

Intro

Author: Robert Louis Stevenson

Published: 1886

Genre: Gothic fiction, Horror, Psychological thriller

Setting: London, late 19th century

Narrative Style: Third-person limited, with key sections in first-person narrative (letters and confessions).

Historical and Literary Context

Victorian Era: **Social and Moral Values:** The Victorian era was characterized by a strict social code and an emphasis on propriety, morality, and respectability. This period also saw the rise of the middle class and increasing urbanization, which led to concerns about crime, poverty, and the darker aspects of city life.

Double Life: Many Victorians led double lives, outwardly conforming to society's moral standards while secretly indulging in behaviors that were considered immoral or scandalous. The duality of human nature, represented by Jekyll and Hyde, reflects this social hypocrisy.

Historical and Literary Context (cont)

Gothic Tradition: **Gothic Elements:** The novel draws heavily on Gothic conventions, such as dark, foreboding settings, mysterious characters, and the exploration of the darker aspects of the human psyche. It also features the theme of the supernatural, though this is presented through the lens of science rather than traditional Gothic elements like ghosts or curses.

The Urban Gothic: Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde introduces a new Gothic setting: the city. The foggy, labyrinthine streets of London serve as a backdrop for the story's exploration of the duality of man and the hidden evils lurking beneath the surface of respectable society.

Historical and Literary Context (cont)

Scientific Advances and Fears: **Evolution and Degeneration:** The publication of Charles Darwin's *On the Origin of Species* (1859) raised questions about humanity's place in the natural world and fears of degeneration, the idea that human beings could regress to a more primitive state. Hyde's brutish appearance and behavior tap into these anxieties.

Psychology and the Unconscious: The novel predates Freud's theories of the unconscious, but it reflects contemporary interest in the divided self and the idea that an individual could harbor multiple, conflicting aspects of their personality.

Plot Summary

Exposition: **Introduction to Mr. Utterson:** The novel begins with Mr. Gabriel John Utterson, a lawyer, and the primary narrator, who is concerned about the will of his friend Dr. Henry Jekyll. The will stipulates that in the event of Jekyll's death or disappearance, all his possessions should be handed over to a certain Mr. Edward Hyde.



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Plot Summary (cont)

Enfield's Tale: Mr. Richard Enfield, a distant cousin of Utterson, recounts a disturbing incident where Hyde tramples a young girl in the street and pays off her family using a cheque signed by Dr. Jekyll.

Rising Action: **Utterson Investigates:** Utterson's curiosity about Hyde grows, leading him to investigate Hyde's connection to Jekyll. He learns from Dr. Lanyon, another friend, that Jekyll has been engaging in strange experiments.

The Murder of Sir Danvers

Carew: Hyde brutally murders Sir Danvers Carew, a respected gentleman. The brutality of the crime shocks London, and Hyde disappears. This event intensifies Utterson's concern for Jekyll.

Climax: **Jekyll's Reclusion:** Jekyll becomes increasingly reclusive, causing Utterson to fear for his friend's safety. Eventually, Jekyll's butler, Mr. Poole, seeks Utterson's help, leading them to break into Jekyll's laboratory, where they find Hyde dead, dressed in Jekyll's clothes.

Falling Action: **Lanyon's Letter:** After Hyde's death, Utterson reads a letter from Dr. Lanyon, which reveals that Lanyon witnessed Hyde transform into Jekyll. The shock of this revelation led to Lanyon's death.

Plot Summary (cont)

Resolution: **Jekyll's Full Statement:** The novel concludes with Jekyll's confession, explaining how he created a potion to separate his good and evil natures, resulting in the creation of Hyde. Over time, Hyde became stronger, and Jekyll lost control, leading to the tragic events of the story.

Main Characters

Dr. Henry Jekyll: **Character Overview:** A respected scientist and doctor who struggles with the duality of his nature. Jekyll is the embodiment of the Victorian gentleman, outwardly respectable but hiding darker desires and impulses.

Role in the Plot: Jekyll's desire to separate his good and evil sides leads to the creation of Hyde. His experiment reflects the dangers of tampering with human nature and the consequences of repressing one's darker impulses.

Mr. Edward Hyde: **Character Overview:** The evil alter ego of Dr. Jekyll, Hyde is described as small, deformed, and repulsive. He represents the pure embodiment of Jekyll's darker instincts, unrestrained by societal norms or conscience.

Main Characters (cont)

Symbolism: Primal Instincts: Hyde symbolizes the primal, base instincts that civilization seeks to repress. His physical appearance and behavior reflect the Victorian fear of degeneration and the idea that beneath the veneer of civilization lies something monstrous.

Symbolism: The Double: Hyde is often seen as Jekyll's doppelgänger, representing the darker side of Jekyll's personality. The concept of the double, or doppelgänger, is a common motif in Gothic literature, symbolizing the conflict between different aspects of the self.

Mr. Gabriel John Utterson: **Character Overview:** A lawyer and Jekyll's close friend, Utterson serves as the novel's central figure and detective. He is rational, moral, and concerned for his friend's well-being, embodying the values of the Victorian gentleman.



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Main Characters (cont)

Role in the Plot: Utterson's investigation into the relationship between Jekyll and Hyde drives the narrative. His logical approach contrasts with the supernatural elements of the story, grounding the narrative in reality while also highlighting the limits of reason.

