

The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde

Plot Summary

Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde by Robert Louis Stevenson is a narrative about the complexities of science and the duplicity of human nature. Dr Jekyll is a kind, well-respected and intelligent scientist who meddles with the darker side of science, as he wants to bring out his 'second' nature.

He does this through transforming himself into Mr Hyde - his evil alter ego who doesn't repent or accept responsibility for his evil crimes and ways. Jekyll tries to control his alter ego, Hyde, and for a while, Jekyll has the power. However, towards the end of the novel, Hyde takes over and this results in their deaths.

Key plot details

- Utterson hears the story of how Hyde, Jekyll's friend, trampled on a girl.
- Utterson meets Hyde and is shocked. He wonders why his respectable friend could befriend such a person.
- A year later, Carew is murdered by Hyde. Jekyll is deeply affected by this and refuses to speak to anybody. Hyde goes missing.
- Utterson goes to speak to Lanyon because he is concerned about Jekyll. Lanyon refuses to speak about Jekyll and hands Utterson a letter that must only be opened at the disappearance or death of Jekyll.
- In the middle of the night, Utterson is summoned to Jekyll's house where he breaks down the laboratory door and discovers a dead man. Utterson reads Jekyll's newly amended will and takes Jekyll's confession to read at home.
- As Jekyll has disappeared, Utterson reads Dr Lanyon's letter which tells him the true nature of Jekyll's experiments.
- Utterson reads Jekyll's confession which reveals the true identity of Mr Hyde.

Detailed plot summary

A strange story

The narrative begins with Mr Utterson and Enfield taking a walk. During their walk, they see a strange and sinister building, which happens to be attached to Utterson's good friend, Dr Jekyll's house. On seeing this building, Enfield tells the tale of Mr Hyde, the occupant of the derelict house. He tells Utterson about how Hyde trampled on a young girl's leg and had no remorse about his evil actions.

Utterson becomes obsessed with Mr Hyde and his story and wants to meet him. He begins to enquire about Mr Hyde and watches the door.

Utterson meets Hyde

Finally, Utterson meets Mr Hyde and he is greatly shocked by the man. He feels a great sense of worry and despair when he has a conversation with him. Utterson goes to warn Dr Jekyll but Poole, Jekyll's butler, says he is not around and Jekyll has ordered them all to let Mr Hyde come and go as he pleases.

Two weeks later, at a friend's dinner party, Utterson asks Jekyll about his will - about the main benefactor being Mr Hyde. Jekyll laughs off Utterson's worries and asks him to speak no more of the matter. Jekyll assures Utterson that he has it all under control.

Carew's murder

Nearly a year later, a well-respected man, Carew, is brutally murdered by Mr Hyde. The murder weapon is Dr Jekyll's walking cane. An eyewitness suffers severe distress and cannot believe the brutality of Hyde's attack. This fuels Utterson's wish to see Hyde pay for his actions.

Hyde goes missing

Dr Jekyll becomes very ill and isolated. He reassures everybody that he is rid of Mr Hyde. The police can't find Hyde and Jekyll becomes happier and more sociable as a result.

Lanyon suffers a shock

Suddenly, Dr Jekyll becomes depressed and refuses to see Utterson. Utterson decides to visit Jekyll's oldest friend, Dr Lanyon. Dr Lanyon is on his death-bed and refuses to discuss Jekyll. Lanyon dies and leaves a letter for Utterson that says it shouldn't be opened until the death or disappearance of Dr Jekyll.

Jekyll's laboratory

One evening, Jekyll's servant comes to Utterson and asks him to go to Jekyll's house. Utterson goes and listens at the locked laboratory door where strange noises are heard. Poole tells Utterson that the laboratory has been locked for days. The person inside the laboratory keeps asking for chemicals and complains that the ones Poole has found aren't 'pure'.

Jekyll is found

Utterson and Poole break down the laboratory door. On the floor there is a small, deformed person wearing Jekyll's clothes, he is twitching and holding a vial. On the desk there is a copy of Jekyll's will with Hyde's name crossed out and Utterson's instead. There is also a confession written by Jekyll. Utterson takes the documents home to study.

