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Sparknotes On Dr Jekyll And Mr Hyde

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Sparknotes on Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde: A Complete Study Guide to Stevenson's Gothic Masterpiece

Robert Louis Stevenson's novella *Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*remains one of the most enduring works of Gothic literature. First published in 1886, this chilling tale of duality, repression, and the dark side of human nature has fascinated readers for generations. Whether you are a student preparing for an exam, a teacher seeking fresh insights, or a curious reader looking for a deep dive, this Sparknotes-style guide will help you navigate every twist and turn. In this comprehensive analysis, we will explore the plot, characters, themes, symbolism, and key quotations—all optimized to give you the same depth you would expect from a premium study resource. Welcome to your one-stop Sparknotes on Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde.

Plot Summary: The Unfolding Mystery of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde

The story begins with the respectable London lawyer, Mr. Utterson, who hears unsettling tales about a violent man named Edward Hyde. Hyde, who appears to have no redeeming qualities, tramples a young girl in the street without remorse. When Utterson investigates, he discovers that his close friend Dr. Henry Jekyll has inexplicably left his entire estate to this brutish stranger in his will. Utterson grows increasingly alarmed as he learns of more brutal acts, including the murder of a respected Member of Parliament, Sir Danvers Carew. Meanwhile, Jekyll becomes reclusive, and his behavior grows more erratic. After a period of calm, Jekyll's friend Dr. Hastie Lanyon dies from shock, leaving a sealed letter for Utterson. The letter reveals that Jekyll has been using a potion to transform into Hyde—his evil alter ego. In the final chapter, written by Jekyll himself, we learn that the transformation has become uncontrollable. Jekyll can no longer suppress Hyde, and when Utterson and a servant break into Jekyll's laboratory, they find Hyde dead by suicide, transformed back to the form of Jekyll. The novella ends with Jekyll's confession, leaving readers to ponder the terrifying consequences of tampering with human nature.

Character Analysis: The Dual Faces of Victorian Society

Dr. Henry Jekyll

Dr. Jekyll is a respected, wealthy, and deeply curious scientist. He is driven by a desire to separate the good and evil within himself, a project born from his own hypocrisy. Jekyll leads a life of public respectability but harbors secret appetites that Victorian society would condemn. His scientific pursuit of a potion to release his dark side reflects a broader human struggle with morality. Over the course of the story, Jekyll transforms from a confident explorer of human nature into a terrified victim of his own creation. His tragic flaw is his belief that evil can be compartmentalized without corrupting the whole person. The irony is that Jekyll's very desire to indulge in wickedness without guilt ultimately destroys him.

Mr. Edward Hyde

Hyde is the physical manifestation of Jekyll's repressed evil. He is described as "dwarfish," "deformed," and somehow "troglodytic." His very presence inspires an instinctual loathing in others. Hyde is pure id—impulsive, violent, and utterly without conscience. He represents everything that Victorian society tried to suppress: sensuality, aggression, and amorality. Importantly, Hyde does not appear as a separate person; he is Jekyll with no moral filter. The more Jekyll indulges in Hyde, the stronger Hyde becomes. Stevenson uses Hyde to argue that evil, once allowed to exist, can grow beyond the control of its originator.

Mr. Gabriel John Utterson

Utterson is the story's protagonist and moral compass. He is a lawyer who values order, reason, and loyalty. He spends much of the novella playing detective, collecting clues and interviewing witnesses. Utterson represents the restrained, upright Victorian gentleman. His role is to unify the narrative—through his perspective we learn of Hyde's crimes, Jekyll's secret, and Lanyon's shock. Utterson does not change significantly; he remains steadfast, symbolizing the attempt of society to maintain decency in the face of chaos. Yet Stevenson suggests that even Utterson, with all his rationality, cannot fully comprehend the depths of human darkness.

Dr. Hastie Lanyon

Lanyon is a colleague and old friend of Jekyll. He is a man of science, but a rationalist who rejects the supernatural. When Jekyll reveals his transformation to Lanyon, the shock is so great that Lanyon becomes physically ill and dies. Lanyon's fate is a cautionary tale: some truths are too terrible for the human mind to bear. He functions as a foil to Jekyll—both are scientists, but Lanyon's skepticism protects him from Jekyll's dangerous path until it is too late.

Themes: The Heart of the Novella

The Duality of Human Nature

This is the central theme of the story. Stevenson explores the idea that every person has both good and evil within them. Jekyll articulates this directly: "I learned to recognise the thorough and primitive duality of man." The novella critiques the Victorian notion that people can be divided neatly into respectable and depraved. Instead, it suggests that evil is an inherent part of humanity. Jekyll's fatal mistake is not his desire to experience evil but his belief that it can be separated and indulged without consequence. The story implies that trying to suppress one side of our nature only makes it more powerful when it erupts.

Repression and Victorian Hypocrisy

Victorian society placed a high value on public decorum and moral rectitude. Jekyll embodies the tension between private desire and public persona. He cannot reconcile his pleasures with his reputation, so he creates Hyde as a safe outlet. However, the very act of repression distorts both sides: Jekyll becomes more fragile as he denies his own instincts, and Hyde becomes more monstrous as he is fed the energy of denied urges. Stevenson uses gaslight, fogs, and locked doors to emphasize the hidden, repressed world beneath the polished surface of London.

