Robert Louis Stevenson

Introduction

"Every man has a sane spot somewhere" - Robert Louis Stevenson

Handicapped from his youth, Stevenson struggled his entire life against the affects of tuberculosis. However, his mind had no such ill-affects. Robert Louis Stevenson was incredibly smart and creative. He studied and subsequently was admitted to the bar in 1875, but he never practiced law. His heart was with literature, which he then devoted his life to...

This wiki has paid special attention to Stevenson's gothic mystery novel *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*. Included on this web page are: 
"Topics for Discussion" - which offers questions relevant to the subject matter to generate deliberation, 
"Form is Content" - which includes multiple quotes from the novel, each with their own explanation, 
"Biography" - offers interesting and significant aspects to Stevenson's life, 
"Additional Material" - includes different images relevant to *Jekyll and Hyde*, 
"Image Gallery" - a composite block of all the images on the web page, 
"1920 Movie" - the full length motion picture *Jekyll and Hyde*, starring John Barrymore, and finally 
"Resources and Links" - has links to appropriate web sites and a list of the resources used in creating this web page. Additionally, you are listening to (or have already heard) an excerpt from the chapter "Dr. Lanyon's Narrative" as written in the novel.

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### Topics for Discussion

Think about the idea of the doppelganger effect/ the duality of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde as exemplified in the novel. How do you think Victorian restrictions and expectations of a strong moral character play a role in the creation of Jekyll's duality?

How do you think Stevenson's novel would have been received when it was first published? How has that reception changed over time?

The predicament of Dr. Jekyll is often looked at in terms of Freud's id, ego and superego. While this is one valid way to interpret the text, the fact of the matter is that *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* was published before Freud's theory, making it impossible for Stevenson to have any knowledge of the theory. With this in mind, what else could Stevenson be attempting to instill in the reader? Was he taking a psychological approach or was he trying to show the duality and conflicting ideals that are inherent in everyone?

Do Dr. Jekyll's symptoms of a dual personality resemble what we now think of as a split personality disorder? If not, what is different between the past and present idea?

The novel lacks a significant female character. What could be the reason for this?

Think about the fact that Jekyll isolates himself as his condition worsens. How does this isolation serve to cultivate his evil side?

Look at the mode of addiction that runs throughout the novel. As Jekyll becomes more deeply entwined with Hyde, he often mentions that he can't stop taking his concoction, that he possesses an almost physical craving for it. Is this an early form of drug addiction or is Jekyll merely addicted to what Hyde allows him to be?

Does the indulgence of pleasures automatically lead to evil or is evil inherent in all human beings? Where does pleasure fit in here?

Discuss Jekyll's progression throughout the novel and his fall from grace. What key moments and decisions determine Jekyll's fate?

### Form is Content

"But he had an approved tolerance for others; sometimes wondering, almost with envy, at the high pressure of spirits involved in their misdeeds; and in any extremity inclined to help rather than to reprove"  
*(The Story of the Door)*

- Stevenson's description of Utterson foreshadows how people will approach Utterson throughout the novel and how Utterson's interactions with others affect himself and surrounding people.

"He must be deformed somewhere; he gives a strong feeling of deformity, although I couldn’t specify the point. He’s an extraordinary-looking man, and yet I really can name nothing out of the way."

*(The Story of the Door)*

- In this quote, Enfield tells a story of a mysterious, deformed man who has stomped over a girl. The description of the man appears to be vague and continues to be vague throughout the story as more people begin to witness the presence of this "mysterious" man named Hyde.
"And hitherto it was his ignorance of Mr. Hyde that had swelled his indignation; now, be a suddent turn, it was his knowledge. It was already bad enough when the name was but a name of which he could learn no more." (Search for Mr. Hyde)

- Here, the narrator points out the consequences of Mr. Utterson's curiosity and knowledge. Before, when Utterson knew nothing of Mr. Hyde he yearned to know more. However, as his curiosity of Hyde grows deeper, Utterson starts to find himself in a vulnerable position.

"This last, however, was not so easy of accomplishment; for Mr. Hyde had numbered 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.... Only on one point were they agreed; and that was the haunting sense of unexpressed deformity...." (The Carew Murder Case)

- The plot gets stranger as we previously have found out that Dr. Jekyll is the only one who has a personal relationship with Mr. Hyde. We see that nobody else can figure out who Mr. Hyde is and readers start to question what is the connection between Dr. Jekyll and such an aloof and malicious being.

"But no sooner was Mr. Utterson alone that night, than he locked the note into his safe, where it reposed from that time forward. 'What!' he thought. 'Henry Jekyll forge for a murderer!' And his blood ran cold in his veins." (Incident of the Letter)

- When Dr. Jekyll gives Utterson a mysterious note that Hyde has written, Utterson takes it to a friend who he feels will be able to help him decipher what the note says. As Utterson's friend notices that it was Dr. Jekyll who has written the note and not Hyde, the audience soon realizes that Dr. Jekyll could possibly be posing as Mr. Hyde. We get a sense of eriness as we question what is Dr. Jekyll hiding.

"Sir, said the butler, turning to a sort of mottled pallor, that thing was not my master, and there's the truth. My master... is a tall, fine, build of a man, and this was more of a dwarf...." (The Last Night)

- The mystery of Dr. Jekyll's seclusion grows deeper as Jekyll's butler describes his master's change in appearance. The master's change in appearance sketches a picture of Hyde. The idea that Hyde could possibly be taking over Jekyll's house arises fear for the safety of Jekyll.

