

The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde by Robert Louis Stevenson

Plot Summary:

<https://www.johnofgauntschool.org/attachments/download.asp?file=466&type=pdf>

- On their weekly walk, an eminently sensible, trustworthy lawyer named Mr. Utterson listens as his friend Enfield
- 5 tells a gruesome tale of assault. The tale describes a sinister figure named Mr. Hyde who tramples a young girl, disappears into a door on the street, and reemerges to pay off her relatives with a check signed by a respectable gentleman. Since both Utterson and Enfield disapprove of gossip, they agree to speak no further of the matter. It happens, however, that one of Utterson's clients and close friends, Dr. Jekyll, has written a will transferring all of his property to this same Mr. Hyde. Soon, Utterson begins having dreams in which a faceless figure stalks through a
- 10 nightmarish version of London.
- Puzzled, the lawyer visits Jekyll and their mutual friend Dr. Lanyon to try to learn more. Lanyon reports that he no longer sees much of Jekyll, since they had a dispute over the course of Jekyll's research, which Lanyon calls "unscientific balderdash." Curious, Utterson stakes out a building that Hyde visits—which, it turns out, is a laboratory attached to the back of Jekyll's home. Encountering Hyde, Utterson is amazed by how undefinably ugly
- 15 the man seems, as if deformed, though Utterson cannot say exactly how. Much to Utterson's surprise, Hyde willingly offers Utterson his address. Jekyll tells Utterson not to concern himself with the matter of Hyde. A year passes uneventfully. Then, one night, a servant girl witnesses Hyde brutally beat to death an old man named Sir Danvers Carew, a member of Parliament and a client of Utterson. The police contact Utterson, and Utterson suspects Hyde as the murderer. He leads the officers to Hyde's apartment, feeling a sense of foreboding amid the
- 20 eerie weather—the morning is dark and wreathed in fog. When they arrive at the apartment, the murderer has vanished, and police searches prove futile. Shortly thereafter, Utterson again visits Jekyll, who now claims to have ended all relations with Hyde; he shows Utterson a note, allegedly written to Jekyll by Hyde, apologizing for the trouble he has caused him and saying goodbye. That night, however, Utterson's clerk points out that Hyde's handwriting bears a remarkable similarity to Jekyll's own.
- 25 For a few months, Jekyll acts especially friendly and sociable, as if a weight has been lifted from his shoulders. But then Jekyll suddenly begins to refuse visitors, and Lanyon dies from some kind of shock he received in connection with Jekyll. Before dying, however, Lanyon gives Utterson a letter, with instructions that he not open it until after Jekyll's death. Meanwhile, Utterson goes out walking with Enfield, and they see Jekyll at a window of his laboratory; the three men begin to converse, but a look of horror comes over Jekyll's face, and he slams the window and
- 30 disappears. Soon afterward, Jekyll's butler, Mr. Poole, visits Utterson in a state of desperation: Jekyll has secluded himself in his laboratory for several weeks, and now the voice that comes from the room sounds nothing like the doctor's. Utterson and Poole travel to Jekyll's house through empty, windswept, sinister streets; once there, they find the servants huddled together in fear. After arguing for a time, the two of them resolve to break into Jekyll's laboratory. Inside, they find the body of Hyde, wearing Jekyll's clothes and apparently dead by suicide—and a letter
- 35 from Jekyll to Utterson promising to explain everything.
- Utterson takes the document home, where first he reads Lanyon's letter; it reveals that Lanyon's deterioration and eventual death were caused by the shock of seeing Mr. Hyde take a potion and metamorphose into Dr. Jekyll. The second letter constitutes a testament by Jekyll. It explains how Jekyll, seeking to separate his good side from his darker impulses, discovered a way to transform himself periodically into a deformed monster free of conscience—Mr. Hyde. At first, Jekyll reports, he delighted in becoming Hyde and rejoiced in the moral freedom that the
- 40 creature possessed. Eventually, however, he found that he was turning into Hyde involuntarily in his sleep, even without taking the potion. At this point, Jekyll resolved to cease becoming Hyde. One night, however, the urge gripped him too strongly, and after the transformation he immediately rushed out and violently killed Sir Danvers Carew. Horrified, Jekyll tried more adamantly to stop the transformations, and for a time he proved successful; one day, however, while sitting in a park, he suddenly turned into Hyde, the first time that an involuntary
- 45 metamorphosis had happened while he was awake.
- The letter continues describing Jekyll's cry for help. Far from his laboratory and hunted by the police as a murderer, Hyde needed Lanyon's help to get his potions and become Jekyll again—but when he undertook the transformation in Lanyon's presence, the shock of the sight instigated Lanyon's deterioration and death. Meanwhile, Jekyll returned to his home, only to find himself ever more helpless and trapped as the transformations increased in frequency and necessitated even larger doses of potion in order to reverse themselves. It was the onset of one of
- 50 these spontaneous metamorphoses that caused Jekyll to slam his laboratory window shut in the middle of his conversation with Enfield and Utterson. Eventually, the potion began to run out, and Jekyll was unable to find a key ingredient to make more. His ability to change back from Hyde into Jekyll slowly vanished. Jekyll writes that even as he composes his letter he knows that he will soon become Hyde permanently, and he wonders if Hyde will face execution for his crimes or choose to kill himself. Jekyll notes that, in any case, the end of his letter marks the end
- 55 of the life of Dr. Jekyll. With these words, both the document and the novel come to a close.

