

Jekyll and Hyde



Robert Louis Stevenson (author)

- Born in Edinburgh, Scotland, in 1850.
- Family included engineers, scientists, a professor of philosophy, and a religious minister. We can see the scientific and religious sides of Stevenson's family reflected in *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*.
- Stevenson was a sickly child, he died in 1894 at the age of 44.
- Stevenson believed there was a darker part of human nature which he presents in the novel

Context: Religion and science in the 19th century

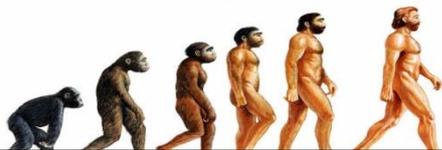
- 1859, when Stevenson was nine, Charles Darwin published *The Origin of Species*. This introduced the Theory of Evolution.
- Many people saw it as an attack on religion, because it impossible to believe that God created the world in seven days.
- Darwin put forward the theory that all life, including humans, *evolved* from more *primitive* forms.
- The book's release came at a time when many people saw science and a belief in religion and the supernatural as being at odds with each another.
- People believed that science had become dangerous and was meddling in matters which only God had control over. This is what Jekyll does in the novel.

Context: Nature versus the supernatural

- The Victorians' increasing sense of the conflict between science and religion was the idea that humans have a dual nature.
- On the one hand, they saw the calm, rational, everyday normality of family life and employment; on the other, fantasies, nightmares, anger and violence.
- The natural versus the supernatural; good versus evil. This is the duality the novel explores.
- The notorious Jack the Ripper murders occurred in London in 1888. In the minds of the Victorians, they underlined the duality of human nature, especially as there was suspicion the murderer was well educated, or even of royal birth.

Key Terminology

- ✓ Contrast
- ✓ Emotive language
- ✓ Simile
- ✓ Metaphor
- ✓ Personification
- ✓ Religious Imagery
- ✓ Animalistic language
- ✓ Narrative viewpoints
- ✓ Characterisation
- ✓ Symbolism
- ✓ Allegory
- ✓ Repression
- ✓ Victorian
- ✓ Science
- ✓ Nature
- ✓ Duality
- ✓ Light and dark
- ✓ Context
- ✓ Primitive
- ✓ Evolution
- ✓ Society



1. Enfield, describing Hyde to Utterson, "There is something wrong with his appearance; something displeasing, something downright detestable."
2. Utterson, speaking to himself, "If he be Mr. Hyde, I shall be Mr. Seek."
3. Jekyll, reassuring Utterson, "The moment I choose, I can be rid of Mr. Hyde."
4. Lanyon's letter to Utterson, "...like a man restored from death—there stood Henry Jekyll."
5. Jekyll's letter to Utterson, describing Hyde, "...they were the expression, and bore the stamp, of lower elements in my soul."
6. Jekyll, reflecting on mankind, "All human beings... are commingled out of good and evil."

Dr Henry Jekyll

- Jekyll is a doctor and experimental scientist, he is wealthy and respectable.
- He has been a sociable person in the past, with a circle of friends including the lawyer, Utterson, and another doctor, Lanyon.
- During the course of the novel his behaviour becomes increasingly strange.
- His will states that if he disappears he leaves everything to Hyde. His oldest friend, Utterson, knows nothing of Hyde and urges Jekyll to change his will. He fears Hyde has a mysterious, perhaps criminal, hold over Jekyll, and that Hyde might murder him.
- In the last chapter we learn that Jekyll has been carrying out experiments to separate his personality (the 'evil' part embodied in Hyde) from his higher nature. Hyde eventually takes over.

Mr Edward Hyde

- He is described as small ('dwarfish') and young.
- People react with horror and fear when they see him. But there is no single thing about him that is especially unpleasant; it is as if his spirit affects people.
- He is violent, and has no sense of guilt about his crimes. In Chpt 1, Hyde assaults a young girl, and in Chpt 4 he beats an elderly gentleman to death. He has no motive for either of these attacks.
- His appearances in the novel are always brief; he often vanishes into the dark or behind a door.
- Hyde is very secretive.

Gabriel Utterson

- Utterson is an old friend of Jekyll, and his lawyer.
- He is calm and rational, just as lawyers are supposed to be.



THEMES

The duality of human nature

In Chapter 10, Jekyll writes clearly about the dual nature of human beings. He says that, as a young, educated man from a respectable family, he maintained an appearance of good behaviour at all times. But he says this was a fraud - no one suspected his true nature, which was at times extremely immoral.

Jekyll's experiments began in an attempt to separate the two sides of human nature and destroy the evil one. He discovered that the evil part of his nature was, indeed, part of himself.

Science and the unexplained

Jekyll and Lanyon are both scientists. Science traditionally explains the real world by means of experiment and observation. Scientists are usually dismissive of the *supernatural*, and Lanyon has avoided Jekyll for ten years because of his 'fanciful' and 'wrong minded' ideas and investigations.

The law and the unexplained

Utterson represents the standards of conventional society and the law. That is why Jekyll cannot confide in him, even though they are old friends. Stevenson makes Utterson come to all the wrong conclusions. The law blinds him to the truth. It is because Utterson is a lawyer that he constantly suspects Hyde is blackmailing Jekyll or has some other criminal purpose. The ultimate failure of Utterson (and therefore the law) is built into the *structure* of the novel. Chapter 8, *The Last Night*, Utterson promises the servant, Poole: "I shall be back before midnight, when we shall send for the police." But neither he nor the police (the other arm of the law) are heard of again. Their silence shows they have no power to deal with what Jekyll has unleashed.

The names Jekyll and Hyde

The two names seem to have a double meaning. The two syllables of Jekyll's name (Je and kyll) perhaps mean 'I kill' (*Je* is the French for *I*). In the last chapter, Jekyll describes how he tried to get rid of (kill) the Hyde in him. Hyde spelled as 'hide' suggests something hidden from view, or the rough skin of an animal. Jekyll is in some way trying to kill the hidden Hyde and his animal nature.

Repression of human nature

Stevenson felt there is something primitively energetic and exciting about mankind's baser nature; that the 'higher', respectable nature of social humans is **repressed** and tame.