"O God! I screamed, and O God! again and again; for there before my eyes- pale and shaken, and half fainting, and groping before him with his hands, like man restored from death- there stood Henry Jekyll!" (Dr. Lanyon's Narrative)

- Dr. Lanyon explains the unnatural behavior Jekyll possesses. Jekyll allows Lanyon to see the troubles he has been through with dual identity. However, Jekyll's unnatural behavior does not fit into the norm of Victorian society. Therefore, Lanyon rejects Jekyll and sees him as an uncontrollable monster.

"Evil besides (which I must still believe to be the lethal side of man) had left on that body an imprint of deformity and decay. And yet when I looked upon that ugly idol in the gladd, I was concious of no repugence, rather a leap of welcome. This, too, was myself. It seemed natural and human." (Henry Jekyll's Full Statement)

- This quote shows the initial reaction Jekyll has of Hyde, and his willingness to accept his dark side rather than shun it. Yet, his initial reaction creates concern as to why is Jekyll so willing to accept his evil side? His initial reaction seems to show that Jekyll has fallen into a temptation of evil and has created himself a get away from reality and "goodness".

"I sat in the sun on a bench; the animal within me licking the chops of memory; the spiritual side a little drowsed, promising subsequent penitence, but not yet moved to begin." (Henry Jekyll's Full Statement)

- Dr. Jekyll reflects on what he has become but shows no remembrance or concern about what he has done. Here, we see Hyde degenerating into a "savage" animal.

"God knows; I am careless, this is my true hour of death, and what is to follow concerns another myself. Here then, as I lay down the pen and proceed to seal up my confession, I bring the life of that unhappy Henry Jekyll to an end." (Henry Jekyll's Full Statement)

- These are the last words Hyde writes in his letter. He has revealed his personal experiences of dual identity and explains the effect of how a potion has created internal conflict between his "good" and "evil" side and the life threatening decisions he was forced to make.
Image from Wikimedia Commons

This is a clip from the musical *Jekyll and Hyde* put to a slide show.

Link to video on YouTube
Robert Louis Balfour Stevenson was a Scottish novelist, poet, essayist and travel writer. He was born the only son to Thomas Stevenson, a civil engineer, and his wife Margaret Isabella Balfour. Throughout his childhood, Stevenson suffered chronic health problems that made schooling difficult, but he attended Edinburgh Academy and other schools before, at 17, entering Edinburgh University, where he was expected to prepare himself for the family profession of lighthouse engineering. Stevenson, however, had no desire to be an engineer.
He had shown a desire to write early in his life. In his youth, his strongest influence was that of his nurse, Allison Cunningham, who often read Pilgrim’s Progress and The Old Testament to him. Once in his teens he had deliberately set out to learn the writer's craft by imitating a great variety of models in prose and verse. While ostensibly working towards a science degree, Stevenson spent much of his time studying French Literature, Scottish history, and the works of Darwin and Spencer. Eventually he came to an agreement with his father and studied for the Bar exam so that he would have a profession to fall back on.

In the fall of 1873, Stevenson fell ill, suffering from nervous exhaustion and a severe chest condition. His doctor ordered him to take an extended period of rest abroad. For 6 months, Stevenson spent his time in the South of France and worked on essays. When he returned to Edinburgh, he worked mostly on book reviews, articles, and experimenting with short stories. Eventually, Stevenson was able to make a name for himself in the world of journalism and his work began appearing in distinguished journals.

While establishing himself as a writer, Stevenson met and married an American woman who was ten years older than him, Fanny Vandergrift Osbourne. Osbourne had traveled to Europe while trying to escape the influence of her estranged husband. For three years, Stevenson, still suffering from illness, continued his relationship with her and eventually followed her to San Francisco, where she divorced her husband and married Stevenson in May of 1880.

On a visit back to Scotland, while drawing a treasure map with his 12-year-old stepson, Stevenson was inspired to write Treasure Island which was published in 1883 as his first novel. Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde came three years later, a best seller which made Stevenson’s reputation on both sides of the Atlantic. It was published in attempts to raise money to support the family. Stevenson said that “Brownies” brought him the story in a dream. He wrote the story in three days while in bed. When he at last read the story aloud to his eager household, Fanny insisted that he rewrite the story. She urged him to make the wicked Dr. Jekyll a good man who had difficulty controlling his evil instincts. She then suggested that Dr. Jekyll would depict the dual image of Victorian society: “prim and proper on the surface, unrestrained and lewd underneath.” At first Stevenson argued with her. Later he admitted he had missed the very essence of the story. After throwing the manuscript in the fire, he rewrote the novel in six days to become the story known throughout the entire English speaking world. His novel, Kidnapped came out that same year and Stevenson’s career was established.
Stevenson and Fanny returned to Europe, but moved back to California in 1887 after the death of his father. In 1888, he and his family decided to sail around the Pacific islands, which marked a new epoch in his writing career and in his health. The climate was so good that they decided to stay, making their home on the island of Upolu in Samoa. Stevenson continued to write stories about the South Seas as well as travel stories. Having fought for good health all his life, he died of a brain hemorrhage in December 1894.

http://www.online-literature.com/stevenson/

Image Gallery

In this section, you will see the pictures of the author and images related to your author that you have attached to your particular page.
This video, now in the public domain, as found on YouTube.

link to video on Youtube
Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde Discussion and Activities

Timeline of important events in Robert Louis Stevenson's life

List of Robert Louis Stevenson's works

List of Jekyll and Hyde films

Books and Articles Below can be found on MLAB and/or JSTOR


