

Character notes: Edward Hyde

BBC Bitesize

Mr Edward Hyde

- He is described as small ('dwarfish') and young.
- People react with horror and fear when they see him. But there is no single thing about him that is especially unpleasant; it is as if his spirit affects people.
- He is violent, and has no sense of guilt about his crimes. In Chapter 1, Hyde assaults a young girl, and in Chapter 4 he beats an elderly gentleman to death. He has no motive for either of these attacks.
- His appearances in the novel are always brief. People only catch impressions of him, before he vanishes into the dark or behind a door.
- Hyde is very secretive
- Hyde is the pure evil which is inside Jekyll and which he releases into the world until Hyde eventually takes over Jekyll's life and personality.



Spark Notes

Dr. Jekyll & Mr. Hyde

One might question the extent to which Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde are in fact a single character. Until the end of the novel, the two personas seem nothing alike—the well-liked, respectable doctor and the hideous, depraved Hyde are almost opposite in type and personality. Stevenson uses this marked contrast to make his point: every human being contains opposite forces within him or her, an alter ego that hides behind one's polite facade. Correspondingly, to understand fully the significance of either Jekyll or Hyde, we must ultimately consider the two as constituting one single character. Indeed, taken alone, neither is a very interesting personality; it is the nature of their interrelationship that gives the novel its power.

Despite the seeming diametric opposition between Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, their relationship in fact involves a complicated dynamic. While it is true that Jekyll largely appears as moral and decent, engaging in charity work and enjoying a reputation as a courteous and genial man, he in fact never fully embodies virtue in the way that Hyde embodies evil. Although Jekyll undertakes his experiments with the intent of purifying his good side from his bad and vice versa, he ends up separating the bad alone, while leaving his former self, his Jekyll-self, as mixed as before. Jekyll succeeds in liberating his darker side, freeing it from the bonds of conscience, yet as Jekyll he never liberates himself from this darkness.

Jekyll's partial success in his endeavours warrants much analysis. Jekyll himself ascribes his lopsided results to his state of mind when first taking the potion. He says that he was motivated by dark urges such as ambition and pride when he first drank the liquid and that these allowed for the emergence of Hyde. He seems to imply that, had he entered the experiment with pure motives, an angelic being would have emerged. However, one must consider the subsequent events in the novel before acquitting Jekyll of any blame. For, once released, Hyde gradually comes to dominate both personas, until Jekyll takes Hyde's shape more often than his own. Indeed, by the very end of the novel, Jekyll himself no longer exists and only Hyde remains. Hyde

seems to possess a force more powerful than Jekyll originally believed. The fact that Hyde, rather than some beatific creature, emerged from Jekyll's experiments seems more than a chance event, subject to an arbitrary state of mind. Rather, Jekyll's drinking of the potion seems almost to have afforded Hyde the opportunity to assert himself. It is as if Hyde, but no comparable virtuous essence, was lying in wait.

This dominance of Hyde—first as a latent force within Jekyll, then as a tyrannical external force subverting Jekyll—holds various implications for our understanding of human nature. We begin to wonder whether any aspect of human nature in fact stands as a counter to an individual's Hyde-like side. We may recall that Hyde is described as resembling a "troglodyte," or a primitive creature; perhaps Hyde is actually the original, authentic nature of man, which has been repressed but not destroyed by the accumulated weight of civilization, conscience, and societal norms. Perhaps man doesn't have two natures but rather a single, primitive, amoral one that remains just barely constrained by the bonds of civilization. Moreover, the novel suggests that once those bonds are broken, it becomes impossible to re-establish them; the genie cannot be put back into the bottle, and eventually Hyde will permanently replace Jekyll—as he finally does. Even in Victorian England—which considered itself the height of Western civilization—Stevenson suggests that the dark, instinctual side of man remains strong enough to devour anyone who, like Jekyll, proves foolish enough to unleash it.

Cliffs Notes

Edward Hyde

Hyde, as his name indicates, represents the fleshy (sexual) aspect of man which the Victorians felt the need to "hide" — as Utterson once punned on his name: "Well, if he is Mr. Hyde, I will be Mr. Seek."