Themes

- The duality of man
- Science and the unexplained
- The Victorian Gentleman & his reputation
- Violence
- Secrets and mystery
- Fear and horror
- The Urban Gothic

For each theme:

1. Consider why they are important in the novel. Why do you think Stevenson wants the reader to think about this issue?
2. Consider how the theme changes in the novel. How does this theme develop as the novel progresses?
3. Identify the key moments for this theme. Which section of the novel do they novel an important part in?
4. Look at your notes about the different characters in the novel. Does thinking about a character develop your understanding of a theme?
5. Look at your notes about the historical context of the novel. Does this develop your understanding of the theme?
6. Pick at least three quotations for each theme. Annotate them to consider how Stevenson has used language to tell us something .

The Duality of Man

- The idea of 'duality' is that humans have 2 sides.
- This is represented in the character of Dr Jekyll/ Mr Hyde but it's also subtly hinted at in other characters, such as the description of Utterson at the opening of the novel.
- Duality is also represented through Dr Jekyll's house with the front and back door of the house.
- Duality is also used to emphasise the concept of good and evil which is central to the novel. However, whilst Hyde is pure evil, Dr Jekyll is not purely good which encourages us to think more deeply about the nature of humanity.
- The novel asks questions about whether we should be trying to live as one or other, or whether we should accept both sides of ourselves.

Reputation – Victorian Gentlemen

- In the Victorian period, there was a very clear idea of what it meant to be a good, honourable and respectable person. This was heavily influenced by Christian teaching.
- To have a good reputation in that time people needed to be religious, have good morals, behave in way which was not sinful (this meant that drinking to excess, sex outside of marriage, gambling etc. were all frowned upon)
- Dr Jekyll says (Ch. 12) that he wanted to be well respected and held himself to very high standards. However, this did not make him happy which led to his experiment.
- If you did something to damage your reputation then you'd be an outcast in society – rejected by friends and family.

Fear and horror

- This novel is a gothic horror. It is intended to frighten the reader (a bit like a modern horror film) whilst also being thought provoking – particularly about the idea of good and evil.
- Evil wins at the end of this novel which is extremely frightening for readers (especially highly religious Victorian readers).
- The writer is communicating a message about the need to control our sinful side and not let it take control of us and our actions.
- There are many frightening scenes in the novel where Stevenson uses descriptive techniques to create terrifying images in the reader's mind and associate things in the novel with the devil.

Violence

- There is a lot of violence from the character of Mr Hyde in the novel.
- The first chapter gives details of the little girl being trampled. This foreshadows the events of Chapter 4 where Sir Danvers Carew is clubbed to death.
- Both of Mr Hyde's victims are described by Stevenson as vulnerable and innocent individuals to encourage the reader to feel sympathy for them, and to feel even more horrified by Mr Hyde. The little girl represents both children and women (who were considered to be weaker by the Victorians) and Sir Danvers represents the elderly and by being a 'Sir' it implies he is worthy of respect.
- Mr Hyde seems completely unmoved by violence, as if it is simply part of his nature. He is also presented as wild and out of control during his violent rages which makes him even more frightening as he is unpredictable.

Secrecy and Mystery

- Secrecy is used throughout the novel to hide the truth of the situation until the 'big reveal' at the end. This creates tension and suspense for readers making the book compelling.
- Secrecy is shown in many ways in the novel, such as: locked doors, letters that cannot be opened, characters refusing to give information, unexplained/ mysterious events.
- The core mystery that Utterson is trying to work out is the nature of the relationship between Mr Hyde and Dr Jekyll. Utterson theorises blackmail and forgery but never guesses the truth.
- Pathetic fallacy is used throughout the novel to represent the mystery and Mr Utterson's inability to see clearly to the truth: fog is used repeatedly to represent this.

Science and the unexplained

- Science was considered new, modern, unpredictable and slightly scary in the Victorian period. People were making discoveries and advancements like never before, but this meant that experiments were happening with unpredictable outcomes which was quite unsettling for many people.
- Science was also criticised as opposing religion. Darwin's theory of evolution began to be circulated and proved and this upset many people as it disproved what was written in the Bible. Many felt this was morally wrong, and were also frightened because if the bible was wrong, what could you have faith in?
- This novel uses people's uncertainty of science and fear of what it might do to create a frightening story for Victorian readers. Because the limits of science were unknown, Jekyll's experiment would have been more believable to original readers than it is to us.
- Fear of the unknown and unexplained is common in many novels and films. Things that we can't apply logic or reason to unsettle us because we don't understand them. Stevenson uses this to create fear in readers.

