the twentieth century have tried to answer one inexplicable question in Robert Louis Stevenson’s *Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde:* Why does Mr. Hyde “weep like a woman?” While the novel appears to exclude a female presence, Mr. Hyde’s rebellious nature symbolizes the feminists who Victorian men believed threatened the very balance of *fin de siècle* English society: the New Women. These feminists sought personal liberties, including sexuality, and shook the definition of gender roles and domesticity in the nineteenth century. The New Woman’s actions were negatively and heavily scrutinized by men writers and she continues to appear as a complex phenomenon throughout films of the twentieth century. I will argue that in the novella, Hyde represents the stereotypical “evils” assigned to the New Woman by men to restore gender roles and domesticity. But in five of the film versions from the twenties, thirties, forties, seventies, and nineties, Hyde gradually transforms into the suppressor of feminism, still representing male fears, but now utilizing a more masculine voice of violence. From the silent twenties version with limited and withdrawn female roles to the nineties film told entirely from the made up perspective of the novella’s minor maid character, the critique of women in *Jekyll and Hyde* and its successors reveal the true fear behind the horror genre: redefined gender roles and female sexual liberation. My paper will argue that the evolution of horror in the *Jekyll and Hyde* adaptations depends on and critiques the history and evolution of sexuality. The more liberated women became through time, the more horror films exposed them (both physically and mentally) to violence, idealized roles of “good” and “evil,” and largely critiqued their presence altogether.
The Violent Mr. Hyde Versus Feminism: Horror cinema’s response to sexuality in film adaptations of *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*

As one of the most adapted literary works of all time, Robert Louis Stevenson’s *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* explores horror, science, and duality through provocative, macabre themes that transcend time. From the silent 1920s film adaptation with little gore but plenty of visual commentary on sexual repression to the modern *Mary Reilly*, told entirely from the point of view of a minor character in the novella, the films shift away from their source text’s storyline and develop grim, erotic visuals that depend on the time period’s surrounding culture, rather than the original Victorian setting. One common theme these filmmakers explore is the visual dimensions of Mr. Hyde’s sexually explicit and violent demeanor: what he looks like and how he interacts with others. Thanks to Stevenson’s vague and various descriptions of the corrupted being, Hyde’s unapologetic actions and mannerisms adapt to the constellation of fears experienced by Victorian gentlemen about the changing roles of women during the final years of the century. Though the novel appears to exclude a female presence, Mr. Hyde’s rebellious nature must be understood to in fact symbolize the feminists who were accused of threatening the very balance of *fin de siècle* English society: the New Woman. But paradoxically, Hyde’s representation of feminism ultimately seeks to destroy feminists by highlighting their weaknesses and providing the means for torture of outspoken female characters in the film adaptations. This dual role of woman and oppressor continues in twentieth century adaptations following the first, second, and third waves of feminism. The female characters of these adaptations not only explore their sexuality and progress with the evolution of feminism—their representations also directly influence and shape the concept of “fear” in the *Jekyll and Hyde* horror adaptations.
The intriguingly subtle yet so explicitly stated exploration of feminism and women’s rights in *Jekyll and Hyde* makes the novella’s adaptation and interpretation anomalous. As Brian Rose notes in *Jekyll and Hyde Adapted: Dramatizations of Cultural Anxiety*, the novella wasn’t recreated hundreds of different ways because of its basic storyline, but because of “the perceived utility of its motifs,” or the applicability of its themes and characters to modern world context (2). Thus, the similarities in plot and character from film to film aren’t purely coincidental; they carry forward visual exploration of violence against women and sexuality because the plot lends itself to this type of criticism. After a series of adaptations (both strict and loose) and their various integrations of popular-cultural imagery and meaning, *Jekyll and Hyde* over time has become less of an entertainment-driven horror story and more of an anthropological piece of commentary on human fear, morality, and sexuality. While other Gothic classics like *Frankenstein* focus mainly on the feminist context surrounding the theme of creation, or, like *Dracula*, focuses more obviously on women as vessels of sexuality, it is the *Jekyll and Hyde* films that consistently create multiple female characters and further, place those characters in conversation between adaptations. Why do filmmakers take the “subtle” out of the novella when it involves gender and sexuality? Look no further than the thematic requirements of the horror film, which cannot achieve its desired impact without the presence and torture of women who disobey the rules and order of society.

As we see through the adaptations, Victorian men weren’t the only ones afraid of these women and shifting gender roles—men throughout the twentieth century also illustrate their unease with female sexual liberation by evolving Hyde’s woman role and creating “ideal” and “immoral” women characters in *Jekyll and Hyde*’s film adaptations. From the twenties fight for the right to vote to radical feminists’ anti-government protests in the seventies and modern
feminists’ internal struggle with the role of sex and pornography in the movement, the evolving
voice of women and their experimentation with sexuality made them the perfect targets for
critique and suffering in *Jekyll and Hyde* horror films. In five of the film versions from the
twenties, thirties, forties, seventies, and nineties, Hyde becomes the suppressor of feminism and
representation of male fears through his masculine voice of violence against these “made up”
female characters. When the films portray Jekyll’s angelic fiancée eager for marital bliss and
family, she is out of Hyde’s evil reach thanks to the protection of the male characters around
her—a symbol for the preservation of domesticity. But when films introduce the seductive
prostitute, an independent woman breaking social norms and expectations, she is visibly doomed
from the start—a victim of Hyde’s lust and violence. As the novella is consistently identified in
the horror film genre, it’s difficult not to wonder what makes this Victorian novella so
horrifying. Is it the science experiments, the thought of defying God, the possibility of releasing
the evils within ourselves? Perhaps, but are these fears apparent until witnessing Jekyll brutally
murder a helpless old man and trample a little girl? The menacing acts of violence and disregard
for the rules of society are the most disturbing of all. Disorder. Anarchy. Change—The negative
connotations men have been taught to fear and abhor. With women at the center of the horror
film equation and feminists in the middle of a sexual revolution, the *Jekyll and Hyde* films rely
on these cultural elements not only to stay relevant to their prospective audiences, but also to
reveal the underlying reason why filmmakers continue to remake and remodel the original
storyline.

From the silent twenties version with limited and withdrawn female roles to the nineties
film told entirely from the made up perspective of the novella’s minor maid character, the
critique of women in *Jekyll and Hyde* and its successors reveal the true fear behind the
adaptation horror genre: redefined gender roles and female sexual liberation. Gina and Millicent of the twenties film begin the trend as the loose, seductive flapper and the timid, idealized wife during a time when women fought for the right to vote and speak their minds. As Millicent and Gina evolve into the more outspoken and sassy Ivy and Muriel of the 1931 film, Hyde becomes more obsessive and violent toward their actions—an almost unstoppable force. In the seventies, radical feminists didn’t just burn bras and scream—they organized protests and lobbied against a power structure that put men as the leaders and women as the meek followers. As their voices became more violent, Dr. Jekyll and Sister Hyde reacted by returning to the novella’s female imagery of Hyde through the deadly Sister Hyde. And lastly, Mary Reilly symbolizes a newfound freedom of women in the Jekyll and Hyde adaptations because the main character and focus is on its title character while exploring issues of the nineties sex-positive feminist movement. As each movement progresses, the female characters of these adaptations demonstrate not only the surrounding cultural expectations and pressures on women of the time, but they also endure the torture and “punishment” of Hyde the suppressor against their physical and sexual freedom.

