

What view of human nature does Stevenson present in the novel *The Strange Case of...*

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



The title chosen by the author, Robert Louis Stevenson is, 'The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde'. From the title the reader can predict that the novel is a form of horror fantasy. The word 'Case' in the title suggests either a possible police investigation, some type of medical study or law. Also the name, 'Dr. Jekyll', inflicts upon the reader that Jekyll is of importance and authority. In the novel both perceptions from the title are true. However, the title shows no indication that 'Jekyll and Hyde' are two characters within one person. The book is based on human nature and concentrates on the mixture of good and evil in people. In the Cambridge dictionary the definition for the word, 'human nature' is, 'The natural ways of behaving that most people share'. It also states that 'You can't change human nature'.

Robert Louis Stevenson was born in 1850 and died in 1894 at the early age of 44. His birthplace was on the outskirts of Edinburgh's New Town.

Stevenson is best remembered nowadays for his repeating theme of the duality of human nature. 'Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde' was one of his most successful novels and was written in 1885, nine years before his death. For that reason, Stevenson is mainly remembered for using human nature in his novels because this is the leading theme in 'Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde'. The novel is a classic mystery and involves the dual nature of man and of society. Unfortunately, Stevenson passed away at the pinnacle of his writing career from a lung condition he had suffered from throughout his life. This condition was troubled by the cold, wet climates he had grown up in when living in Scotland.

'The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde' was written in the 19th Century, when Gothic Literature was at its best. This novel includes some of the main themes of a Gothic novel such as the supernatural; horror; terror; mystery and secrecy. This novel explores the consequences of following your desires such as challenging rules. For example, Dr. Jekyll was using his skills as a Doctor and his knowledge to create the potion that changed him from being the respectable Dr. Jekyll into the murderer, Mr. Hyde.

It has been suggested that the dismal streets and dark alleys in the novel are more reminiscent of Old Town Edinburgh, near where Stevenson was brought up, than they are of London, where the story is set in the year 1885 and 1886. Stevenson wrote the novel in the Victorian period. He probably chose to set his novel in London because at the time this was the most important city where all classes of society lived. Therefore this enabled Stevenson to create Hyde and Jekyll living in two dissimilar societies such as the poor, Soho area and the wealthy, respectable area. Stevenson structures the novel relating it to the Victorian Home. The back door used by Hyde to enter the house could represent the entrance of evil. Crime and evilness in general is committed in the poor district, which is where Mr. Hyde trampled over a girl and killed Sir Danvers Carew.

The novel is set as a contrast between interior and exterior. In the exterior, crimes and social meetings occur and in the interior, hidden away are secret laboratories and elegant rooms, this duality represents the social theme. The interior and exterior can relate to humans, as the interior represents the part

people choose not to show and the exterior is what people do decide to show of their personalities. Secrecy is another theme Stevenson uses. All around England, Stevenson saw that although on the outside most noblemen seemed to be fine and upstanding citizens, inside they hid dark secrets. Many critics have suggested that 'Jekyll and Hyde' was a confession by Stevenson of his own dark nature.

I think the two areas reflect Jekyll and Hyde's different personalities. Jekyll is the main character that reflects good in people because he has a respectable occupation, he is wealthy, he had a privileged upbringing, a high reputation, reserved and has high ambitions. He lives in an upper class area, where Doctors and Lawyers amongst other respectable people live. The part of London in which Hyde lives is called Soho and is described as a 'dark', 'dingy' and 'dismal' district.

Mr Hyde is poor and people in his community are conveyed as 'Slatternly passengers'. Stevenson may have chosen Soho for Hyde to live because it's a secretive place, which is ideal for someone who doesn't want to be noticed. I believe that every person has good and evil inside them, but people who decide to show their evil side are portrayed as 'bad people', when actually what they are showing is in others who decide not to show it and therefore are respected in the community as a 'good person.' Throughout the novel there is a continuous battle between the two forces and the two characters.

I think Mr Enfield appears to be a judgmental character, because when describing Mr Hyde he says,

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' There is something wrong with his appearance; something displeasing, something downright detestable. I never saw a man I so disliked...'

From the quote Mr Enfield sounds very critical of Mr Hyde especially since he doesn't even know Hyde as a person. He may dislike him because he is of a lower class and because he doesn't generally surround himself with people from the Soho area and therefore doesn't feel he can trust him. However, I think Mr Hyde's appearance is very unusual because the witness of the Sir Danvers murder also commented on his strange appearance. He is said to be, ' small' and ' deformed in some way'.

Mr Utterson seems very dedicated to his job as a lawyer. I think this because after Mr Enfield had told him the story of the door he went home and read Dr. Jekyll's will. He was puzzled by the will as it stated that if Jekyll were to die or disappear '...for any period exceeding three calendar months' then all Jekyll's possessions would be passed on to Hyde. Mr Utterson was confused and therefore went looking for Hyde and visited an old friend of his and Jekyll's, Dr. Lanyon, for an explanation. That night Mr Utterson relived the story in his dream, which shows how determined he was to get some answers and because he is a lawyer it's in his nature to investigate.

I think Stevenson felt while writing the novel that everyone has a split personality and that we all have evil and good inside us. I think he also thought that different people choose to show different sides of their personality and that is why everyone in the world is different. He is shown his view on human nature through the characters, Jekyll and Hyde.

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Stevenson suggests in the novel that evil is potentially more powerful than good. He suggests this by writing at the end of the novel that Hyde overpowers Jekyll and Jekyll then commits suicide. I think Stevenson is trying to say that if you give evil an inch, it will take a mile. Meaning that if you decide to show your evil inner side like Jekyll did through Hyde, then evil will take advantage and overpower you.