Dr. Hastie Lanyon: **Character Overview:** A former friend and colleague of Dr. Jekyll, Lanyon is a rational scientist who is horrified by Jekyll's experiments. He represents the scientific community's rejection of Jekyll's unorthodox methods.

Role in the Plot: Lanyon's role is pivotal in revealing the truth about Jekyll and Hyde. His shock at witnessing the transformation contributes to his death, underscoring the novel's theme of the dangers of forbidden knowledge.

Mr. Richard Enfield: **Character Overview:** A distant cousin of Utterson and a minor character who introduces the mystery of Hyde through his recounting of the trampling incident. He represents the Victorian concern with reputation and the social consequences of immoral behavior.

Main Characters (cont)

Role in the Plot: Enfield's account of Hyde's violence sets the plot in motion and highlights the novel's theme of the hidden, darker side of human nature.

Poole: **Character Overview:** Dr. Jekyll's loyal butler, who plays a key role in the discovery of the truth about Jekyll and Hyde. Poole is a minor character, but his actions are crucial in the novel's climax.

Role in the Plot: Poole's concern for Jekyll's safety and his decision to seek Utterson's help lead to the discovery of Hyde's death and the unraveling of the mystery.

Major Themes

Duality of Human Nature: The central theme of the novel is the duality of human nature. Stevenson explores the idea that every individual has both good and evil aspects, and that these aspects are in constant conflict. Jekyll's experiment to separate these two natures results in the creation of Hyde, who represents the unchecked, amoral side of his personality.

Major Themes (cont)

The Repression of Sinful Desires: The novel reflects Victorian concerns about the repression of sinful or immoral desires. Jekyll's transformation into Hyde can be seen as an allegory for the dangers of repressing one's darker impulses. Hyde acts out Jekyll's repressed desires without regard for societal norms, highlighting the consequences of such repression.

The Limits of Scientific Experimentation: Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde questions the ethical limits of scientific experimentation. Jekyll's use of science to tamper with human nature leads to catastrophic results, suggesting that some aspects of humanity are not meant to be altered or controlled.

The Nature of Evil: The novel explores the nature of evil, suggesting that it is an inherent part of the human condition. Hyde is not a separate being but an extension of Jekyll, indicating that evil is not external but resides within every individual.

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Major Themes (cont)

Identity and the Self: Stevenson delves into questions of identity and the self. Jekyll and Hyde are two sides of the same person, raising questions about the nature of identity and whether an individual can truly be divided into separate selves.

Appearance vs. Reality: The novel also explores the theme of appearance versus reality. Jekyll appears to be a respectable gentleman, but beneath the surface, he harbors a dark, violent nature. Hyde's appearance is a manifestation of this inner evil, and his existence challenges the notion that outward appearances reflect inner virtue.

Narrative Structure and Style

Multiple Perspectives: The novel is structured as a series of narratives, including third-person descriptions and first-person accounts (letters and confessions). This structure allows Stevenson to present different perspectives on the events and to gradually reveal the truth about Jekyll and Hyde.

Narrative Structure and Style (cont)

Use of Mystery and Suspense: Stevenson uses elements of mystery and suspense to engage the reader and build tension. The identity of Hyde and his connection to Jekyll are slowly revealed, creating a sense of anticipation and dread.

Gothic Elements: The novel's style is heavily influenced by the Gothic tradition, with its dark, foggy setting, themes of horror and the supernatural, and focus on the psychological and moral dilemmas of the characters. The use of Gothic imagery enhances the novel's exploration of the duality of human nature and the hidden evils within.

Symbolism: The Fog: The persistent fog in the novel symbolizes the moral ambiguity and obscured truths that pervade the story. It represents the confusion and lack of clarity surrounding Jekyll's actions and Hyde's true nature.

Hyde's Appearance: Hyde's physical deformity symbolizes the moral deformity that he embodies. His ugliness reflects the corruption of Jekyll's soul and the evil that lies within.

Reception and Legacy

Initial Reception: Upon its release, Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde was an immediate success, both critically and commercially. It was praised for its originality and its exploration of complex psychological and moral issues. The novel tapped into contemporary anxieties about science, morality, and identity, resonating with readers of the time.

Influence on Literature and Culture: The novel has had a lasting impact on literature and popular culture, with the character of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde becoming iconic. The story has been adapted into numerous films, plays, and other media, often interpreted as a commentary on the duality of human nature and the dangers of repression.

The concept of "Jekyll and Hyde" has entered the English language as a term to describe a person with a dual personality, one aspect of which is good and the other evil.



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Reception and Legacy (cont)

Psychological and Moral Interpretations: The novel has been the subject of extensive analysis, particularly in the fields of psychology and moral philosophy. It is often read as an exploration of the divided self and the struggle between the conscious and unconscious mind. Some interpretations focus on the novel as a critique of Victorian hypocrisy and the dangers of repressing one's true nature.

Enduring Relevance: The themes of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde remain relevant today, particularly in discussions about identity, the nature of evil, and the ethical implications of scientific experimentation. The novel's exploration of the darker aspects of the human psyche continues to resonate with modern readers and scholars.

Conclusion

Summary: Robert Louis Stevenson's *Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* is a powerful exploration of the duality of human nature and the dangers of repressing one's darker impulses. Through its Gothic elements, complex characters, and psychological depth, the novel offers a profound commentary on the moral and ethical dilemmas of its time, many of which remain relevant today.



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