This paper will convey how the history and evolution of sexuality and women’s rights (as displayed by the female characters and actresses) directly influences and shapes the concept of “fear” in the Jekyll and Hyde horror adaptations. The novella demonstrates both the fear of evolving gender roles and the consequences of repressing sexuality, and as women became more and more liberated through time, horror films subjected them (both physically and mentally) to further violence, idealized roles of “good” and “evil,” and largely critiqued their presence outside the home altogether. In the novella, Hyde represents the purported evils of the New Woman and her imagined plan to overthrow balance and domesticity: she is the fear of all men. In the films,
Hyde transforms into the suppressor of feminism, still representing male fears, but now with a more masculine look of violence. This paper reveals how the path of the *Jekyll and Hyde* storyline essentially evolves from a Gothic novella with no main women characters to a nineties film told entirely from the point of view of a female character. The critique of women in *Jekyll and Hyde* and its successors is important because it tells us something broader about the true fear behind the horror genre: the threatened loss of masculine identity caused by redefined gender roles and female sexual liberation.

With a noticeable lack of a female presence in the *Jekyll and Hyde* novella, Hyde’s New Woman role discredits the feminist voice by portraying Hyde himself as a corruptive, dangerous murderer. The *fin de siècle* “was a period of deeply serious inquiry, of impassioned debate over central questions of moral and social behavior,” and for the first time, women emerged as thinkers and critics of their own societal roles (Cunningham 1). New women wrote about how education, financial independence, and work felt more fulfilling than marriage, but above all else, they solidified their feminist status in history through one topic: sex. As New Woman critic Gail Cunningham notes in *The New Woman and the Victorian Novel*: “It was suddenly discovered that women, who had for so long been assiduously protected from reading about sex in novels and periodicals… had a great deal to say on the subject themselves” (2). The threat of empowered, sexually liberated women shocked Victorian men, who believed the rules and order of society were now at stake. Victorian novels, in response, openly critiqued the chaos and danger surrounding explicit sexuality, placing the New Woman movement at the forefront of these problems. Thus, Hyde’s lewd representation of new women feminists mimics male desire to suppress women’s fight for gender equality. In the novella, his repeatedly stated “odd”
appearance, rejection of societal order, and unrepentant, violent attitude foreshadows the supposed consequences of female sexuality.

Appearance and femininity are much too often linked, but it’s difficult not to notice Hyde’s slender attributes as proof of his womanhood. Not only does Hyde have a “pale and dwarfish” physique of a woman, but he also possesses a “mixture of timidity and boldness” (Stevenson 17). The striking connotation of “timidity” contrasts sharply with traits typically used to describe men, like “boldness.” In fact, this concept of apprehension combined with strength fits the character of the emerging feminist, as cited by New Woman literary scholar Lloyd Fernando, by mirroring how “the ‘New Women’ had not only to run the gauntlet of strong criticism, [but] faced rather more insidious defeat within her own psyche” (22). In order to firmly declare their rights, New Women learned to become comfortable with raising their voices against the injustice they faced everyday—“bold,” to say the least. Another evident example of Mr. Hyde’s femininity is that he “weeps like a woman,” according to Poole, Jekyll’s butler (Stevenson 38). The revelation of his dramatic emotions yet again stabs away at his masculinity, this time with a male character quick to point out the femininity of his actions. By portraying Jekyll’s counterpart with violently unstable emotions and comparing him unfavorably to the relatively stiff and “rugged countenance” of the other gentlemen characters, Hyde can suitably pass as a feminine figure in a predominantly male novel (1). Jekyll’s unrest with his role as a male, upper class gentleman expected to only performing dignified and practical scientific research is revealed through Lanyon’s shock at his desire to split the soul. Because his peers expect civility, the lifestyle of an outspoken, sexually liberated woman becomes a symbol of freedom, intrigue, and lack of consequences he would face from his upper class peers. While the
implications of his outer femininity are subtle, Hyde’s actions and interactions allow us to better understand him as a metaphorical New Woman.

Hyde’s outward appearance, though pivotal in recognizing his female role, is less believable without first examining his inner personality. At one point in Strange Case, Enfield attempts to describe Mr. Hyde and concludes: “he must be deformed somewhere, [for] he gives a strong feeling of deformity” (Stevenson 11).\(^1\) The word “somewhere” sticks out like a sore thumb as Enfield’s statement alludes to the notion of a hidden vestige out of the line of sight, possibly even underneath his clothes. Although Enfield does not immediately assume Hyde lacks a penis, nor call him a woman, he attacks Hyde’s masculinity and achieves the same effect. Mr. Hyde’s apparent “distortedness” refers to his inability to act as a proper gentlemen. Similarly, gender equality opponents argued women were unable to hold the same status as men because of the “domestic theory” argument, specifically, the intention-of-nature theory. This theory maintains that “nature ‘intended’ women to be chiefly, even exclusively, a mother… therefore everything that distracted her attention from this function should be treated as mischievous” (Fernando 2). Just as Hyde’s “distortedness” prevents him from gentleman status, women’s vaginas and reproductive role inhibited them from equality. Along with genitalia, Hyde’s “invisible deformity” represents his unstable state of mind, a further reference to new women’s incapacity to earn basic rights. Stephen Heath’s article “Psychopathia Sexualis: Stevenson’s Strange Case,” discusses how mental illness and hysteria traditionally “served in the nineteenth century as the representation of woman and of sexuality” due to their seeming paranoia during the menstrual cycle (qtd. in Doane 66). Strangely enough, Hyde “[wrestles] against the approaches of hysteria” when confronting Lanyon about the whereabouts of the transformation

\(^1\) See Doane (69) for further analysis of Enfield’s statement: “he must be deformed somewhere.”
drug, yet another proof of his “invisible deformity” (Stevenson 45). Through such a connection, Hyde’s assumed mental condition adds another level of femininity to his character. Author Ruth Robbins claims male hysteria and sexual anarchy were labeled during “a period in which gender definitions were accurately threatened by a variety of social changes” (220). Mr. Hyde’s hysteria symbolizes both the destruction and survival of nineteenth century gender stereotypes by showing how an outwardly male character can fall victim to “woman disorders,” his appearance and inner ego providing the battleground between the two extremes.

The reversal of gender roles and the struggle for power each become noticeably consistent themes throughout the course of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, in ways reflecting cultural norms of Victorian society. The purpose of Mr. Hyde’s feminine role in the novella, therefore, represents the emergence of England’s state of unbalance and the fears associated with this change. While Jekyll wanted to use his female counterpart as a sexually liberating entity, he soon realizes he cannot maintain control over both souls, symbolic of the Victorian husband’s role in managing the family. His desire to explore sinful desire yet maintain balance between his two personas also reveals Victorian men’s fascination with increased feminine sexuality (also known as the pedestal theory, which “regarded woman as a minor goddess to be worshipped from afar”), but the consequences of trying to control and harness this movement without giving women basic rights (Fernando 3). As a result, every main character in the novel represents the Victorian gentlemen’s rejection of Women Suffrage and its advocates: the New Women. For instance, Utterson expresses extreme concern about Jekyll willing everything to Hyde and makes a point to convince him otherwise. During the late nineteenth century, women were fighting for basic land property rights, which were withheld by men under the jurisdiction that women were
the sexual property of the husband\(^2\) ("Women’s Rights"). Utterson’s suspicion of Hyde and his plead to Jekyll implies Victorian males’ resistance to change especially over the prospect of a woman’s status. Men held the money and property, significant of their power and ultimate control. Utterson, as the well-to-do lawyer of the novella, provides a voice for these English gentlemen as his persistence in revising Jekyll’s will guides him to expose Hyde’s evils, no matter the cost of his societal appearance.

