

Dr jekyll and mr hyde  
– how does  
stevenson create an  
atmosphere of  
tension and bu...

[Literature](#), [Novel](#)



The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde has all the characteristics of a Gothic Horror text. For example, most of the settings are dark and mysterious, women play a very small part in the text and there is a beast, Hyde. In Frankenstein and Dracula, two Gothic horror texts, there is also a beast. In Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde, lives are deeply affected. The little girl is trampled and badly injured, Sir Danvers Carew is murdered, the maid who saw the murder was deeply horrified, the shock on Dr Lanyon was too much for him and he took to his bed and died.

Stevenson was brought up strictly and taught to behave properly. Victorian children had to be seen and not heard and boys had to be brave and manly. Stevenson often wondered about the evil side of a man. He grew up feeling there was a clear division between good and evil, very aware of the powers to destroy, if given the chance. He wondered what it would be like to be pure evil and so he created Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde.

The tension and suspense in the novel begins with the title, The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde. It makes you want to know what the strange case was and how it affected the characters.

Mr Utterson is the narrator of the story. He was a lawyer and friends with Jekyll and Lanyon when they were students. He was an upright man and Jekyll trusted him. So much so, that Jekyll gave him his will to look after. Utterson agreed to this, but he found the contents to be unusual. The will didn't make any sense to Utterson, who was a lawyer, and he decided to try and solve the mystery. In Gothic texts there is nearly always a problem that has to be solved.

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One day, Utterson was out walking with his distant cousin Mr Enfield, when they passed a door. The door was in a "sinister block of buildings" and contrasted to the neighboring doors which were clean and had well polished brasses. This strange door was "equipped with neither bell or knocker and was blistered and distained." It looked like it had been rejected and "no one had appeared to drive away the random visitors or repair their ravages" The "visitors" being tramps and schoolboys who played on the doorstep and tested their knives on the stone. The door creates an atmosphere of tension. It is linked to Gothic horror genre as veils and masks.

The door hides something. This door opened into the dissecting room of Jekyll's house. Enfield tells Utterson about a terrible incident when a man named Hyde trampled calmly over a child's body and "left her screaming on the ground". This information startled Utterson, and he became interested in the relationship that Jekyll had with Hyde. Especially when Enfield tells him that this monster, who was the man named in Jekyll's will, had a key to the door! After the incident of the door, Utterson had a nightmare and declared that he wanted to find out who Hyde was ... "If he be Mr Hyde, I shall be Mr Seek."

A year later there was a terrible incident. A maid who was looking out of her bedroom window and was "romantically given... and fell into a dream of musing." witnessed an aged and beautiful gentleman come down the lane and meet another man. The elderly man had bowed, and "accosted the other with a pretty manner of politeness" but Hyde, as the maid recognized him as, attacked him with "ape like fury". The horror of these sights and

sounds, caused the maid to faint. The contrast between the atmosphere and settings and the murder show great tension and suspense here.

The "ape like" description of Hyde, is closely linked to Gothic horror genre. Many texts normally have an animalistic person with some sort of deformity that makes them different and disliked by society. Hyde was smaller than Jekyll and so when Jekyll changed into Hyde, the clothes on him were too big. Jekyll says he felt happier in his new body. Hyde was younger than Jekyll and "evil was written broadly and plainly on the face". He had a "husky, whispering and somewhat broken voice".

And his skin was "lean, corded, knuckly, of dusky pallor and thickly shaded with a swart of hair." He also had a desire to do bad things... "I was conscience of a heady recklessness." "at the first breath of this new life, to be more wicked, tenfold more wicked, sold a slave to my original evil." In gothic texts, there is nearly always a reference to Satan and the devil. Red and black are used to express anger as well as symbolize the devil. The colours are used constantly to express the sheer fury and rage of Hyde. "black searing coolness" and "in red hot."

Utterton was becoming so obsessed in the whole matter that he decided to go and see Dr Jekyll, "it was late afternoon when Utterton found his way to Dr Jekyll's door." He was let in by Poole and led to the dissecting room, which was cluttered, dusty and dingy. Then Utterton saw Jekyll sitting in the cabinet, next to the fire "looking deadly sick". He held "out a cold hand and bade him welcome in a changed voice". When Utterton mentions Hyde,

Jekyll “seemed seized by a qualm of faintness” and became “feverish” in manner. Jekyll seemed to want nothing to do with Hyde as if he was afraid of something. Jekyll handed Utterson a letter that he said he received from Hyde in which Hyde promised not to bother Jekyll again. Utterson noticed that it was written “in an odd upright hand, and signed ‘Edward Hyde’”. The tension in this chapter builds up very quickly. Letters are also typical to Gothic horror genre. They are a type of mask or veil.

