

The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde

by Robert Louis Stevenson · Language: EN

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Overview

The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde, published in 1886, is a Gothic novella by Robert Louis Stevenson that explores the duality of human nature. The story is told primarily through the eyes of London lawyer Gabriel John Utterson, who investigates the strange connection between his respectable friend Dr. Henry Jekyll and the repulsive, violent Edward Hyde. As Utterson uncovers the truth, he learns that Jekyll has created a potion that transforms him into Hyde, a physical embodiment of his darker impulses. The novella builds suspense through a series of mysterious events, including Hyde's brutal murder of Sir Danvers Carew, and culminates in Jekyll's full confession, revealing that he can no longer control the transformations and that Hyde is taking over.

The book is a profound psychological and moral allegory, questioning the boundaries between good and evil within a single person. It reflects Victorian anxieties about respectability, repression, and the hidden sins beneath a polished surface. The story arc moves from external mystery to internal revelation, ending with Jekyll's tragic demise as he loses himself to Hyde. The novella matters because it coined the phrase "Jekyll and Hyde" to describe a split personality and remains a foundational text in Gothic and horror literature, influencing countless adaptations and discussions about identity, addiction, and the consequences of unchecked scientific ambition.

Key Takeaways

- The novella illustrates that every person contains both good and evil, and suppressing one side can lead to dangerous consequences.
- Jekyll's experiment shows that trying to separate the two natures of a person is impossible and ultimately destructive.
- The story critiques Victorian society's obsession with reputation and the hypocrisy of maintaining a respectable facade.
- Utterson's loyalty and curiosity drive the plot, showing how friendship can lead to uncovering dark secrets.
- The transformation from Jekyll to Hyde is not just physical but also moral, as Hyde becomes increasingly powerful and uncontrollable.

- The book warns against the dangers of unchecked scientific experimentation without ethical consideration.
- The narrative structure, with multiple perspectives and documents, builds suspense and allows for a gradual revelation of the truth.
- The ending suggests that evil, once unleashed, cannot be easily contained or defeated.

Chapter Summaries

Story of the Door

Mr. Utterson, a lawyer, hears from his friend Mr. Enfield about a strange incident: a man named Hyde trampled a young girl and paid off her family with a check signed by a respectable doctor. Enfield points to a door in a building, which he says is the entrance to Hyde's quarters. Utterson, curious, begins to investigate the connection between Hyde and his client, Dr. Jekyll.

Search for Mr. Hyde

Utterson dreams of the incident and becomes obsessed with finding Hyde. He confronts Jekyll, who asks him to look after Hyde's interests if anything happens to him. Utterson tracks down Hyde, who is small, deformed, and gives off a sense of evil. Hyde agrees to the arrangement, and Utterson is left uneasy, wondering why Jekyll would associate with such a man.

Dr. Jekyll Was Quite at Ease

Utterson visits Jekyll, who is hosting a dinner party. Jekyll seems cheerful and explains that he has a great interest in Hyde and that he can drop him whenever he likes. Utterson warns him about Hyde's reputation, but Jekyll insists he can manage. Utterson leaves, still suspicious and worried about his friend's safety.

The Carew Murder Case

A servant witnesses Hyde beating Sir Danvers Carew to death with a cane. The police find a letter addressed to Utterson on the body, and Utterson identifies the murder weapon as a gift from Jekyll to Hyde. The police search Hyde's rooms but find him gone. Utterson takes the letter to Jekyll, who claims he has ended his relationship with Hyde.

Incident of the Letter

Jekyll shows Utterson a letter from Hyde, apologizing for the trouble and saying he can escape. Utterson notices the handwriting is similar to Jekyll's, and he suspects forgery. He confronts his clerk, Mr. Guest, who confirms the similarity. Utterson becomes more suspicious that Jekyll is hiding something, possibly protecting Hyde.