Hyde’s representation of the New Woman, while figuratively striking, isn’t exactly an accurate portrayal of the actions of feminists in the fin de siècle. As Sally Ledger explains in The New Woman: Fiction and feminism at the fin de siècle, the New Woman “had a multiple identity. She was, variously, a feminist activist, a social reformer, a popular novelist, a suffragette playwright” and “there was a very real fear that she may not be at all interested in men, and could manage quite well without them” (1, 5). Hence, Victorian men viewed the New Woman’s intelligence and ability to articulate her opinions as an abnormality and the eventual demise of male power and influence. Her expression of gender inequalities meant anarchy rather than analysis and observation—words, apparently, were a bigger threat than actual uprising. In this light, Hyde’s violent, disobedient nature stereotypes the new women as evil conspirators out to destroy Victorian domesticity and family, despite the reality of the situation. This theme carries over into film adaptations by extracting Hyde’s feminine role and creating Jekyll and Hyde-like women characters who mirror the expectations of men of the decade. But how much influence does the surrounding feminism movements have on the novella and its adaptations? In Functions of Victorian Culture at the Present Time, Christine Krueger cites Judith Walkowitz’s analysis of

\(^2\) This 1844 article provides context to the property struggle through its outline of the veto of the Tennessee Women’s Rights bill, described as “securing to married women the use and enjoyment of their own property.”
the Victorian media’s role in sensationalizing murders and in a sense, influencing gothic literature topics:

According to Walkowitz, the media during the Whitechapel murders usurped the concerns of female political reformers (primarily prostitution, poverty, sanitation) and reworked them into a male Gothic melodrama closer in tone to the literature of urban exploration, of the flaneur. The media also drew on cultural fantasies of the grotesque and sexually promiscuous female body; the labyrinthine city, including the illicit and squalid Whitechapel setting; and the notion of the deviant lurking inside every respectable person à la Jekyll and Hyde. The media transformed the murders into a dark male fantasy that simultaneously symbolized national disgrace and provided titillation. Whitechapel “vigilance committees” were formed ostensibly to offer protection to the women of the area; however, they largely aided in policing the movements. (104)

As we shall see, Victorian women’s murders and bodies were used against the feminist movement and progression just as such murders were used in later decades. Through murder and torture of women, the media was influenced by *Jekyll and Hyde* to create its own horror adaptation of the Whitechapel murders to oppress and control women. They revealed the “punishment” for independence and moving away from the protection of man as a death wish. Horror films of the past 100 years show us the role of women in violence has become more grotesque, less censored, and more appalling—as a key critic of the horror genre writes: “In what sense these tales were caused by nightmares or modeled on dreams is less important than the fact that the nightmare is a culturally established framework for presenting and understanding the horror genre” (Carroll 17). Women’s bodies and their association with violence and terror in horror only become maximized among their struggle for liberation throughout the late nineteenth
and twentieth centuries. Through the first, second, and third wave of feminism, the role of
women in the *Jekyll and Hyde* film adaptations of 1920, 1931, 1941, 1971, and 1996
demonstrates how men’s threatened masculinity and women’s increasing sexual liberation affect
the content, graphic violence, and portrayal of female characters in the horror genre. *Jekyll and
Hyde*’s wide adaptation timespan, theme of repressed and exploited sexuality, and
multidimensional woman characters makes its adaptations the best example of the horror genre.

What is the appeal of adapting and repurposing an old gothic novella into multiple horror
films throughout the century? How can a story about duality translate to the big screen as
something terrifying? Historically, many of the early motion picture companies based their films
off of Gothic fiction because of the stage adaptations that followed many of these works (Punter
180). With the novella essentially transformed into a plot of dangerous love, lust, and mortality
in Thomas Russell Sullivan’s 1887 *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, film directors like John S.
Robertson could easily utilize the screenplay drama and change the dialogue for their own time
period. The popularity of *Jekyll and Hyde* spans decades thanks to the timeless relevance of its
duality and sexuality storyline, vague descriptions of Jekyll’s transformation/Hyde’s appearance,
and its macabre themes of human violence. As Rose reveals in *Jekyll and Hyde Adapted:*
*Dramatizations of cultural anxiety*, “cultured ideas” like the addition of a fiancée and prostitute
in the film adaptations almost never appear in the original text because they are “aspects of the
‘culture-text’ of a story; they are both initial and final artifacts of adaptation (ix). Rose’s
“culture-text” term refers to the product of blending the source text, the group-text (all following
adaptations), and the surrounding popular cultural references (icons, imagery, language) to create
a melting pot of ideas and visuals that resonate with the modern viewer while preserving
elements of a familiar storyline. Thus, the framework of the novella mixed with relevant cultural
issues (women’s rights) and commercial appeal (horror thriller) mean endless possibility for future film adaptations. The original story carries an important theme that can be molded virtually anyway the filmmaker wants, lending to its timeless appeal and a string of hit TV, movie, radio, and book adaptations.

Paramount’s 1920 *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* was one of the first film adaptations and, more notably, the version that set the tone for future adaptations. The horror movie featured female characters Millicent Carew (Martha Mansfield), Jekyll’s fiancée, and Miss Gina (Nita Naldi), a dance hall performer, who were based on characters in the 1887 play version. The two women serve as static, almost non-existent roles surrounding Jekyll’s moral transformation, but their inclusion shows the beginning of horror evolution in *Jekyll and Hyde* during a time period focused on the broadening of women’s rights. While the novella depends on intense descriptions of violence and psychological paradigms to get under the readers’ skin, the silent film relies on dramatic visuals, music, and, most importantly, Gina and Millicent’s emotional response to disturb the viewer. The film also has the liberty of mentally terrifying the viewer through the angle of framing, point of view shots, and low-key lighting. But in order to achieve the element of suspense, the film decides to transition from the novella’s focus on letters and an outsider’s (Utterson) perspective on the storyline and more directly on the main character(s), Jekyll and Hyde. By incorporating two female characters who parallel Jekyll and Hyde’s morals (the ideal woman and the prostitute), the film can objectify their emotions and bodies as symbols of horror and consequences. Or as Budd Boetticher is quoted in “Visual Pleasures and Narrative Cinema”: “What counts is what the heroine provokes, or rather what she represents. She is the one, or rather the love or fear she inspires in the hero, or else the concern he feels for her, who makes him act the way he does. In herself the woman has not the slightest importance.” (19). Just as
Jekyll must repent for his sin of creating Hyde, Gina must repent for her loose lifestyle and serve as an example of shame for women viewers. The combination seems to aim to give men of the twenties a sense of entitlement and secures their masculine role while petrifying women viewers into submission.

The critique of women in the 1920 film begins within the first five minutes. Jekyll appears as a “savior” and loyal servant to the poor, taking care of a withering beggar and her family. Jekyll is positioned two feet taller than the woman, his face shining against the black of his top hat and jacket. The low contrast of the barren background and the deep, dirty gray of the poor woman’s face draw the viewer’s eye to Jekyll. She gazes up at him with clenched hands, which creates leading lines to Jekyll’s caring stare and warm embrace. The power balance is established between men and women, the rich and poor. As an upper class male, Jekyll’s position helps him appear chivalrous and masculine, a trait the viewers must recognize in order to sympathize with his plight later in the film. The beggar merely serves as a part of the scene’s mise-en-scene —she appears nowhere else in the film and is unnoticeable without the white brilliance of Jekyll’s skin. By utilizing this scene in the beginning, the audience clearly identifies Jekyll as the hero of the film. Also, before Millicent and Gina are introduced, the film questions gender roles through Sir George Carew’s comment to a much younger, beautiful woman. Again, the man is positioned high above the woman in the frame, and Carew grips her hand almost forcibly. He whispers something close to her ear and she giggles, before the title card displays: “My dear Lady Camden, a beautiful woman like you is paradise for the eyes—but Hell for the soul.” The concept of duality plays an important role in both the film and novella, but in this instance, the morals of men and women and sexuality serve a more explicit role. The woman’s body represents a world of temptation and evil for a “gentleman” like Carew. The introduction of
the beggar and young woman in *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* instantly critique 1920 men’s view of women: of lesser value and a source of corruption for their moral character.