Hyde actually comes to represent the embodiment of pure evil merely for the sake of evil. When he is first extracted and in our first encounter with him, he is seen running over a young girl, simply trampling on her. He does not do this out of spite — or intentionally; it is simply an amoral act. He does make reparations. But even in this first encounter, he raises a fear, an antagonism, and a deep loathing in other people. The reaction of others to him is one of horror, partly because while looking at him, others feel a deep desire to strike out at him and kill him. In other words, his mere physical appearance brings out the very worst evil in other people.

Since Hyde represents the purely evil in man (or in Dr. Jekyll), he is, therefore, symbolically represented as being much smaller than Dr. Jekyll — Jekyll's clothes are far too large for him — and Hyde is also many years younger than Jekyll, symbolically suggesting that the evil side of Jekyll did not develop until years after he was born.

Hyde also creates terror; the servants are extremely frightened of him. When they think he is around the house, the servants cringe in horror, and some go into hysterics.

As the novel progresses, Hyde's evil becomes more and more pronounced. He bludgeons Sir Danvers Carew to death for absolutely no reason other than the fact that Sir Danvers appeared to be a good and kindly man — and pure evil detests pure goodness.

Since Hyde represents the evil or perverse side of Jekyll, and since Jekyll does, vicariously, enjoy the degradations which Hyde commits, Hyde gradually begins to take the ascendancy over the good Dr. Jekyll.

A conflict between them erupts, as though the older Dr. Jekyll is a father to the errant and prodigal son. He wants to punish this son, but at the same time, he recognizes that Hyde is an intimate part of himself. Ultimately, Jekyll transforms into Hyde for the final time and Hyde, terrified of the gallows, poisons himself and his dying body is found by Poole and Utterson when they break into Jekyll's laboratory.

Character Notes

Shmoop.com

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Edward Hyde

Evil Incarnate

Not only do you not want to run into this guy in a dark alley—if you did, you might end up dead.

Mr. Hyde is Dr. Jekyll's evil alter ego who indulges in various undisclosed vices. He's smaller, younger, more energetic, and just basically a malevolent, villainous guy. He's frequently compared to a monkey or an ape, suggesting a certain inhumanity or bestiality. And although no one can really pinpoint a particular deformity, they all agree that he has one—one that makes him a twisted, dark man who manages to inspire fear, disgust, and loathing even from afar. He is also described repeatedly as "timid yet bold."

He indulges in many undisclosed pleasures, but the main characteristic we see is that of violence. Mr. Hyde, to put it mildly, likes to beat people up. Based on the crimes we see, his predilection for violence isn't like a gang member's because he doesn't hold any affiliations or have any conception of honor and respect. Nor is he really like a schoolyard bully because he's not particularly bigger or stronger than the people he beats up—not to mention that he doesn't do it in front of crowds or to make himself look good. No, he simply likes beating people up. He feels pleasure when he engages in violence:

"He had in his hand a heavy cane, with which he was trifling; but he answered never a word, and seemed to listen with an ill-contained impatience. And then all of a sudden he broke out in a great flame of anger, stamping with his foot, brandishing the cane, and carrying on (as the maid described it) like a madman. The old gentleman took a step back, with the air of one very much surprised and a trifle hurt; and at that Mr. Hyde broke out of all bounds and clubbed him to the earth. And next moment, with ape-like fury, he was trampling his victim under foot and hailing down a storm of blows, under which the bones were audibly shattered and the body jumped upon the roadway. At the horror of these sights and sounds, the maid fainted". (ch 4)

Mr. Hyde's name is also significant, as he is both a persona that Dr. Jekyll hides behind and a hidden man:

"Mr. Hyde had numbered few familiars—even the master of the servant maid had only seen him twice; his family could nowhere be traced; he had never been photographed; and the few who could describe him differed widely, as common observers will. Only on one point were they agreed; and that was the haunting sense of unexpressed deformity with which the fugitive impressed his beholders". (ch 4)

Coming Out Of Hyde-ing

Perhaps the most interesting aspect of Mr. Hyde to discuss is his death. We aren't really sure at the end how Mr. Hyde died. Well, suicide, you say—but who committed the suicide? We know that Hyde is afraid of death (and probably the Hell that, according to Victorian England, awaits him) and that the threat of suicide is Jekyll's only weapon against him. So one would think Jekyll somehow killed himself and Hyde right after writing his confession. That's the easy explanation.

