

## Themes

### 1) The Duality of Human Nature

Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde centres upon a conception of humanity as dual in nature, although the theme does not emerge fully until the last chapter, when the complete story of the Jekyll-Hyde relationship is revealed. Therefore, we confront the theory of a dual human nature explicitly only after having witnessed all of the events of the novel, including Hyde's crimes and his ultimate eclipsing of Jekyll. The text not only suggests the duality of human nature as its central theme but forces us to ponder the properties of this duality and to consider each of the novel's episodes as we weigh various theories.

The first chapter begins with a description of Mr. Utterson, "Mr. Utterson, the lawyer was a man of a rugged countenance that was never lighted by a smile; cold, scanty and embarrassed in discourse; backward in sentiment; lean, long dusty, dreary and yet somehow lovable." The first sentence of the entire book portrays this theme by describing Utterson as cold yet friendly. This, in itself, is a contradiction of duality. Also, Mr. Hyde's first appearance to the public is a quiet, unknown man who is rarely seen or heard of. Later, Mr. Hyde tramples a girl with no remorse for his actions and just keeps trudging along. The theme of the duality of human nature is also shown in the bystanders or the crime. A group of upstanding, moral citizens is instantly turned into an angry, hateful, almost murderous mob. The attending doctor is specifically described in this scene, "He was the usual cut and dry apothecary, of no particular age and colour, with a strong Edinburgh accent, and about as emotional as a bagpipe. Well, sir, he was like the rest of us; every time he looked at my prisoner, I saw that Sawbones turn sick and white with desire to kill him." This shows the immediate change that occurs in normal, calm citizens that turn them into murderous animals. The look on their faces, when the citizens witness this act of murder, turns incredulous and infuriated.

Duality of human nature is portrayed through Jekyll's character. His house, which represents him, is described as having a "great air of wealth and comfort." However, it is also observed as "plunged in darkness." This relates to Jekyll's duality because like the door, his character fluctuates. At times, he is the wealthy Jekyll and at other times, he is the dark and evil Hyde.

All of chapter 5, *Incident of the Letter*, is linked to this theme. Mr. Utterson is an ignorant person when it comes to the city he lives in and the duality of human nature: he cares so much about saving Dr. Jekyll's reputation that he cannot see the truth in which Jekyll is really Mr. Hyde even after the clerk, Mr. Guest, declared that the handwriting of the letters are the same. Duality of human nature is the theme of this chapter. The handwriting from the letters written by Jekyll and Hyde are

good examples of how within one person, two handwritings can come about, furthermore that one person can have to very different parts of themselves. In Chapter 5, the theme, duality of human nature, is portrayed. Dr. Jekyll does not want to have anything to do with Mr. Hyde anymore. He hands Mr. Utterson a letter that is supposed to be delivered to the post. Dr. Jekyll actually has two personalities: Mr. Utterson knows one side of his personality but does not know the other side.

Dr. Jekyll wanted to find a solution where he could fix his "split nature", thus giving reason for making the potion. This theme relates to our lives because every human has somewhat of a split nature: nobody is good all the time, since we all do little bad things, and "hide" our bad side. This is explored in the story when Jekyll tries to "hide" Mr. Hyde. He does not want Mr. Hyde to be seen because of all the murders he has done.

Jekyll asserts that "man is not truly one, but truly two," and he imagines the human soul as the battleground for an "angel" and a "fiend," each struggling for mastery. But his potion, which he hoped would separate and purify each element, succeeds only in bringing the dark side into being—Hyde emerges, but he has no angelic counterpart. Once unleashed, Hyde slowly takes over, until Jekyll ceases to exist. If man is half angel and half fiend, one wonders what happens to the "angel" at the end of the novel...

Perhaps the angel gives way permanently to Jekyll's devil. Or perhaps Jekyll is simply mistaken: man is not "truly two" but is first and foremost the primitive creature embodied in Hyde, brought under tentative control by civilisation, law, and conscience. According to this theory, the potion simply strips away the civilised veneer, exposing man's essential nature. Certainly, the novel goes out of its way to paint Hyde as animalistic—he is hairy and ugly; he conducts himself according to instinct rather than reason; Utterson describes him as a "troglodyte," or primitive creature.

Yet if Hyde were just an animal, we would not expect him to take such delight in crime. Indeed, he seems to commit violent acts against innocents for no reason except the joy of it—something that no animal would do. He appears deliberately and happily immoral rather than amoral; he knows the moral law and basks in his breach of it. For an animalistic creature, furthermore, Hyde seems oddly at home in the urban landscape (see *Urban Terror* below). All of these observations imply that perhaps civilisation, too, has its dark side.