Science and Morality

Jekyll is a rational scientist who believes he can advance knowledge through experimentation. Yet his potion has moral consequences he did not foresee. The novella questions the limits of science when divorced from ethics. Jekyll's transformation is a metaphor for the dangers of unchecked ambition. Stevenson, writing in an era of rapid scientific progress (Darwin, Freud), warns that discovery without responsibility can lead to self-destruction.

Friendship and Loyalty

Utterson's unwavering loyalty to Jekyll, despite growing evidence of wrongdoing, is a major thread. He refuses to abandon his friend, even when Jekyll withdraws. This theme highlights the tension between personal allegiance and moral judgment. Ultimately, Utterson's loyalty cannot save Jekyll; it only leads him to the

horrifying truth. The story suggests that even the strongest bonds cannot prevent someone from destroying themselves.

Symbolism: Objects and Settings That Speak

The Door

The door in Dr. Jekyll's laboratory is a powerful symbol. It is the entry point to Hyde's world, a place where the respectable doctor becomes a monster. The door also represents the barrier between the conscious and unconscious mind. When Utterson and the butler break it down at the climax, they are forcing their way into Jekyll's hidden self. The dual entrances to Jekyll's house—the grand front door for his respectable life and the shabby back door for Hyde—symbolize the dual nature of his existence.

The Potion

The transformative potion represents the artificial separation of good and evil. It is a product of Jekyll's scientific hubris. The potion's changing color and taste reflect the instability of Jekyll's experiment. Moreover, the fact that Jekyll must continually take the potion to return to his original form (and later needs more to stay in Hyde) indicates that the balance between aspects of self cannot be maintained artificially. The potion is both a liberation and a prison.

The Letters and Documents

The novella unfolds through a series of written documents: Lanyon's letter, Jekyll's confession, and Utterson's narrative. These papers are treasure troves of truth, but they also hide as much as they reveal. For example, Jekyll's initial mutilated letter to Utterson is a symbol of his struggle to communicate his fractured state. The reliance on documents in the story mirrors the Victorian obsession with evidence and record-keeping, while also showing how truth can be distorted by the writer.

Key Quotes and Analysis

Below are some essential passages that capture the spirit of *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*. They are often cited in Sparknotes-style discussions.

- "I bring the life of that unhappy Henry Jekyll to an end." — Jekyll's final words in his confession. This line marks the moment Jekyll acknowledges that he cannot separate himself from Hyde. His "life" as a unified person is over, and even though Hyde is dead, Jekyll is equally lost. It underlines the theme that identity cannot be severed into two independent entities.
- "The moment I choose, I can be rid of Mr. Hyde." — Jekyll to Utterson early in the story. This statement shows Jekyll's dangerous overconfidence. He believes he controls Hyde, but soon learns that the opposite is true. It is a classic tragic irony—the protagonist is blind to his own downfall.
- "I saw for the first time a human countenance that bore the stamp of Satan." — Utterson, describing Hyde's face. This quote emphasizes Hyde's inhuman evil. Stevenson deliberately leaves Hyde's exact appearance vague, so readers can project their own fears onto him. The "stamp of Satan" suggests that evil is not just a behavior but something physically repulsive.
- "You must suffer me to go my own dark way." — Jekyll to Utterson. This line captures Jekyll's resignation and guilt. He recognizes that he must follow the path he has chosen, even though it leads to destruction. It also reflects the Victorian ideal of the lonely, tortured soul.

Structural and Literary Devices

Stevenson uses a multi-layered, non-linear narrative structure. The story is told mostly in third person from Utterson's point of view, but the final two chapters are first-person accounts (Lanyon's letter and Jekyll's confession). This structure builds mystery and allows the reader to piece together the truth gradually. It is a classic detective story format. The fog and nocturnal settings create a Gothic atmosphere that mirrors the moral

murkiness of the tale. Stevenson also employs foreshadowing: the initial trampling of the girl hints at worse crimes to come, and Jekyll's growing reliance on the potion foretells his loss of control.

Historical Context: Victorian Anxieties

Understanding the era in which Stevenson wrote enriches any Sparknotes analysis. The late 19th century was a time of immense change. Charles Darwin's theory of evolution had shaken religious certainty, and Freud's ideas about the unconscious were just emerging. London itself was a city of stark contrasts—extreme wealth alongside dire poverty, public prudishness alongside private vice. The Jack the Ripper murders (which occurred two years after the novella's publication) would later make the fear of unseen evil even more relevant. *Jekyll and Hyde*channels these societal fears into a single narrative: the monster is not a foreign outsider but a respected gentleman. This made the story deeply unsettling for its original readers, and it continues to resonate today.

Conclusion: The Enduring Power of Jekyll and Hyde

This Sparknotes on Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde has walked through the plot, dissected the characters, explored themes and symbols, and highlighted key passages. Stevenson's novella is far more than a simple horror story. It is a profound examination of the human condition, the dangers of repression, and the impossibility of separating

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