

# Strange case of dr jekyll and mr hyde



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## Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde — Wide Reading Assignment Term 3

The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde, or Jekyll and Hyde for short, is a mystifying short horror story written by Robert Louis Stevenson and set in Victorian England. It encounters the mystery of Henry Jekyll and Edward Hyde through the eyes of mild-mannered lawyer, Mr Utterson. Stevenson has skilfully characterised Jekyll, Hyde and Mr Utterson, who is the ultimate Victorian, into a complex and baffling plot based upon a true story. Its age defying themes include science vs. supernatural, the effects of society on the individual and the Jekyll/Hyde dual personality. Henry Jekyll is a medical doctor that undertakes experiments in an attempt to purify his good side from his bad side. Thus he transforms into the “ detestable” Edward Hyde. Hyde, a man giving “ a strong sense of deformity”, is Jekyll’s alter ego; one that hides behind Jekyll’s polite façade and whose doubtful relationship with Jekyll stands out in a society where there are distinct borders between social classes. At the end of the story, Hyde commits suicide, something that Jekyll thought “ impossible”. This makes his character more believable as it is doubtful that any urban-dwelling man could possibly be as evil as Hyde in the beginning of the story. The novella is set in the “ draughty streets of London” in Victorian times, during the peak of Western civilisation. Within the text, the setting has no value other than to help the audience visualise the storyline. Sub textually; the setting is what pushes Jekyll to want to become another man free of “ social burden”. His inability to do some things that may be considered “ preposterous” by his peers results in him attempting to break out of character and become a whole new person; Hyde. Although the setting does not directly change the plot, it informs the characters’ choices and actions throughout the story where a different

setting would have resulted in a different outcome. The storyline begins when Mr Utterson is out walking with an old friend and they pass a building outside which his associate had once experienced a “peculiar event”. A certain Mr Hyde tramples a girl and the check he gives is signed by Utterson’s good friend Henry Jekyll, which they both find quite suspicious. Utterson’s suspicions are further aroused when he discovers that Hyde is listed as Jekyll’s heir. The remainder of the story is spent trying to figure out why “Jekyll and Hyde are associated” in such a way. The plot is very convincing and became the world’s pioneer into horror, eventually followed by Bram Stoker’s *Dracula*, the book that formally introduced the world to the genre of horror. This short story could best be described as a gothic horror book. This “shilling thriller” contains traits from the Gothic genre such as those in Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* as well as some aspects of horror. It does a fair job of following the genre’s rules by having the setting and half of the plot abide by gothic rules and the other half of the plot and the characters abide horror rules. It cannot be directly compared with another book due to its uniqueness but Hyde can be viewed as somewhat of a hybrid between *Dracula* and *Frankenstein*, taking characteristics from both supernatural creatures. This novella investigates and develops various timeless themes such as the supernatural vs. scientific, the effects of society, human nature and the idea of a dual personality. In order to make the transformation from Jekyll to Hyde more believable and suspend the disbelief, Stevenson portrays Utterson as a very serious man who does not jump to supernatural conclusions and remains clueless until he reads Jekyll’s letter at the very end of the story. Another logical man, Dr Lanyon, also receives a shock from watching the transformation occur and knows “I (Dr

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Lanyon) shall never recover", a result of experiencing the supernatural and living in a society that demands evidence to all scientific claims. Stevenson develops the effects of society on the individual by depicting the society of 19th century Victorian England as having a vital impact on each of the characters' reactions in the story. Society has both beneficial and debilitating effects on its civilians and, in this case, the benefits are the community's support for the girl trampled by Hyde and the outrage at Sir Danvers Carew's murder, also committed by Hyde. Some of the negative effects of Victorian society include Enfield and Utterson having "retracted from common society" and Dr Jekyll's need to be another person, something that is hard-wired into every human being. Though Hyde starts out as a latent force within Jekyll, he eventually breaks free from Jekyll and begins to subvert him. This holds implications for human nature as Hyde is continuously represented as a "troglodyte", or primitive creature, while he may in fact be the authentic nature of man, repressed by the weight of civilisation, conscience and societal laws. Through this, Stevenson suggests that the primitive man remains powerful enough within us to devour those who, like Jekyll, foolishly unleash it. The idea of each man having a dual personality that societal pressure holds back is investigated by Stevenson through Jekyll's all-encompassing urge to free the Hyde within him. Stevenson develops the groundwork for this theme by writing about Hyde's primitive and animalistic nature and Jekyll, who has been tamed and civilised by the laws of society. It can be assumed from this that Jekyll's potion reduced his being to its most basic form; evil. The investigation of how potent the primitive creature within man is what makes this tale so timelessly classic. The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde is a moderately engaging book.

The intended audience must plunge deeper into the sub textual storyline to truly find this book engaging and understand its true meaning. Overall, reading this book is an enjoyable experience for those who can appreciate it with the only negative aspect being the complexity of the language used at the time it was written. In conclusion, though the language is very formal and often makes references that are difficult to understand, the mysterious plot in a classic setting with complex characters make this book a journey to be remembered. By Simran Rajpal 8. 3