A confession

Utterson reads Dr Lanyon's letter which tells Utterson the true nature of Jekyll's experiments and the true identity of Mr Hyde. Utterson reads Dr Jekyll's 'Statement of the Case' where Jekyll confesses his dark experiments and how Hyde became too controlling. Utterson is amazed and shocked by it all.

Character Overview

Main characters

Dr Jekyll

Mr Hyde

Secondary characters

Mr Utterson

Dr Lanyon

Minor characters

Poole - Dr Jekyll's butler

Mr Richard Enfield - Mr Utterson's friend and cousin

Sir Danvers Carew - Mr Hyde's murder victim

Detailed Character Notes

Dr Jekyll

At the beginning of the novel Dr Jekyll is shown to be:

- respectable
- wealthy
- intelligent

Dr Jekyll is a well-respected and intelligent scientist. He is a wealthy man and lives in a house with his butler, Poole. To the rear of his house, with a separate entrance onto a side street, he has his own laboratory. It is here that he is conducting his most ambitious experiment yet - and it is this experiment which causes him to become erratic and alienated from his friends and Victorian society.

As the novel progresses, Jekyll becomes unpredictable and decides to leave all of his belongings and wealth to the scoundrel, Mr Hyde, in his will. This causes his friend Utterson to become very concerned and very anxious to find out more about Mr Hyde.

	How is Dr Jekyll like this?	Evidence	Analysis
Determined	Dr Jekyll is determined as he wants his experiment to succeed. He is so determined that he risks losing everything in order for him to succeed - his friendships, reputation and wealth.	"I do sincerely take a great, a very great interest in that young man."	The repetition of 'great' emphasises how determined Jekyll is and illustrates how he feels about Mr Hyde. The use of 'sincerely' shows that his determination and passion are real.
Respected	Dr Jekyll is respected due to his wealth, reputation as a charitable man and his discoveries in science.	The doctor gave one of his pleasant dinners to some five or six old cronies, all intelligent reputable men, and all judges of good wine.	This shows that he is well-liked and respected in the society of Victorian London. As all of the men are judges of 'good wine', it indicates to the reader their wealth and respectability.
Intelligent	Dr Jekyll is intelligent due to his innovative experiments which are perceived by some others as worldly and un-godly, particularly by the conventional scientist, Dr Lanyon.	Henry Jekyll, M.D., D.C.L., LL.D., F.R.S., etc.	The titles that are attached to Dr Jekyll's name highlight his intelligence, as he has many degrees and qualifications. The use of 'etc.' suggests there are more.
Erratic	Dr Jekyll becomes more erratic as the novel develops. This is because he is trying to conceal Mr Hyde from everyone. He's also trying to control his experiment, but failing.	...before the smile was struck out of his face and succeeded by an expression of such abject terror and despair, as froze the very blood of	This highlights the change in Dr Jekyll's behaviour, as before this quotation, Dr Jekyll was happily talking to Mr Utterson. However, Stevenson describes a sudden change in Dr Jekyll's behaviour. The word 'struck' shows that

		the two gentleman below.	Hyde's appearance has changed Dr Jekyll's behaviour instantly.
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Social and historical context

In the Victorian era, scientists were viewed with some superstition and their discoveries, in some cases, were seen as un-Godly. Charles Darwin's *The Origins of the Species* was published in 1859. This book became famous as it discussed the theory of evolution. Many people saw it as an attack on religion because the book made many of the Bible's teachings impossible. Therefore, many people thought scientists were untrustworthy and engaged in doing the 'devil's work.'

Mr Hyde

- evil
- murderous
- Jekyll's alter ego

Mr Hyde is described as devilish, evil and a criminal mastermind. Stevenson makes Hyde more mysterious by only hinting at his physical appearance - he is smaller than Jekyll and whenever people see him, they are deeply affected by his looks and spirit.

He is violent and commits terrible crimes - the trampling of an innocent young girl and the murder of Carew. He is unforgiving and doesn't repent for his crimes and sins. He is selfish and wishes for complete dominance over Jekyll.