These roles are more clearly defined through the objectification of Millicent and Gina, which originates in their physical appearance. Both are beautiful brunettes, one boasting a formal Victorian gown and the other more revealing in her dance hall attire. Millicent’s fragility is capitalized thanks to her constant reliance of her father and Jekyll. For example, she is often introduced in a scene sitting down and looking pensive, anxiously staring at the door and Carew. After minutes of waiting, Carew’s comments about Jekyll’s absence throws her deeper into despair. Her pursed lips and knit eyebrows show a delicate personality, and the constant concern of the men around her reveal her importance as the daughter of a wealthy man. She has many suitors, but the audience can empathize with her love for Jekyll thanks to a dramatic soundtrack and her forlorn face. She never speaks nor is offered a title card until much later in the film when her father dies, and it’s only to ask Jekyll for help. Much like the beggar, Millicent serves mainly as a “prop” to the film’s setting. Her interactions with Jekyll are focused only on him, and in many scenes, she is literally occupying less than a third of the frame. In one particular scene, Jekyll charges forward through the shot and Millicent appears barely visible as she backs up against the wall. Again, the film demonstrates Jekyll’s importance and Millicent’s role as his lovesick, beautiful wife-to-be.

But Millicent’s body and “idealized” role is used more forcibly near the end of the film when Hyde dominates Jekyll. At one point when Hyde visits the dance hall, Millicent also appears, without rational explanation. The viewer can only assume she was searching for Jekyll, but her presence only serves as a source of horror in the end. Captivated by her innocence, Hyde forces himself on Millicent with a wide smile. She looks absolutely repulsed, but is unable to
break free from his touch. Her lack of fight means two things: she is inferior to the power of man and is more easily tempted by the power of sexuality and evil. Despite her desire to maintain her innocence and the ideal woman role, her weakness proves only Jekyll can save her. The title card then reads: “Into the life of Millicent the shadow of evil now began to creep” and the scene transitions to Carew’s mansion, where a group of men comfort the weeping Millicent. Again, her purity and “damsel in distress” actions attract the surrounding suitors, who wish to save her from evil. But the true test of her character resides in her final encounter with Hyde: the audience can only cringe as Hyde lets the unknowing Millicent into the lab and approaches her with a wild rage. The extreme close up of Hyde’s menacingly smile juxtaposed against the shot of Millicent’s terrified face arouses fear and anxiety in the audience. While the music is rather calm for this scene, it adds to the viewer’s distress at John Barrymore’s gruesome facial expressions. He blinks slowly while staring at Millicent and jarringly grins at the camera, growing close and closer to build an unbearable tension. When Hyde pins Millicent, she arches her back and sighs, representing the sexual ecstasy and panic that collide within her weak will and struggle to maintain the “ideal woman.” But because Jekyll poisoned himself before transformation, Millicent manages to escape the hands of evil and seek help from other men. Now freed from her father and fiancée’s protection, Millicent finds herself alone, and the film ends with her grieving beside Jekyll’s body like a faithful woman “should.” Throughout the
silent adaptation of *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, men not only control the “film fantasy,” but they “also emerge as representative of power in a further sense: as the bearer of the look of the spectator, transferring it behind the screen to neutralize the extra diegetic tendencies represented by woman as spectacle” (Mulvey 20). From the flirtatious women at the beginning of the film to Gina’s seductive dance and Millicent’s struggle to maintain purity, the men surrounding their presence on the screen limited their voice and force them into roles of good and evil. Despite Gina’s demise, the viewer is not encouraged to sympathize her plight, but to blame her independence for her fall. Through the filter of “made up” characters, these women serve only as “spectacles” and lessons learned for the audience. Millicent’s innocence makes her the target of evil: she could’ve easily submitted to Hyde’s powers if not for the last “heroic” act of Jekyll. The film delivers a grim message to men: your dainty, domestic women will become tramps asking for power if exposed to sexuality and freedom. Even Sir Carew, a highly immoral character in the film, is commended by his peers for “the way he… brought up Millicent. He protected her as only a man of the world could.” But Millicent serves only as one half of the warning. Gina, on the other hand, embodies the consequences of living a free lifestyle and reveals how women of all morals have no power over men.

The film introduces Gina as the woman “who faced her world alone,” an identifier that not only critiques women’s need for independence, but also dooms her. The dance hall manager calls for everyone to feast their eyes upon her, but the camera shifts to a very wide shot of the dance hall from a perspective of peering in through a hallway. Far away, the curtains open and Gina begins dancing, barely viewable for the outside audience. The distance mirrors Gina’s own isolations from the world around her, and yet again, a woman character’s body is used more for spectatorship and less for substance. When the camera zoom in, Gina’s plunging neckline and
tight corset draw attention to her cleavage above all else. She bites her lip erotically while
dancing, and seems to notice no one else in the room. She is the film’s embodiment of
temptation and a threat to Jekyll’s gentlemanly persona. When Carew requests her presence, she
slinks over and attempts to seduce Jekyll by wrapping her arms around him. The camera zooms
in tight as Gina draws in closer for a kiss, but Jekyll’s moral character resists her charm.

However, when Hyde appears later on, Gina is attracted to his charm and evil ways. Her
fascination with Hyde draws on her own weakness of character—as a dancer, she has turned her
back on a normal, respectable life and lived in the darker world of sex and sin. She is doomed
from the beginning because of her lack of security and protection from men. After Hyde
repeatedly uses her, she encounters him in a bar flirting with another dancer. She confronts him,
looking rugged and disheveled from abuse, and he proceeds to drag both women to see their
reflection in a mirror. After Hyde throws Gina to the floor, he pats the other woman’s face,
hinting that her youth and beauty makes her the superior choice. This symbolic moment warns
women that everything withers with time, and neither beauty nor charm will save a sinner from
isolation in the end. Unlike the men who surround and protect Millicent throughout the film,
Gina’s empty ending symbolizes the true undesirability of her character. Her attractiveness and
live-in-the-moment lifestyle gave her less freedom and more loneliness, suggesting
liberality/freedom/flexible gender roles and open sexuality give women no more happiness than
living a domestic, quiet life.

Just as Victorian men critique the New Woman through Hyde in the novella, 1920-era
men showcase the twenties’ idealized version of a good housewife through Millicent’s tender
personality and Gina’s lonely demise. In *Jekyll and Hyde Adapted*, Rose notes that most novel
adaptations formulate their own agenda and are less concerned with the original storyline, all thanks to the tastes and concerns of the contemporary viewing audience:

The adaptations, due to their roots as popular art created for commercial consumption, are disseminated via the most powerful of contemporary performative media using a complex process fueled by artistic, social and market influences… these “cultured” ideas from adaptations serve major functions in structuring future adaptations of the original, thus continuing the process and making it both reflexive and autonomic. (ix)

While Victorian men were concerned with the New Woman developing her own voice and sexual identity, 1920s men felt the force of the so-called first wave of feminism crashing down on their masculinity. Women emerged as independents and workers during World War I. When the men returned, they refused to go back to their old roles as domestic housewives and mothers. They wanted education, employment, and voting rights. Through the examples of Millicent and Gina, male viewers temporarily suppress the cries of the first wave of feminism. According to horror critic Lothar Mikos’ suspense theory in “The Experience of Suspense: Between Fear and Pleasure,” by echoing Victorian and contemporary male ideals of a woman’s role in the world through violence and horror, the film could essentially “scare” women back into their place:

Films merely convey an impression of reality that spectators recognize as an “as if” reality within the framework of an aesthetic position. The realistic illusion that “a text is a true reproduction of a real and existing world stems from the fact that the contrived quality of the text is suppressed.” The spectators are so involved in what is going on in the movie… that they experience it as quasi-real. (40)

Gina and Millicent’s encounters with the violent, disfigured Hyde, while obviously fictional, still illustrate the consequences of independence in a male-dominated society. Women have two
choices: Receive protection from men like the pure Millicent, or fend oneself as free woman like Gina. Hyde’s menacing exploitation of Gina’s sexuality makes the former option much more desirable than the latter.