Ultimately, while Stevenson clearly asserts human nature as possessing two aspects, he leaves open the question of what these aspects constitute. Perhaps they consist of evil and virtue; perhaps they represent one's inner animal and the veneer that civilization has imposed. Stevenson enhances the richness of the novel by leaving us to look within ourselves to find the answers.

## **2) The Importance of Reputation**

The whole reason, as Jekyll explains in his confession at the very end of the novella, why he created this poison and desired to be two different people was to keep up his good image and hide his bad personality.

For the characters in Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, preserving one's reputation emerges as all important. The prevalence of this value system is evident in the way that upright men such as Utterson and Enfield avoid gossip at all costs; they see gossip as a great destroyer of reputation. Similarly, when Utterson suspects Jekyll first of being blackmailed and then of sheltering Hyde from the police, he does not make his suspicions known; part of being Jekyll's good friend is a willingness to keep his secrets and not ruin his respectability. The appearance of Dr. Jekyll is a very accomplished one, his accomplishments include being an "*M.D., D.C.L., LL.D., F.R.S.*" All of the abbreviations after Henry Jekyll's name show the University degrees of medicine / science / law that Dr. Jekyll possesses. This proves that Jekyll is seen as a highly intelligent, respectable, and dedicated man who would do no harm. It also shows that Dr. Jekyll is well-known and people may look up to him due to his accomplishments. The importance of reputation in the novel also reflects the importance of appearances, facades, and surfaces, which often hide a sordid underside. In many instances in the novel, Utterson, true to his Victorian society, adamantly wishes not only to preserve Jekyll's reputation but also to preserve the appearance of order and decorum, even as he senses a vile truth lurking underneath. As a Doctor, Lanyon pays the ultimate price to keep his reputation whole: he dies having kept Hyde's true identity a secret. 'A trouble shared is a trouble halved...'

## **3) Violence(especially against the innocents)**

The text repeatedly depicts Hyde as a creature of great evil and countless vices. Although the reader learns the details of only two of Hyde's crimes, the nature of both underlines his depravity. Both involve violence directed against innocents in particular. In the first instance, the victim of Hyde's violence is a small, female child whom he tramples; in the second instance, it is a gentle and much-beloved old man. The fact that Hyde injures a child and ruthlessly murders an old man, neither of which has done anything to provoke his rage or to deserve death, emphasises the extreme immorality of Jekyll's dark side unleashed. Hyde's brand of evil constitutes not just a lapse from good but an outright attack on it.

## **4) Silence**

Repeatedly in the novel, characters fail or refuse to articulate themselves. Either they seem unable to describe a horrifying perception, such as the physical characteristics of Hyde, or they deliberately

abort or avoid certain conversations. Enfield and Utterson cut off their discussion of Hyde in the first chapter out of a distaste for gossip; Utterson refuses to share his suspicions about Jekyll throughout his investigation of his client's predicament. In *The Remarkable Incident of Doctor Lanyon* the reader sees the theme of duality **and** silence. Dr. Jekyll becomes more social for a short time but then becomes even more confined in his home than before. The reader sees that Dr. Jekyll refuses to meet with any of his old friends including Mr. Utterson and gives them the 'silent treatment.' The reader also notices how Dr. Lanyon refuses to speak to Mr. Utterson about his reason for no longer wanting to meet Dr. Jekyll (see *Reputation*, above). These incidents show how duality in personality can cause a most awkward silence... In the beginning of chapter 7, *Incident at the Window*, we experience the theme of silence where Mr. Utterson and Mr. Enfield encounter Dr. Jekyll at his window: neither asks the man the burning question that they surely want an answer to! Mr. Hyde was becoming increasingly stronger than Dr. Jekyll. Just as the chapter began, the chapter ends with a common motif of silence: "But Mr. Enfield only nodded his head very seriously, and walked on once more in silence." Enfield did this because it was the proper thing to do in the Victorian era. Unusual and impure things were not wanted and were not tolerated so Enfield was basically being a model citizen. In addition, neither Jekyll in his final confession nor the third-person narrator in the rest of the novel ever provides any details of Hyde's sordid behaviour and secret vices. It is unclear whether these narrative silences owe to a failure of language or a refusal to use it.