	How is Mr Hyde like this?	Evidence	Analysis
Ugly	He is described as ugly and Stevenson suggests he has the face of Satan. Everybody Hyde meets in the novel is afflicted with his 'nightmarish' appearance.	"There is something wrong with his appearance; something displeasing, something downright detestable. I never saw a man so disliked."	This quote from Enfield shows that he is greatly appalled and disgusted by Hyde's appearance, suggesting that he is other-worldly and doesn't belong in the reputable society of Victorian London. The repetition of 'something' exaggerates how deformed Hyde is, as Enfield can't quite put his finger on it.
Murderous	Hyde murders Carew and tramples on a little girl causing her legs to break.	...with ape-like fury, he was trampling his victim under foot, and hailing down a storm of blows.	The use of the simile 'ape-like fury' describes Hyde as an animal capable of rages, not a human. This shows that Hyde doesn't care about his actions and has no control over his fiery, animalistic behaviour.
Powerful	Towards the end of the book, Hyde becomes the dominant side to Dr Jekyll's personality. Each	"It took on this occasion a double dose to recall me	This shows that Mr Hyde is getting stronger, as Dr Jekyll needs to use more drugs to return to his former self. The use of the exclamation

	time Dr Jekyll turns into Mr Hyde, Mr Hyde gets stronger and makes it more difficult for Dr Jekyll to turn to his 'original' self.	to myself; and alas!"	mark suggests that this surprises and also scares Jekyll as he is unsure and wary of Hyde's power.
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Social and Historical Context

In the Victorian era, many people were religious and believed in the devil. Many believed that people harnessed the Devil's power when they committed evil acts and crimes.

Victorian literature shows this through the opposition of good and evil, reflecting the good and evil in people. Many texts from the Victorian period have this clear motif.

Mr Gabriel Utterson

- rational
- curious
- calm
- respectable

Mr Utterson is the main narrator in the novel. Utterson is a lawyer and therefore a respectable, wealthy man in Victorian London. Stevenson shows Utterson's personality to be rational, calm and curious.

It is through these personality traits that Utterson uncovers the mystery of Dr Jekyll's will. This confuses him, as Jekyll's wish is to leave all of his belongings and wealth to the mysterious criminal Mr Hyde. Utterson's persistence leads him to discover the truth about Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde's relationship.

	How is Utterson like this?	Evidence	Analysis
Curious and persistent	Utterson is persistent in his quest to uncover the true reality of Mr Hyde and his relationship with Dr Jekyll.	"If he be Mr Hyde," he had thought, "I shall be Mr Seek."	This demonstrates Utterson's persistence in wanting to find Mr Hyde. Stevenson uses the pun "Mr Seek" to show Utterson's curious nature in discovering the truth about Mr Hyde.
Caring	Utterson cares about his friend, Dr Jekyll. He really admires him and values him as a friend - he wants to see Jekyll happy.	"This is very good of you, this is downright good of you, and I cannot find words to thank you in."	Jekyll's response to Utterson's good deed shows that Jekyll is grateful for what Utterson has done and for his friendship.
Outspoken	Utterson is outspoken when it comes to his dislike for Mr Hyde, Jekyll's beneficiary.	"I can't pretend that I shall ever like him," said the lawyer.	This shows that Utterson speaks his mind - to the point where his friendship with Jekyll could be compromised.

Dr Hastie Lanyon

Doctor Lanyon and Dr Jekyll were once great friends and both enjoyed the field of science. However they had a disagreement about Dr Jekyll's latest experiment which Dr Lanyon describes as 'scientific balderdash.' This disagreement caused them to fall out with each other and Jekyll was further isolated from his friends.

Dr Lanyon witnessed Jekyll's transformation into Hyde and it scarred him deeply. He couldn't believe what Jekyll had done and he thought it was unnatural. Lanyon never recovered from what he had seen and shortly after, had a fit and died.

	How is Lanyon like this?	Evidence	Analysis
Outspoken	Dr Lanyon describes Dr Jekyll's experiments as 'unscientific balderdash', claiming that Jekyll's experiments are ridiculous and not the 'correct' science.	"Unscientific balderdash."	This shows that Dr Lanyon doesn't agree with Jekyll's experiments or 'believe' in them, as he calls them 'balderdash'.
Stubborn	Dr Lanyon is stubborn as he will not forget or forgive Dr Jekyll for his experiments with Mr Hyde.	"I am quite done with that person."	This shows that Dr Lanyon is stubborn, as he refuses to acknowledge Dr Jekyll's name. The fact that he is saying he is 'done with that person' shows that Lanyon doesn't forgive easily.