In chapter 6, Lanyon was very ill and “his death-warrant written legibly upon his face.” He told Utterson that he was about to die and that he knew things he shouldn’t and that he didn’t really want to know them. He handed Utterson a letter which should not be opened until the death or disappearance of Henry Jekyll. He didn’t want to talk about Dr Jekyll and told Utterson that he regards Jekyll as good as “dead”.

Utterson was confused and wrote a letter to Jekyll asking the “cause of his unhappy break with Lanyon” and “his exclusion from the house”. In the reply Jekyll quotes “if I am the chief of sinners, I am the chief of sufferers also.” Here there is a meaning behind it that

Jekyll has not told Utterson, but obviously feels ashamed of. “I have brought on myself a punishment and a danger that I cannot name.”

Mr Enfield and Mr Utterson walked past Jekylls house on their Sunday walk, and saw him sitting there by the window “like some disconsolate prisoner.”. Utterson looks up and asks whether Jekyll is well and while talking to Jekyll when Jekyll was suddenly “succeeded by an expression of such abject terror

and despair” that it “froze the very blood of the two gentlemen below”.

After the window was “instantly thrust down” the two men left in silence and in shock.

When “Utterson was sitting by the fireside one evening after dinner” he was very surprised by a visit from a frightened Poole who had left his master to visit Utterson. Utterson knew something was wrong at once. Poole was worried about Jekyll who had hidden himself in the cabinet. On the way to Jekyll’s house, it “was a wild, cold, seasonable night of March”. The description of the weather is typical to Gothic horror genre and creates an atmosphere of tension for the reader. There are normally dark atmospheres when something bad is going to happen. Rarely are there times when the sun was shining during a murder.

“Poole, who kept all the way a pace or two ahead, now pulled up in the middle of the pavement, and in spite of the biting weather, took off his hat and mopped his brow with a red pocket-handkerchief.” Stevenson wrote that the sweat was not caused by the effort but by Poole’s mental agony. Once in the house, which was guarded by one of the servants and locked on a chain, Utterson noticed the servants, “men and women”, were all huddled together “about the hearth” the reason, as Poole told Utterson... “they are all afraid.”. One women servant was hysterical and the cook cried out and “ran forward as if to take” Utterson in her arms. These female characters are typical of Gothic horror genre, who tend to be weak and insignificant.

Poole informed Utterson of Jekyll's notes desperately wanting a special drug. "This drug is wanted bitter bad." Though the reason wasn't given. Gothic horror genre frequently has information without reason. Towards the end gothic texts, there are pieces of puzzle that need one more piece to make the picture clear.

All this so far has helped create an atmosphere of tension. The mysterious nature of Jekyll, the wicked actions of Hyde and now the obsession of Utterson to do what ever he can to find out the relationship of Jekyll and Hyde.

Poole and Utterson decided to break down the door of the cabinet. The door was strong and would not give easily. There is a link here to masks and veils of Gothic horror genre. The door was hiding something. On the fifth blow "the wreck of the door fell inwards on the carpet". As they looked in they notice the comfortable scene of the cabinet. Here there is a strong contrast between the cosy setting and the body of Hyde "sorely contorted and still twitching" on the floor. There was no sign of Jekyll but on the table, there was a letter addressed to Mr Utterson. Utterson, confused by the note went home and opened the letter that Dr Lanyon had given to him. He had told Utterson that the letter should not be opened until the death or disappearance of Henry Jekyll. Reading through the letter Utterson finally finds out who Hyde really was... Dr Jekyll

Gothic genre normally has an element of the supernatural or magic. In this book there was something like a magic potion used by Jekyll to become

Hyde. Jekyll finds out that he cannot remake the mixture again, due to a small impurity in the first batch. Unable to stop himself from turning into the monster, Hyde, he killed himself.

Horrific acts are a recurring theme throughout the text. In Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde, Hyde is extremely violent and tramples on the little girl and murders Sir Danvers Carew only to satisfy his thirst for violence. Violence and irrational behavior are common in Gothic texts.

Another theme in Gothic horror texts are the 'anti-heroes'. They often appeal and repulse the reader at the same time. The reader may sympathise as the 'anti-hero' struggles with his conflicts. In the case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde, we may feel sorry for Jekyll as he struggles with his desire to be Hyde but at the same time we feel angry at him for making the potion and taking it in the first place.

Only Lanyon and Jekyll knew the secret about Mr Hyde, and the truth killed them both...eventually. Jekyll excluded himself from society but he was still unable to stop Hyde's personality from dominating himself. Jekyll didn't have any more mixture to switch personalities, so he had to destroy both in order to destroy Hyde.

In conclusion, The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde is a very effective Gothic horror novel. There is a lot of suspense and tension in it so that the reader was always trying to guess the outcome. Stevenson's narrator is an unsuspecting lawyer, who has to get the answer to the mystery and he uses the elements of Gothic horror genre to create a more gripping atmosphere of



tension and suspense. He uses settings and atmosphere, veils and masks, anti-heroes, supernatural elements, violent and horrific acts to make us ask the question... Who is Hyde?