Your notes

GCSE English Literature: revision notes

# The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde

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## Plot

- Mr Utterson, a lawyer, hears from his distant relative Mr Enfield how a sinister man, Mr Hyde, trampled a young girl and paid her family with a cheque signed by the respectable Dr Jekyll.
- Utterson is worried by Jekyll's will, which leaves everything to Hyde. Later, Hyde brutally murders Sir Danvers Carew, an MP, with a cane. Jekyll claims Hyde is gone for good.
- Dr Lanyon sees something terrible, falls ill and dies, leaving a letter to be opened after Jekyll's death.
- Jekyll's butler, Poole, fetches Utterson. They break into Jekyll's laboratory and find Hyde dead, apparently by suicide, wearing Jekyll's clothes.
- Lanyon's letter reveals he saw Hyde drink a potion and turn into Jekyll. Jekyll's 'Full Statement' explains that he made a potion to separate his good and evil sides, but Hyde grew stronger, until Jekyll began turning into Hyde without the potion.

## Themes

- The **duality** of human nature, good and evil, science and religion, **reputation** and secrecy, violence, and **repression**.

## Context

- Published in 1886. Respectable Victorian gentlemen were expected to control their desires and protect their **reputations**, but many led hidden lives.
- Darwin's theory of evolution (1859) led some people to fear that humans could 'degenerate' into more primitive, ape-like forms. Rapid scientific progress worried many religious people.

- London had a respectable West End and a poor, dangerous East End. Stevenson's fog-bound London reflects secrecy and confusion.

## Key quotations

- 'Like Satan' and 'trampled calmly over the child's body' (Enfield about Hyde).
- 'If ever I read Satan's signature upon a face' and 'troglodytic' (Utterson about Hyde). 'Ape-like fury' (the account of the Carew murder).
- 'Man is not truly one, but truly two' and 'the thorough and primitive **duality** of man' (Jekyll).

## How to get top marks

- Have a big idea about **duality**: Stevenson suggests that the danger isn't a monster, but what respectable men hide behind closed doors.
- Use the setting as evidence: fog, doors and locked rooms all keep secrets, just as the Victorian gentlemen do.
- Mention how the **novella** holds back the truth until its last chapters. That's a point about structure, which many students miss.

## Key terms

| | |
|---|---|
| **Duality** | Having two sides, such as good and evil. |
| **Gothic** | A style of fiction with mystery, horror and dark settings. |
| **Novella** | A short novel. |
| **Repression** | Holding back feelings or desires. |
| **Reputation** | The way other people see someone. |
| **Degeneration** | The idea that humans could slide back into a more primitive form. |
| **Narrator** | The person who tells a story. |

## Quick questions

Cover the answers and test yourself: remembering is what makes it stick.

1. Who is Mr Utterson?
2. What does Hyde do in Enfield's story?
3. Whom does Hyde murder?
4. What does Jekyll's will say?
5. Why does Dr Lanyon fall ill and die?
6. What does Jekyll's potion do?
7. What is duality?
8. Why were Victorian gentlemen so concerned about their reputations?

Your notes

### Answers

1. A lawyer and Jekyll's friend
2. Tramples a young girl
3. Sir Danvers Carew
4. Everything goes to Hyde
5. He is shocked after seeing Hyde turn into Jekyll
6. Separates his evil side into the form of Hyde
7. Having two sides, such as good and evil
8. Respectability was essential to their social status

## What to do next

**Practise 12 questions on this topic**

**Try 4 exam questions, with mark schemes**

**Read the lesson, one step at a time**

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