

Worksheet 4 – Degeneration

Review: Lecture 3: The Opening Paragraph

Which line in the opening paragraph is a Biblical reference?

Recall: Lecture 4: Degeneration

Answer these questions after watching the video lecture to check how much you remember.

1. When was Darwin's *The Origin of Species* published?
a) 1856 c) 1858
b) 1857 d) 1859
2. When was the Great Exhibition held?
a) 1849 c) 1851
b) 1850 d) 1852
3. According to Dr Pittard, who 'gave Darwinism a direction'?
a) Herbert Spencer c) Charles Wheatstone
b) John Tyndall d) William Whewell
4. Who argued that criminality could be seen in facial features?
a) Nordau c) Lombroso
b) Lankester d) Darwin
5. Which committee 'pointed to the existence of a degenerate underclass of the population which formed a residual pool of infection'?
a) The Committee of Physical Deterioration c) The Committee of Societal Decline
b) The Committee of Moral Deterioration d) The Committee of Social Degeneration
6. In the novel, which animal is Mr Hyde frequently compared to?
a) Wolf c) Dog
b) Monkey d) Panther

Analysis

7. Read the extract below from Max Nordau's book *Degeneration* (1880). How might these ideas apply to *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*?

Hysteria and degeneration have always existed; but they formerly showed themselves sporadically, and had no importance in the life of the whole community. It was only the vast fatigue which was experienced by the generation on which the multitudes of discoveries and innovations burst abruptly, imposing on it organic exigencies greatly surpassing its strength, which created favourable conditions under which these maladies could gain ground enormously, and become a danger to civilization.... Degenerates are not always criminals, prostitutes, anarchists and pronounced lunatics; they are often authors and artists.

8. Read the extract below from Ray Lankester's book, also titled *Degeneration* (1892). How might these ideas also apply to *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*?

The traditional history of mankind furnishes us with notable examples of degeneration. High states of civilisation have decayed and given place to low and degenerate states. At one time it was a favourite doctrine that the savage races of mankind were degenerate descendants of the higher and civilised races... With regard to ourselves, the white races of Europe, the possibility of degeneration seems to be worth some consideration. In accordance with a tacit assumption of universal progress—an unreasoning optimism—we are accustomed to regard ourselves as necessarily progressing, as necessarily having arrived at a higher and more elaborated condition than that which our ancestors reached, and as destined to progress still further. On the other hand, it is well to remember that we are subject to the general laws of evolution, and are as likely to degenerate as to progress.

Evaluation

9. Use the internet to consolidate your notes on 'degeneration'. Use the following links from the British Library to help you:

<https://www.bl.uk/romantics-and-victorians/articles/duality-in-robert-louis-stevensons-strange-case-of-dr-jekyll-and-mr-hyde>

<https://www.bl.uk/collection-items/degeneration-by-max-nordau>

<https://www.bl.uk/romantics-and-victorians/articles/post-darwin-social-darwinism-degeneration-eugenics>

You should aim to write at least 1-2 sides of notes, and make sure to always think about how the **context** relates to the **text**.

Glossary

- **Profound** – Very great, significant or intense.
e.g. Afterwards he had profound feelings of regret.
- **Criminology** – The study of crime and criminals.
e.g. Her obsession with true crime documentaries led her to want to study criminology.
- **Atavistic** – A synonym for primitive; relating to ancestral, earlier times.
e.g. Her fear of water was almost atavistic.
- **Taxonomy** – A scheme of classification.
e.g. The scientists needed to create a new taxonomy for the recently discovered species.
- **Abnormality** – An abnormal or unusual feature, characteristic or occurrence.
e.g. Genetic diseases can cause abnormalities in babies.

--