Dr Jekyll

- Dr Jekyll is a scientist. He was interested in experimenting with the soul and personality of humans, aiming to separate the good and evil parts.
- He fell out with his friend Dr Lanyon who felt that these experiments were wrong and should not be done.
- Dr Jekyll (in Ch. 12) explains he felt he was living a double life – part of him wanted to be a very moral, upstanding doctor with a good reputation and no bad habits, but the other part of him wanted to enjoy some of the fun things in life.
- The experiment didn't go as planned: Jekyll manages to separate out the evil and as it grows in strength it starts to do more and more evil deeds making Dr Jekyll feel horribly guilty.
- Jekyll seems unable to stop turning in to his alter ego Hyde – this could be interpreted as him being addicted, or maybe as Hyde gaining strength and control.
- Jekyll finds that he is unable to make the potion to keep switching between personas and has to accept that Hyde will take over his body forever – evil has won.
- Jekyll writes his confession and hopes Hyde won't destroy it.

Mr Hyde

- Mr Hyde is the **gothic monster** of this text. He is the embodiment of pure evil and commits horrifying, violent crimes throughout the novel.
- Mr Hyde is described using a semantic field of satanic imagery (descriptions that link him to Satan – the devil) to make him seem evil and frightening.
- Mr Hyde increases in strength and power as the novel goes on. His first crime (Ch. 1) is violent but not fatal, but by Ch.4 he commits a murder.
- Mr Hyde is frightened of being caught by police (in the Victorian period the punishment for murder was death) so he hides as Jekyll to avoid capture. Jekyll starts to believe he has control again at this point.
- Mr Hyde becomes frustrated and keen to be free from Jekyll so comes out again. He no longer needs the potion to transform, and instead it is Jekyll who has to take the potion to re-gain control.
- Mr Hyde takes over Jekyll's body when away from home and can't go back because of course he's still a wanted criminal. He enlists the help of Dr Lanyon to safely re-hide as Jekyll again, but shocks and horrifies Dr Lanyon through the transformation.
- Mr Hyde feels angry that Dr Jekyll dislikes him so much – he feels betrayed since Jekyll created him and now wishes he didn't exist. Mr Hyde takes out this anger by trying to upset Jekyll.
- As Poole and Utterson break down the door, Hyde kills himself to avoid capture and justice.

Dr Lanyon

- Dr Lanyon is an old friend of both Mr Utterson and Dr Jekyll. Dr Lanyon is a scientist just like Jekyll, however they fell out when Jekyll began experiments that Lanyon morally disagreed with.
- Dr Lanyon receives a mysterious letter from Dr Jekyll asking him to go and collect certain equipment and ingredients. Lanyon is then instructed to be home alone at midnight and await a visitor.
- The visitor turns out to be Mr Hyde. Hyde creates the potion and drinks it, transforming into Dr Jekyll. Dr Lanyon is shocked and horrified by what he sees. He is so horrified he starts to die from the fright.
- Dr Lanyon writes a letter to Utterson explaining what he saw but he won't let Utterson read it until Dr Jekyll has died or has disappeared.
- Dr Lanyon then dies of fright. His letter is revealed at the end of the novel in the penultimate chapter.

Mr Utterson

- Mr Utterson is the main narrative viewpoint through which the story is told – he's not the narrator though because it's written in the 3rd person not 1st person.
- He is a lawyer so he has Dr Jekyll's will (which has some suspicious and unsettling details in it) – he is also an old friend of Dr Jekyll and Dr Lanyon.
- Mr Utterson walks every Sunday with his cousin Mr Enfield which is how he comes to hear about Mr Hyde's crime (Ch. 1). Utterson becomes concerned for his friend Jekyll due to his contention with Hyde and determines to find out more.
- Mr Utterson meets Mr Hyde and gets a very negative impression of him. He questions Dr Jekyll about their connection but Jekyll refuses to talk about it.

- Mr Utterson is called after the murder (Ch. 4) and helps the police by tracking down the murder weapon with them – this is found at Hyde's lodgings in Soho.
- Mr Utterson gets increasingly concerned about Dr Jekyll who becomes very withdrawn. He goes to ask Dr Lanyon about Jekyll and finds Lanyon near to death. Lanyon refuses to speak about Dr Jekyll increasing the mystery.
- Jekyll's butler (Poole) comes to get Utterson's help when Jekyll has not been seen for days. Utterson agrees to help and breaks down the door with Poole. They do not find Dr Jekyll, just the body of Hyde.
- Mr Utterson picks up Jekyll's confession and reads it, along with Dr Lanyon's narrative.

The Victorian Period

This text is from the Victorian period.

Complete this mind map to try and understand how a Victorian reader might approach the text and consider what effect it would have on them.