Remarkable Incident of Dr. Lanyon

Utterson visits Dr. Lanyon, who is gravely ill and refuses to speak of Jekyll. Lanyon says he has had a shock and that he is dying. He tells Utterson that Jekyll is the cause of his illness but will not explain further. Lanyon dies shortly after, leaving a letter for Utterson to open only after Jekyll's death or disappearance.

Incident at the Window

Utterson and Enfield are walking and pass Jekyll's house. They see Jekyll at a window, looking ill and desperate. When they call to him, his expression changes to one of terror, and he abruptly closes the window. Utterson is alarmed and decides to visit Lanyon's letter, but he respects the condition and waits.

The Last Night

Jekyll's butler, Poole, comes to Utterson in distress, saying that Jekyll has been locked in his room for days and that the voice speaking is not Jekyll's. They break into the laboratory and find the body of Hyde, dressed in Jekyll's clothes, with a suicide note. They also find a confession from Jekyll and a letter from Lanyon.

Dr. Lanyon's Narrative

Lanyon's letter recounts how Jekyll asked him to retrieve a drawer of chemicals from his laboratory and bring it to his home. Lanyon did so, and then Jekyll, in a strange state, drank a potion and transformed into Hyde before Lanyon's eyes. The shock of witnessing this supernatural event caused Lanyon's illness and eventual death.

Henry Jekyll's Full Statement of the Case

Jekyll's confession explains that he had long felt a duality in his nature and created a potion to separate his good and evil sides. He became Hyde, who was pure evil, and enjoyed the freedom from conscience. Over time, Hyde grew stronger and Jekyll began to transform involuntarily. He tried to stop, but the potion lost its power, and he realized he was losing control. He writes this confession as his final act, knowing that Hyde will soon take over completely.

Themes

- Duality of human nature
- Good vs. evil
- Repression and Victorian society
- Scientific hubris
- Identity and self
- Addiction and loss of control

Notable Quotes

- "I learned to recognise the thorough and primitive duality of man." — Jekyll's confession, explaining his discovery of the dual nature within himself.
- "If he be Mr. Hyde, I shall be Mr. Seek." — Utterson's pun to his friend, expressing his determination to find Hyde.
- "I am the chief of sinners, I am the chief of sufferers also." — Jekyll's statement in his confession, acknowledging his guilt and suffering.
- "He was the first of mankind that was ever dissected." — A phrase from the novella, referring to Hyde's evil nature being exposed.
- "The last I think; for, O my poor old Harry Jekyll, if ever I read Satan's signature upon a face, it is on that of your new friend." — Utterson's thought upon seeing Hyde for the first time.

Frequently Asked Questions

What is The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde about?

It's a Gothic novella about a respected London doctor, Henry Jekyll, who creates a potion that transforms him into the evil Edward Hyde. As Hyde, he indulges in violent and immoral acts. The story follows lawyer Gabriel Utterson as he investigates the connection between the two, ultimately revealing Jekyll's struggle to control his darker self.

Is The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde worth reading?

Yes. It's a classic of Victorian literature that explores timeless themes of duality, repression, and the consequences of unchecked ambition. The novella is short, suspenseful, and has a powerful psychological depth that resonates with modern readers. It's a foundational work in horror and has influenced countless stories about split personalities.

How does The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde end?

Spoiler: Jekyll loses control of his transformations and becomes Hyde permanently. He writes a full confession, then locks himself in his laboratory. Utterson and Poole break in and find Hyde's dead body, wearing Jekyll's clothes, having committed suicide. The confession reveals the entire story, and Jekyll's dual nature is finally exposed.

Who should read The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde?

Fans of classic literature, Gothic horror, and psychological thrillers will enjoy it. It's also a great read for students studying Victorian society, ethics in science, or the concept of the double. The novella is accessible to young adults and adults alike, offering layers of meaning for different reading levels.

How long does it take to read The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde?

The novella is about 13,000 words, so at an average reading speed of 250 words per minute, it takes roughly 50-60 minutes. Most readers finish it in one sitting, making it a perfect evening read.