

Henry jekyll is a
victim of his time and
therefore deserves
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'The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde' was written by Robert Louis Stevenson during the Victorian era. This is significant because during this period, society was very different from today's society. During the Victorian there were strict moral codes to which men of the upper classes were expected to achieve. I will discuss if Jekyll was a victim of the harsh Victorian society and hence whether he deserves our sympathy.

I think that in some ways Jekyll was a victim of his society as Jekyll was caged by his upbringing and tortured by feelings which were forbidden. The conflicting sides of his personality are clear when he refers to, 'the perennial war among my members'. After keeping these feelings for so long inside him Jekyll must have become desperate, so we can understand why he made the potion and deserves our sympathy.

As I stated in my introduction, the society Jekyll lived in was very rigid and he had lots of pressure on him to accomplish great things in life. Some people would say that Jekyll did his experiment in the interest of science and that he was pushed by society's expectations to make groundbreaking discoveries; he claims, after all, that 'the temptation of a discovery so singular and profound, at last overcame the suggestions of alarm'. Jekyll was obviously keen to keep up with the advances in science which were so prevalent in the Victorian era.

Also, had the experiment gone slightly differently, Jekyll may have created a personality that was one hundred percent good; this makes us think that it was not all his fault. Furthermore whilst making his discovery Jekyll lost everything he had; he lost his friends and family and if this was in the

interest of science then we should feel some sympathy for the man.

Withdrawing from society, few really cared about him or noticed him. One could say that it was his fault because he pushed them away, but maybe he was afraid he would lose his friends forever if he told them about his freak discovery. This seems particularly likely when one considers the death of Dr Lanyon.

Another incident in which Jekyll felt guilty for Hyde's actions was the Carew murder case. The day after the incident, when Utterson visited Jekyll, he was 'looking deadly sick.' Could this mean that Jekyll was guilty about Carew? Jekyll says after the murder, 'the horror of my other self', making the reader think that Jekyll was genuinely disgusted by Hyde. Jekyll can also be seen as a victim of Hyde. After the murder Jekyll tries to stop changing into Hyde, but he can't.

When Jekyll does this Hyde becomes angry and defaces his books and abuses Jekyll. Jekyll later goes on to say, 'I was punished'. Jekyll is addicted to being Hyde and therefore deserves some sympathy and when he has a break from Hyde he becomes stronger and breaks out 'roaring'. This suggests that the repression experienced by Jekyll when trying to adhere to moral codes causes him to become even more desperate to destroy the 'prison house of my disposition' and to let Hyde free. Society can therefore be blamed for Jekyll's destruction.

On the other hand, Jekyll can be seen as the victimiser rather than the victim. Ever since his childhood he desired the separation to take place.

Other men in this era would have liked to do the same, but they managed to

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repress their feelings or found an outlet for themselves secretly at places such as brothels, whereas he doesn't. Jekyll lets himself be tempted. Jekyll also had chances to be rid of Hyde, 'the fatal crossroads', Stevenson's image here emphasizes the choice that Jekyll makes. Having become Hyde, Jekyll brags about the feeling of being Hyde, saying he felt 'Younger, lighter, happier in body'. Jekyll also knew how evil Hyde was after becoming him the first time; 'I knew myself, at the first breath of this new life, to be more wicked, ten fold more wicked, sold a slave to my own evil'.

However, Jekyll still carries on and this makes us feel little or no sympathy for him. Jekyll admits that he profits from being Hyde, because Jekyll could do bad things as Hyde and remain innocent as Jekyll. This makes us feel that Jekyll is truly selfish and self-centered, as the quotation 'My evil kept awake by ambition'; emphasises. Furthermore, Jekyll doesn't take full responsibility for Hyde claiming, 'It was Hyde after all, and Hyde alone that was guilty.' This makes the reader feel little sympathy for Jekyll as he refuses to accept any responsibility for Hyde's actions.

There are also some parts of this story where I feel that Jekyll partially deserves sympathy. For example, Jekyll says 'I bind my honour to you that I am done with him in this world. It is all at an end,' 'he will never more be heard of.' This is a change in tone from when he was very laid back about Hyde; however, he still has the arrogance to be sure that he can 'be rid of him.' This makes us feel no sympathy for Jekyll, as he is so confident that he can get rid of Hyde. We find out later that he cannot. However, we may feel a small amount of sympathy when he says he has 'lost confidence in

(himself)', as his loss in confidence was brought about by Hyde, and so he is suffering to some extent. In using Hyde, Jekyll ' was thinking of his own character, which this hateful business has rather exposed.'

This is him thinking about his loss of reputation, showing, once again, his selfishness. Jekyll does, however, show remorse. ' I have had a lesson - O God, Utterson, what a lesson I have had!' We cannot, however, be sure whether this remorse is for the girl and Carew, or for the loss of his reputation. If it was to be the first, then we could feel sympathy for him, however, the latter would further emphasise his selfishness. Jekyll clearly wants sympathy, and uses emotive vocabulary to draw on Utterson's sympathy. For instance, he says ' I have brought on myself a punishment and a danger that I cannot name. If I am the chief of sinners, I am the chief of sufferers also.' In this statement by Jekyll, he admits that he has done something wrong, but asserts that he has also been a victim of something. He is therefore trying to shift the blame onto something else, which may or may not convince the reader.

In conclusion, the expectations of society and the traumatic situations that Jekyll has suffered make us feel some sympathy for him. Jekyll may be guilty but he makes his crimes seem beyond his control at times. However, Jekyll consciously took the evil path that night when ' he had come to the fatal crossroads'. This makes me feel no sympathy for Jekyll and makes me feel that his problems were of his own doing.