Key Themes

Good vs. Evil

Good vs. evil is basically the novel's biggest theme. More specifically, Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde is easily viewed as an allegory about the good and evil that exist in all men, and about our struggle with these two sides of the human personality. In this book, then, the battle between good and evil rages within the individual. The question is which is superior. Since Hyde seems to be taking over, one could argue that evil is stronger than good. However, Hyde does end up dead at the end of the story, perhaps suggesting a weakness or failure of evil. The big question, of course, is whether or not good can be separated from evil, or whether the two are forever intertwined.

Repression

Repression is indisputably a cause of troubles in Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde. The repression here is that of Victorian England: no sexual appetites, no violence, and no great expressions of emotion, at least in the public sphere. Everything is sober and dignified, and you're really not supposed to be happy. (That would somehow take away from your focus on morality). The more Dr. Jekyll's forbidden appetites are repressed, the more he desires the life of Mr. Hyde, and the stronger Mr. Hyde grows.

This is clearly demonstrated after Dr. Jekyll's two-month hiatus from donning the visage of Mr. Hyde; Dr. Jekyll finds that the pull to evil has been magnified after months of repression.

Friendship

Friendship in Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde serves to drive the plot forward. Aside from human curiosity, Mr. Utterson is compelled to uncover the mystery of the evil man because of his friendship with Dr. Jekyll. In trying to unravel the secret, his many friendships deliver crucial pieces of information. In this sense, friendship acts as both a motivator and an enabler. As for the friendship between Dr. Lanyon and Dr. Jekyll, it's certainly not as unconditional as the loyalty Mr. Utterson bears for Dr. Jekyll. Instead, it's fraught with competition, anger, and eventually an irreconcilable quarrel. We see that friendships can be ruined by differences of opinion.

Appearances

Appearances figure in the novel both figuratively and literally. Dr. Jekyll definitely wants to keep up a well-respected façade, even though he has a lot of unsavoury tendencies. In a literal sense, the appearances of buildings in the novel reflect the character of the building's inhabitants. Dr. Jekyll has a comfortable and well-appointed house, but Mr. Hyde spends most of his time in the "dingy windowless structure" of the doctor's laboratory. Other disreputable quarters of London are described as well, the stomping ground of Mr. Hyde.

Curiosity

In Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, curiosity drives the characters to seek knowledge. This curiosity is either suppressed or fulfilled in each character. Curiosity lacks any negative connotation; instead, characters who do not actively seek to unravel the Jekyll and Hyde mystery may be viewed as passive or weak. Finally, the characters' curiosities are, to some degree, transferred over to the reader; we seek to solve the puzzle along with Mr. Utterson.

Lies and Deceit

In Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, the plot is frequently driven forward by secrecy and deception; Mr. Utterson doesn't know the relationship between Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, and he wants to find out. Also, by omitting the scenes of Mr. Hyde's supposedly crazy debauchery, Stevenson allows our imaginations to run to wild and eerie places.

Violence

This novel details two crimes of violence against innocent and helpless citizens: first, a little girl, and second, an elderly man. The violence in the novel centres on Mr. Hyde, and raises the question as to whether or not violence is an inherent part of man's nature.

Religion

God and Satan figure prominently in this text, as well as many general references to religion and works of charity. As part of their intellectual lives, the men in the novel discuss various religious works. One sign of Mr. Hyde's wickedness, for example, is his defacing Dr. Jekyll's favourite religious work. Mr. Hyde is also frequently likened to Satan.

Women and Femininity

Most female characters in Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde are passive and weak. The first female we see is a young girl mowed over by Mr. Hyde. Although she is "not much the worse, more frightened," she still kicks up an incredible fuss and a large group of people come to her aid. The next woman we see is via a maid's narrative of the Carew murder. After witnessing the murder, she faints, awakening long after the murderer is gone. She is a passive spectator. There is much speculation as to the reasons for the absence of females in the story; one particularly compelling argument is that women function as moral

bedrocks in most Victorian novels. They're supposed to be beacons of good moral influence. In Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde therefore, women may have unnecessarily complicated the story.