Jekyll did say that Hyde was taking over and growing stronger. If the last thing Jekyll was able to pull off was writing his last "document," then it sounds like Hyde took over before the death occurred. So did Hyde kill himself? And does that mean he killed Jekyll? You could say that Jekyll was already dead by that time, and that Hyde had taken over completely. After all, it is Hyde's dead body that we see, not Jekyll's. Also Hyde fears being caught by the police and executed for

the murder of Danvers Carew so he has a motive for killing himself. And, Utterson and Poole are battering down the door.

But you could also argue that it's irrelevant to ask who killed himself, or who killed whom, because at the end of the day, Hyde and Jekyll aren't separate entities. They share the same body and the same memory. You could even go so far as to say that Jekyll's attempted division failed; man can't be separated into two tidy halves.

Hyde's timeline

*This is based on Dr. Jekyll's final account.

- At some unknown point in time, Mr. Hyde comes to life when Dr. Jekyll drinks a special potion.
- For a time, Mr. Hyde comes to life whenever Dr. Jekyll doesn't feel like being respectable.
- Mr. Hyde participates in "undignified" pleasures that soon turned to the "monstrous."
- Then he tramples a child, witnessed by Mr. Enfield.
- He writes a check in Dr. Jekyll's name, then opens a bank account for himself—the signature is merely Dr. Jekyll's handwriting, sloped backwards.
- Two months before the murder of Sir Danvers, Dr. Jekyll goes to bed and then awakes as Mr. Hyde.
- Dr. Jekyll notes that Mr. Hyde's body has been growing larger, as if from "a more generous tide of blood." He is also more strong-willed.
- For two months, Dr. Jekyll refrains from drinking the potion, and Mr. Hyde remains hidden.
- In a moment of "moral weakness," Dr. Jekyll drinks the potion and Mr. Hyde emerges stronger than ever. The beast is out of the cage.
- When a passer-by (Sir Danvers Carew) stops him, Mr. Hyde beats the man to death.
- The murder was witnessed and Mr Hyde is now Britain's most wanted man.
- Dr. Jekyll resolves to stop transforming into Mr. Hyde forever, but commits some sin (as Dr Jekyll) that "tips the balance of his soul" toward evil.
- Mr. Hyde takes control of Dr. Jekyll's body one day at Regent's Park.
- Away from his potions and a wanted man for murder, Mr. Hyde runs into a hotel and stays there after penning messages to Dr. Jekyll's friend (Dr. Lanyon) and Dr. Jekyll's butler, delivering a complex series of instructions.
- Mr. Hyde goes to Dr. Lanyon's house to get the potion.
- Warning Dr. Lanyon that he is about to see something extraordinary, Mr. Hyde drinks the potion and transforms into Dr. Jekyll.
- The next morning, Dr. Jekyll is relieved and walking in his courtyard, on his way to the laboratory, when he again transforms into Mr. Hyde.
- It takes a double dose to recall Dr. Jekyll.
- Six hours later, Mr. Hyde again takes over.
- From that point on, Mr. Hyde is the dominant personality, and Dr. Jekyll struggles helplessly to assert himself.
- At this point Dr. Jekyll realizes that Mr. Hyde is afraid of death and that only fear of the gallows allows Dr. Jekyll to resume his identity.
- However, because Dr. Jekyll really dislikes Mr. Hyde at this point, Mr. Hyde begins to really hate Dr. Jekyll.
- Mr. Hyde plays lots of tricks on Dr. Jekyll, like defacing his favourite books and burning his letters.
- But since Mr. Hyde is afraid to die, he fears that Dr. Jekyll will simply commit suicide. Because of this, Dr. Jekyll pities Mr. Hyde.
- Because Dr. Jekyll runs out of potion, Mr. Hyde finally takes over.
- Mr. Hyde, no longer able to hide as Dr Jekyll because the potion has run out kills himself, and is found dead by Mr. Utterson and Poole.