Ultimately, the two kinds of silence in the novel indicate two different notions about the interaction of the rational and the irrational. The characters' refusals to discuss the sordid indicate an attribute of the Victorian society in which they live. This society prizes decorum and reputation above all and prefers to repress or even deny the truth if that truth threatens to upset the conventionally ordered worldview. Faced with the irrational, Victorian society and its inhabitants prefer not to acknowledge its presence and not to grant it the legitimacy of a name. Involuntary silences, on the other hand, imply something about language itself. Language is by nature rational and logical, a method by which we map and define our world. Perhaps when confronted with the irrational and the mystical, language itself simply breaks down. Perhaps something about verbal expression stands at odds with the supernatural. Interestingly, certain parts of the novel suggest that, in the clash between language and the uncanny, the uncanny need not always win. One can interpret Stevenson's reticence on the topic of Jekyll's and Hyde's crimes as a conscious choice not to defuse their chilling aura with descriptions that might only dull them.

## 5) Urban Terror

Throughout the novel, Stevenson goes out of his way to establish a link between the urban landscape of Victorian London and the dark events surrounding Hyde. He achieves his desired effect through the use of nightmarish imagery, in which dark streets twist and coil, or lie draped in ‘pea soup’ fog, forming a sinister landscape befitting the crimes that take place there. Chilling visions of the city appear in Utterson’s nightmares as well, and the text notes that:

“He would be aware of the great field of lamps of a nocturnal city. . . . The figure [of Hyde] . . . haunted the lawyer all night; and if at any time he dozed over, it was but to see it glide more stealthily through sleeping houses, or move the more swiftly . . . through wider labyrinths of lamp-lighted city, and at every street corner crush a child and leave her screaming.”

In such images, Stevenson paints Hyde as an urban creature, utterly at home in the dingy darkness of industrial Victorian London—where his countless unspeakable crimes take place, the novel suggests, without anyone knowing...



## Duality

Duality is a key theme in the novella, closely linked to the idea of good and evil. It is the Jekyll/Hyde relationship that best explores the theme of duality of man, but it is also explored throughout the novella in other ways; for example, in the way Utterson is portrayed at the very beginning and also in the contrasting natures of the lawyer and his distant cousin, Enfield. It is reflected in the structural split between first- and third- person narrations, and symbolically through the description of Jekyll's sprawling residence. The two aspects of the house (the well-presented, ornate front, symbolising Jekyll, and the dilapidated and shabby rear entrance, symbolising Hyde.)



In the box below, make more notes on the theme of duality in the novella.

## Good and evil

The theme of good and evil is closely linked with that of the duality of nature. Evil is personified throughout the novella through the character of Hyde. This is exemplified in both his physical description and in his personality and behaviours. Good, on the other hand, is shown in the novella as being generous and kind to others and is seen in several characters, including Jekyll. There is certainly more about evil in Jekyll & Hyde than there is about good, however, the good nature of the characters should not be ignored.



In the box below, make more notes on the theme of good and evil in the novella.

## Secrecy and hypocrisy

There are many times when the characters in the novella swear others to secrecy or agree not to talk about a certain topic or event ever again. The idea of secrecy is reinforced symbolically in the novella through the locking away of documents to be read later, the locking and unlocking of doors and the closing of windows. The idea of secrecy is closely linked to the theme of hypocrisy. Stevenson's work is a criticism of Victorian society at the time of his writing, as it was obsessed with the outward appearance of respectability and decorum. However, the secrets kept in this novella prove that this is not true and it's all just a front that is put up.



SECRECY IS  
WEAKNESS

In the box below, make more notes on the theme of secrecy and hypocrisy in the novella.



# The supernatural & Science

Utterson, like Lanyon, represents the rational world in which everything can be explained. Jekyll, on the other hand, explores forces that are outside of the rational world. The novella certainly raises questions about the supernatural as it deals with pseudo-science and the view that perhaps science can be stretched further than we think it can. This theme is closely linked to the theme of SCIENCE and how it is presented in the novel. Lanyon represents the more rational side of science whereas Jekyll appears to challenge this and is more mystic. This is seen throughout the novella in their uses of language to describe and explain science.



In the box below, make more detailed notes on the theme of the supernatural and science in the novella.

# Appearance V Reality

Nothing is what it seems in this novella and so another theme is the idea of appearance and reality. Is what we see in the novella real, or is it just that we are fooled by what we are seeing? This is a huge question, particularly in regards to Jekyll and Hyde.

It's also worth considering how Stevenson narrates the novel in such a way that we are forced to believe that events are real, even if logic suggests that they aren't.



In the box below, make more detailed notes on the theme of appearance V reality in the novella.