Ten years later, Hyde, Millicent, and Gina evolve into more outspoken perpetrator and victims of on screen violence and horror following the voting rights of women and introduction of cinema sound technology. Critics often deem the 1931 *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* as the best film version of the novella due to its creative filmography, iconic transformation scene, and topnotch actors. With the benefit of audio, the 1931 film plays heavily off of contemporary dialogue and intense subject matter to appeal to a wide audience. Whereas John Barrymore was the true star and focus of the 1920 version, both Miriam Hopkins and Rose Hobart shift the focus from Jekyll/Hyde to their characters, Ivy Pearson and Muriel Carew. With the film debuting only a few years after the Nineteenth Amendment granted women the right to vote, the roles Ivy and Muriel play vary greatly from the isolated Gina and innocent Muriel of the twenties. Muriel appears confident from the very start: Carew questions the way she “spoils” her fiancée and she sassily responds, “Well you’re already the most spoiled darling in the world” while pinching his cheek. From her beaming face to her trendy gown (a little too much so to be inspired from the Victorian era), Muriel redefines the “ideal woman” as a beautiful, conversational, and constantly chipper. The constant Jekyll point of view close ups of her dreamy expression help solidify her splendor and virtue. However, her freedom of expression is still limited at best, shown through her obsession with her engagement to Jekyll. While their love is evident, Muriel proclaims her “whole world” rests on her father’s permission to marry Jekyll sooner. While Jekyll repeatedly begs her to elope, Muriel is still controlled like a puppet by her father’s will. And despite Jekyll’s failure to show up to dinner or write her letters, she remains lovesick as ever, even begging for
him to stay when he breaks off their engagement. Muriel can do no wrong, only love limitlessly and pass from father to husband. The audience grows to love and sympathize with her so at the end they will realize why a flawed, “indecent” man like Jekyll cannot obtain her purity. While men viewers learn this lesson through Jekyll’s failure, women are shown two options for happiness and misery: Muriel’s naïve love or Ivy’s chilling demise.

Ivy is arguably the most compelling character of the 1931 film. She sings loudly, drinks with the men, and goes through a range of terrifying emotions when stalked by Hyde. Like Gina, her body symbolizes lewd desire, and in this film version, we see her more exploited than ever through suggested rape scenes and violence. Jekyll first encounters Ivy in the streets as a man is beating her to the ground. He runs to the rescue to the damsel in distress, but the scenario already sets Ivy up as the perverse, doomed foil of Muriel. When Jekyll carries Ivy to her apartment and she attempts to seduce him, the viewer is instantly drawn to dislike her. In light of the pure and gentle Muriel, Ivy’s frazzled blonde hair, skimpy clothes, and coarse voice identify her as the “villain” of the two characters. When Jekyll first transforms into Hyde and seeks her out at the nightclub, her tragic destiny is evident and almost bestowed on her because of her curious personality. The film provides tension as Hyde eagerly waits to see Ivy, and when he grabs her by the arm and professes his undying love, the audience may sympathize with Hyde at first. A close up shot of her appalled face during Hyde’s confession reveals her shallowness, along with her expression, “Well, ya ain’t no beauty.”

But the scene takes a dramatic turn when Hyde grips her tighter and says, “Forgive me my dear, you see, I hurt you because I love you.” The extreme close up of Ivy’s horrified expression along with Hyde’s masochistic demeanor introduces a new theme of horror to Jekyll and Hyde adaptations. Hyde’s serial killer-like tendencies and desire to own Ivy at all costs
reflect an overall theme of man’s need to possess women. As Noel Carrol dissects Hyde in “Nightmare and the Horror Film,” “The traditional conflict in these films is sexuality. Stevenson’s *Jekyll and Hyde* is altered in screen variants so that the central theme of Hyde’s brutality… becomes a preoccupation with lechery” (22).

The 1931 film introduces a more lewd side to Hyde’s “lechery” through his sexual abuse of Ivy. While rape violence isn’t explicit in this adaptation, it is still present and provides a darker side of the struggle for gender equality and sexual liberation. Hyde beats and leaves bruises on Ivy’s fair skin, and in one particularly terrifying scene, he describes all the “wonderful” things he will do to her that evening. “I’m going to spend the evening here with you, just as you’d like… The last evening is always the sweetest, and what a farewell it will be.” Hyde possessively grabs Ivy from behind, unable to tear away from his grip. Her trembling lip and teary eyes run deep with the audience, but not enough to redeem her. Even after Ivy begs on her knees for Jekyll’s help, her fate is solidified by her role as the flawed woman. When Hyde finally beats Ivy to death, the audience can see nothing but the side of the bed and a statue of an angel embracing a woman, suggesting her only chance at redemption for was through death. In the novella, Hyde kills his male victim, Mr. Carew, quickly by beating him with a cane and fleeing the scene. Similarly in the film, Hyde finishes off Mr. Carew in a brief struggle to save Muriel from his deviance. While the maid and other witnesses describe the murder as gruesome, nothing quite
compares to the auditory horror of Ivy’s screams and moans as Hyde finishes her off. With Hyde controlling the fate of the women around him, he becomes a pseudo Grim Reaper—“It is no accident that male victims in slasher films are killed swiftly or off screen, and that prolonged struggles, in which the victim has time to contemplate her imminent struggles, in which the victim has time to contemplate her imminent destruction, inevitably figure females” (Clover 51).

The stereotype of women as emotional, fragile creatures transcends whether or not they are sexually free as Ivy or wholesome as Muriel. When Hyde viciously stalks and attacks both Ivy and Muriel, the audience can more strongly identify with their peril and helplessness. While Muriel is spared from death thanks to her idealized role, Ivy dies for a reason—she serves as a warning to women who overstep their boundaries, drink with the men, and wear loose clothing. She is always alone in the world without protection, which becomes a threat to the male ego and masculine role. By oppressing her voice and demoralizing her spirit, Hyde destroys the voice of feminism and leaves the dainty Muriel paralyzed with fear, forever frozen in her rightful place.

Muriel and Ivy return to the big screen in 1941 in almost identical oppressed roles and as the 30s version, but a more remarkable piece of history in this film lies with its actresses rather than its content; as Punter explains, “A notable feature of the film is the women’s roles, in which Ingrid Bergman and Lana Turner insisted on being cast against type as Ivy and fiancée, in opposition to the director’s original intentions” (186). Bergman was tired of being typecasted as the pure, wholesome woman in her films, and demanded to play Ivy, her first dark role. As women in the World War II era stepped up to working class roles while men fought in the war, they gained more of a voice and independence. Bergman’s desire to branch out and become a multidimensional actress reveals the restless desire of women to become something more than the status quo. To Bergman, Ivy represented freedom and sexual liberation, despite her eventual
death. As women around the decades began to grow, Muriel and Ivy also transformed into more outspoken and cheeky females who maintain a powerful influence over the lives of Jekyll, Hyde, and Carew. The growth of female roles throughout the film adaptations shows an unstoppable movement, hence increased violence and overtly sexualized roles come into play in the future adaptations like the first murderess in the seventies version *Dr. Jekyll and Sister Hyde* and the both pure and sexualized woman-in-one role of the nineties’ *Mary Reilly*.

The 1971 adaptation of *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* broke interpretation barriers of Hyde’s identity like never before in *Dr. Jekyll and Sister Hyde*. The film twists the novella’s original plot by axing the “Mr.” side of Hyde and exploring the evils of the female body, eroticism, and the nuanced necessity of gender roles. After the end of the Motion Picture Production code, which heavily censored Hollywood films until 1968, horror director Roy Ward Baker sought to take nineteenth century novels and create low-budget thrillers. The new rating system allowed more freedom with violence and nudity, which translated well with the new version of *Jekyll and Hyde* he wanted to create (“Motion”). Even the trailer seeks to amp up the exploited sexuality of the film: “This is the new Dr. Jekyll, the most evil woman you’ll ever meet” plays as Jekyll (Ralph Bates) works in his lab before quickly jumping to a scene of him stalking a woman at night. Then, the trailer jumps to Martine Beswick and announces: “This is the sensuous Sister Hyde, the most evil man you’ll ever meet” during a scene where Hyde licks her fingers in a skimpy corset and then transitions to her grabbing a knife hidden in a garter underneath her dress. Before the film begins, the audience quickly identifies that while the murderer is a woman, she actually represents the repressed sexual aggression of Dr. Jekyll, making her more of a masculine figure. However, the audience cannot see her completely as male thanks to her exposed breasts, legs, and batting eyelashes. This puts Sister Hyde in a very interesting
classification in regards to the horror spectator’s compassion for the killer, which Aviva Briefel identifies as the “gendered system of identification” in her article, “Monster pains: Masochism, menstruation, and identification in the horror film” (20). According to Briefel’s system, viewers generally accept a male murderer because of his masculinity and testosterone, which leads to rage and anger. However, when a woman is the killer, the audience decides she became a murderer because a male is the source of her anger, not because of any natural feelings of aggression. In this instance, Sister Hyde’s desire to kill stems entirely from Jekyll’s sex drive. Her actions and personality initially appear predominately male due to Jekyll’s influence, but her erotic appearance reveals a more lewd and consequential side to desires, becoming more and more womanly as the film progresses.

Sister Hyde’s “male” side diminishes as she becomes more sexually promiscuous and controlling of her shared body, producing the true horror and threat to masculinity and gender roles. *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* focuses largely on the concept of human duality, or the separate “good” and “evil” personas inside us all. The novella uses Jekyll’s obsession with science and progress as a vehicle to explore the desires suppressed by Victorian culture. Surprisingly, Dr. Jekyll in *Dr. Jekyll and Sister Hyde* is not interested in this type of science—instead, he hopes to discover an elixir of life by using female hormones as the main component of his potion. He believes a woman’s ability to retain beauty with age and not bald like men must be the answer to his elixir. Thus, Jekyll’s moral dilemma in the film is not about playing God, but that he must murder young women for the “cause.” The horror side of *Dr. Jekyll and Sister Hyde* shines strongest in these moments of sacrifice. At first, Jekyll tries to keep his hands clean by hiring others to kill women for his experiments. However, after he has tasted the elixir and experienced the glory of Sister Hyde, he realizes the number of bodies he will need
and the film instantly takes a darker, more sinister tone. The killing scenes always take place at night when it’s difficult for the audience to anticipate his next move. In one instance, a young blonde woman approaches Jekyll in the street and flirtatious asks if he needs an escort. A close up shot of his stern face and wide eyes reveals his thoughts: the perfect target. They walk down the dark street and then Jekyll disappears from the frame of the camera as the woman walks ahead into his laboratory. With Jekyll hidden out of sight, the audience is forced to focus on the chattering woman, feeling the tension and anticipation of her death. The flickering light of the fire barely shows Jekyll in the corner, removing his gloves finger by finger. The woman again faces the back to unlace her corset and the camera zooms in toward the gleaming knife Jekyll pulls from his sleeve. The tension reaches its peak in an extreme close up of Jekyll’s hands on the lace of the woman’s corset. The knife seamlessly rips off her clothing, and as she turns around, all the audience can see is her eyes and mouth wide with horror, barely visible over Jekyll’s dark shoulder. The camera shifts to a shot of shadows on the wall—a large visual of Jekyll stabbing the woman. Then the shot shifts back to her screaming face, blood pouring, as he continues to stab. The scene proceeds with another quick shot of the shadows of the wall and a blood splatter before ending with a visual of her bloodied hand shielding her face, eyes lifeless. The gruesome violence is reflected through the choppy, almost confusing camera transitions from point of view to point of view of the murder. However, the woman’s face solidifies the horror, her screams providing the soundtrack to her death as the audience watches her blood paint the white walls and white bed sheets. The subsequent murders follow a similar pattern of stalk, trap, kill, but interestingly enough, Sister Hyde’s murders are not as explicitly visual as Jekyll’s. This refers yet again to Briefel’s gendered system of identification: women killers are
not taken as seriously as men, who scare the audience more with their aggression, size, and testosterone.

Jekyll and Sister Hyde target prostitutes in their murder sprees to justify the sacrifice and continue in the name of science. Going back to the goals and missions of The New Women, prostitution demeaned the female race since the beginning of time and hampered on New Women’s efforts to gain respect. One late nineteenth-century feminist author, Olive Schreiner, declared that a New Woman’s “first duty is to develop [herself]… the woman who does this is doing more to do away with prostitution and the inequalities between man and woman” (qtd. in Fernando 19). In this light, Sister Hyde’s rampage can be seen as elimination of prostitutes in womankind in order to further the New Woman’s cause. In the 70s, women were in the middle of a Radical Feminism Movement, a “theory of patriarchy as a system of power that organizes society into a complex of relationships based on an assumption that ‘male supremacy’ oppresses women” (Willis 117). Radical feminists were just that—they vocally protested male oppression and wanted to overthrow societal norms of gender roles. This insistent standpoint proved women were a force of their own, and a greater threat to male power than ever before. Just as Jekyll grew to fear Sister Hyde’s control over his body, 70s men were afraid of the radical feminists’ goals and voice.

Both the film and novella analyze suppression of sexuality and gender and both are similar in their portrayal of Hyde as the New Woman. While the novella and film Dr. Jekyll challenges societal taboos through science, Mr. and Sister Hyde symbolize presumed desires of feminists that lead to disorder and destruction. Their chaotic actions and powerful personas slowly take over the sanity of the Dr. Jekylls, erasing whatever morals they have left, and eventually, killing them. Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde’s examination of this topic, while graphic, is
mainly explored through character dialogue and thoughts rather than actions. For example, the readers never witness the transformation scene. Instead, Dr. Lanyon describes his horror in a final letter:

He put the glass to his lips and drank at one gulp… and as I looked there came, I thought, a change—he seemed to swell—his face became suddenly black and the features seemed to melt and alter—and the next moment, I had sprung to my feet and leaped back against the wall… my mind submerged in terror. ‘O God!’ I screamed, and ‘O God!’ again and again; for there before my eyes… like a man restored from death—there stood Henry Jekyll! (102)

The transformation scene through Lanyon’s eyes sets a terrifying tone and stirs fear in the reader. *Dr. Jekyll and Sister Hyde* seeks to translate this to the screen with a more overt, sexy twist, and thus, Hyde the “damned Juggernaut” becomes a beautiful seductress with a desire to kill (12). In the adaptation’s first transformation scene, the suspense is built through a shaky hand-held camera shot of Jekyll gripping his throat, choking and coughing on the elixir, dressed in a feminine pea coat with a brown-checkered scarf. The low brass builds suspense as the camera moves around Jekyll’s back while he grips his face. When the shot moves back and Jekyll removes his hands, the audience can clearly see Sister Hyde in his place, wearing the same outfit. The extreme long shot creates the illusion of transformation without switching actors, despite its lack of special effects. When Jekyll realizes he has become a woman, he begins flaunting from side to side in the mirror and opens his coat to reveal breasts:

This is a male fantasy of becoming female, still objectifying his/her own body, providing a spectacle for the male viewer to enjoy vicariously. This voyeurism is extended when the young man who lives upstairs opens the door, looking for Jekyll, to see Hyde’s
breasts in the mirror; he gazes for a long moment before he recovers himself and leaves, allowing the viewer to stare along with him. (Punter 188)

Yet again, the female body is objectified in horror to represent weakness, lust, and ownership.

The appearance of Sister Hyde does not begin as a separate character, but instead shows Jekyll’s desire for liberation and greed to possess the taboo. Only once he realizes the lack of control he has over this liberated side does he try to stop the transformation, if not to protect his love interest, Susan Spencer, but to save himself.

Dr. Jekyll’s character, like Hyde’s, is also changed to meet the needs of the new storyline. No longer an innocent old gentleman with a thirst for knowledge, the new version of Jekyll has a skewed sense of right and wrong from the very beginning. Before he even transforms into Sister Hyde, Jekyll hires hit men to murder young women for his elixir of life. However, the troubling part is his lack of remorse. Not one moment. When the hit men refuse to continue Jekyll’s biddings, he takes the matter into his own hands and goes on a killing spree. Even his supposed “romantic” interest in Susan seems far from genuine. In fact, it is never clear whether or not the audience is supposed to feel sympathetic for Dr. Jekyll. In the novella, however, the final chapter features Jekyll’s remorse for his experiment and his decision to sacrifice himself to save humanity. The last line of the novella especially highlights Jekyll’s suffering: “Here then, as I lay down the pen and proceed to seal up my confession, I bring the life of that unhappy Henry Jekyll to an end” (148). Ironically, while Jekyll kills himself to
destroy Hyde, Sister Hyde more or less kills Jekyll in the film. As Jekyll scales the side of a building while escaping from police, Sister Hyde begins to transform, making his arms too short to reach the ledge. Hyde falls to her death, but changes back into Jekyll once they have hit the ground. The end serves as a warning to men about the role of the radical feminists in their potential demise while also punishing a sexually aggressive woman for pushing gender boundaries, a message Hollywood horror clearly labels as “dangerous” (Blewett 14).

Stephen Frears’ *Mary Reilly* (1996) yet again redefined the story of *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* and the role of women characters in horror adaptations through its narrative perspective told entirely through the eyes of the female main character. The timid yet faithful Mary Reilly, played by one of America’s best known female actors, Julia Roberts, embodies both the ideal and sinful qualities of past made up characters like Ivy and Muriel. The struggle between her inner demons and virtue mirrors that of Jekyll and Hyde, but her strength and persistence helps save her in the end and kill the beast, Hyde. From the beginning scenes, Jekyll is portrayed as an aristocratic, intelligent man who keeps a curious eye on his new maid, Mary Reilly. With Robert’s likeability and fame as a leading lady, Mary’s presence automatically suggests an air of importance before the film even starts. Also known for her wild brown curls, the audience is jolted by Robert’s blonde frizzy hair, Irish accent, and lack of make up in *Mary Reilly*. These changes help the audience identify Roberts as someone completely different from her past characters: a vulnerable and pure woman. Just as Bergman demanded to play Ivy to avoid typecasting in the 1941 film, Roberts’ Mary Reilly is not the same sexually liberated *Pretty Woman* character audiences expected her to play, but a working class maid with a dark past of sexual abuse.
The dark and muted colors of the opening sequences foreshadow sinister scenes and
gloom. The shot starts wide and zooms in to reveal Mary from behind, scrubbing the outside
walkway on her hands and knees. The camera creeps up behind her as she washes and switches
to a view of her dirty hands before panning up to her calm face. Sudden footsteps behind her
triggers a jump from the audience, and the legs continue to walk in front of her before she
realizes she’s not alone. A low voice asks about the “teeth mark” scars on her arm as the shot
shifts to a close up of Mary’s wounds, the voice’s owner remaining hidden. A steel tipped cane
lifts her arm closer to her face as Mary answers, eyes downcast. The voice continues to speak
and the camera finally reveals Jekyll clad in a top hat over wispy gray hair. This opening scene
not only denotes Mary’s status as a maid and Jekyll’s superior position, but also reveals the
sexual tension between the two through Jekyll’s cane stroking her marked arm. The “teeth”
marks open questions and violence to the audience, introducing Mary’s dark and twisted past.
The camera continues on a tracking shot through Mary’s day-to-day chores and largely ignores
the men around her. The audiences’ attention is only drawn back to the “Jekyll and Hyde”
storyline 20 minutes into the film when the doctor screams out during his first transformation
scene. The audience sees nothing but Mary’s sleeping face, and when she rushes down the stairs
to help him, the audience only sees his back before he slams the door shut. From the first few
scenes, the film clearly shows its intentions and focus: A lower class woman’s fight to survive
among the strange occurrences of her master. Even further, Mary soon reveals the story of her
father’s sexual and physical abuse as the source of the scars. “Feminism again would seem to
rule Stephen Frear’s Mary Reilly… Not only is Reilly a woman but, as Jekyll’s servant, a
working-class woman ‘wrongly’ attracted to her upper-middle-class master, she challenges the
upper-middle-class world of Stevenson’s tale,” while also portraying women’s issues like rape
and abuse in a problematic light (Punter 190). However, the feminist notions of *Mary Reilly* are equally denoted by the “good women versus bad women” themes and glamorized view of sexual assault. The horror film emerges as Mary’s struggle to overcome her past literally haunts her in the form of the violent, perverse Edward Hyde.

Just as Mary feels at home in Jekyll’s manor, Hyde appears as a source of torture, lust, and passion. Mary’s attraction to Jekyll is evident in her dialogue and shy mannerisms, but with their worlds at odds (social status and age), she refuses to see him as more than a master. However, her first encounter with Hyde elicits fear and lewd views of sex. In Hyde’s first appearance, the camera’s shallow depth of field focuses on Mary while blurring his profile over her shoulder. He grabs her shoulder and whispers seductively, forcing her to stare at phallic images in a book. Hyde also touches Mary’s breast, to her fear and surprise, and takes her into his lap. This display of forced physical contact recreates Mary’s experience with her father’s sexual abuse and shakes her poise. Despite the exhibitionism of the naked male form, the scene only becomes erotic when Mary stares back: “In a world ordered by sexual imbalance, pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive/female. The determining male gaze projects its fantasy onto the female figure, which is styled accordingly” (Mulvey 19). As the “pure” and “idealized” side of Mary attempts to resist the lust Hyde projects on her, from smearing his blood on her face to kissing her roughly, she simultaneously craves for sexual freedom and expression, despite her dark past. In a later scene that the audience does not initially realize to be a dream sequence, Mary awakes to Hyde in her bed, ripping her nightgown and licking her spine. She rolls over quickly and stares up at the camera, hair wild and panting, as he sneers, “Oh, there must have been a mistake. I thought you invited me here.” “I did,” she whispers and he grins widely before she jolts awake. With Mary’s skin finally exposed and her
innocent look lost, she becomes an objectified vision of a lust she can’t deny, despite the
violence behind it. Mulvey’s *Visual Pleasures* reports, “In their traditional exhibitionist role
women are simultaneously looked at and displayed, with their appearance coded for strong visual
and erotic impact so that they can be said to connote *to-be-looked-at-ness*” (19). The audience’s
first erotic view of Mary’s desire to be ravished seems hypocritical in comparison to earlier
scenes of female empowerment and feminism. However, the film seeks to expose the
hypocritical nature of nineties feminists during the heat of the sex-positive feminist movement
and alas continue to idolize the “perfect” image of womanhood. The sex-positive movement
focused on the differing viewpoints of women opposed to pornography and those who wanted to
use it to highlight women’s issues:

One tendency has criticized the restrictions on women’s sexual behavior and denounced
the high costs imposed on women for being sexually active. This tradition of feminist
sexual thought has called for a sexual liberation that would work for women as well as
for men. The second tendency has considered sexual liberalization to be inherently a
mere extension of male privilege. This tradition resonates with conservative, anti-sexual
discourse. (Rubin 267)

Mary mirrors this struggle between pro and anti-pornography feminists through by illustrating
both points of view. The film exploits Mary’s body and mind to show a frail *and* powerful side
of her womanhood when she encounters the beastly Hyde. While Hyde forces himself on Mary
by ripping her gown and thus her nakedness portrays a defenseless, sexualized being, Mary also
takes ownership of this role when she tells him she did invite him to her room. The scene invites
the audience to see Mary as a woman overcoming sexual violence and her past to satisfy her
need for love and passion. Even more defining, when Hyde continues his attempt to seduce
Mary, she resists his touch when her moral side realizes the death and destruction he has caused others, including Jekyll. In one particular moment, Hyde attempts to apologize to Mary while the camera focuses on his shaking hands. He breaks the teacup and removes a piece of glass from his hand, smiling widely. The shot follows Hyde closer to Mary as he reaches her hand up to her face and smears blood onto her chin. He whispers, “Don’t you know who I am?” as she closes her eyes and sighs. He backs out of the frame and Mary stares at him, her eyes defiant and eyebrows knit. The blood represents self-sacrifice, foreshadowing Hyde’s death and one-sided love for Mary. John Malkovich portrays both a maniacal and passionate Hyde throughout the film, making Mary’s torture scenes all the more painful and confusing—while the audience can sympathize with her traumatic past, they also feel attached to Hyde, whose affection for Mary calms his rage and remains consistent until the end.

When Hyde, the corruptor of pure women, visibly falls in love with Mary and she betrays him, the tension increases with his unpredictable anger. The horror climax is achieved through the blending of the characters’ weaknesses with their split personalities—will Hyde’s thirst for murder eventually overcome his romantic side? Will Mary stand up to him and defend her life? At the film’s close, Mary walks across a dark bridge in Jekyll’s lab, hoping to face him one last time before she leaves. As the music builds, Hyde’s hand grabs her leg between the steps and pulls her downward. Mary screams over and over as Hyde throws her against walls and tables like a limp rag doll. He raises the knife to her neck, but once he sees her eyes, he stops and begins kissing her instead. In the end, Mary’s virtue wins over the beast and he commits suicide.
to free her. She weeps when Jekyll asks her to forgive him, but walks away into the light when he turns back into Hyde, symbolizing her final rejection of lust and sexual violence. In the end, *Mary Reilly* provides similar commentary on a woman’s “place” as the other film adaptations of the thirties and twenties. Mary can only overcome her past once she rejects temptation and preserves her virtue. Despite the film’s primary focus on a woman’s point of view and Mary’s complex Jekyll-and-Hyde split personality, the end solidifies the thriller-horror cinema message about women who will survive and those who will fall: “Natural female desires… lead to the female character’s downfall” (Helford 150). While *Jekyll and Hyde* adaptations have yet to let the fully sexually liberated women survive, Mary’s ability to save herself from Hyde breaks his ability to both represent and overcome feminists. She pushes past her weaknesses and refuses to let Hyde exploit her abusive past, setting precedent for female characters in future *Jekyll and Hyde* film adaptations.

In Stevenson’s gothic novella, Mr. Hyde literally and figuratively embodies the ideal, violent feminists who struck fear into the hearts of England’s nineteenth century gentlemen: the New Women. From his physical attributes and actions to interpretations of his character over time, Hyde’s femininity represents the prevailing gender struggle in Victorian society and still today. This negative personification along with the death and destruction left at the end of the novel foreshadows not only the fall of gender roles, but of structured English society as a whole when faced by uprising women and the rejection of the cult of domesticity. But as seen in the adaptation versions, Hyde not only represents the fear of the New Woman, he also destroys her. In response to the feminist waves of the twentieth century, Hyde reveals how the flaws in their activism could also be used to kill their revolution. The horror adaptations antagonize sexual liberation through Hyde’s ability to torture and murder non-ideal women characters but hardly
touch or seduce the pure ones. The fear factor of their torture serves as warning to other women. From a silent film with close up visuals of Hyde’s demonic face and Millicent’s petrified reaction used as a main source of horror to Hyde thrashing Mary Reilly against walls and lab equipment and smearing blood on her screaming face, the adaptations’ oppression of sexual liberation and women’s rights demonstrates the unwillingness of men to let go of gender role stereotypes and the status quo.

From the five film adaptations analyzed in this paper, violence against women in horror films follows the evolution of the feminist movements through multidimensional female characters and a Hyde that uses their strength to exploit their vulnerability. As 1920-era men sought to suppress sexual women like Gina, Millicent became a beacon for the survival of the cult of domesticity and preservation of gender roles. Millicent survives Hyde’s attacks for this reason, while Gina falls into desolation from his abuse. When the thirties introduced more outspoken female characters and women’s rights, Hyde sought to mask Muriel’s voice as frivolous and turn Ivy’s independent lifestyle into horrific death. In the end, Muriel’s desire to become a good wife triumphs over Hyde’s torture games, sparing her existence. Leap forward 40 years and the radical feminists of the seventies inspire a new twist of the Jekyll and Hyde story: Dr. Jekyll and Sister Hyde. These feminists’ loud and proud protests against inequality are implicitly critiqued by Sister Hyde’s violence against sexually-freed women and consumption of Jekyll’s body, which eventually kills them both. This gruesome foreshadowing of the fall of man against the rise of radical feminists creates a terrifying adaptation of gory violence, exposed skin, and extreme sexuality. Finally, Mary Reilly explores new thriller-horror territories, from sexual abuse and rape to extreme gore and “jump” scenes more typical of the modern films in this subgenre. While she portrays both the sexually curious and pure woman (a symbol of the
struggles within the sex-positive feminist movement), Mary eventually rejects Hyde’s seduction, freeing herself from the sexual assault of her past and present.

While horror adaptations continue to idealize gender roles and use Hyde as a flawed feminist and oppressor, the evolution of female murder scenes in these films draws more nuanced sympathy and complex resolve for the characters involved. Where Gina’s fall portrays the consequence of her lust and independence, Ivy’s murder invites more complex thinking about her character in the end. The audience sees Ivy seduce Jekyll and keep men company for money in the beginning scenes, but for a majority of the film, she pleads for help and forgiveness as Hyde tortures her slowly, making her death all the more frightening and gruesome. While Millicent, Muriel, and Mary fall under the idealized role, Millicent and Muriel did not have the strength to reject Hyde’s seduction (take ownership of their sexuality), as indicated by the men who must save them in the end. Mary, however, must face Hyde alone and is given the choice to free herself or be consumed. Thus, Mary walks away having control over her sexuality and the people she invites near it.

Today in the twenty-first century, Mary symbolizes the self-control and bravery feminists demonstrated from the very beginning as new women. However, Millicent could not become Mary until women gained basic voting rights, experimented with their sexuality, and found a balance between male idealized roles of femininity and empowerment. While she’s not necessarily the perfect or toughest feminist, she represents a movement overcoming stereotypes to fight their cause in the future. Despite Hyde and the adaptations’ efforts to dominate women, the female characters of Jekyll and Hyde keep evolving and becoming more prevalent in their influence over the male leads. The novella reveals the consequences of suppressing sexual desires through Hyde’s destructive and unapologetic nature. Similarly, women refused to remain
silent and forced into roles of submission, and as they gained voting rights, explored their sexuality, and debated what elements of sex helped and hindered their cause, the women of the *Jekyll and Hyde* films also fought for survival in a world dominated by science and men. While current adaptations continue to reveal more and more gore and violence against women, it is now possible for the independent, “tough” female character to survive while also calming the voice of their suppressor, Hyde the beast. As each adaptation exploits women to achieve horror and violence, the growth of these characters and their role in the films dramatically continues to change as well. While the limited voices of Gina and Millicent, Ivy and Muriel showed a more hopeless setting for sexual liberation, the roles of Sister Hyde and Mary Reilly became stronger and more defiant of their male counterparts. Horror films may never stop oppressing women, but they also cannot keep women in the same static roles, based on social setting and new precedent set by films like *Dr. Jekyll and Sister Hyde* and *Mary Reilly*. Indeed, without the women they depend upon, adaptations of *Jekyll and Hyde* would cease to exist altogether, and as women worldwide continue to find personal liberation, their influence on these films’ female counterparts can only keep advancing as fighters and survivors.
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