

Character Analysis—Mr Edward Hyde

Edward Hyde is described to us many times in the novella, yet there's a certain enigmatic nature to his appearance: numerous people see him but 'Only on one point were they agreed; and that was the haunting sense of unexpressed deformity with which the fugitive impressed his beholders.' It is surprisingly difficult to pin down any concrete details about the character. However, Stevenson presents Edward Hyde in a number of ways which tap into the fears and concerns of Victorian society.

Hyde and Evolution:

Stevenson regularly employs animal imagery when describing Hyde. When Utterson finally meets him in chapter two, Hyde shrinks back from him 'with a hissing intake of breath'. This 'hissing' would perhaps make readers think of a snake. In the same chapter, we read that Hyde 'snarled', evoking images of a wild animal. In chapter eight, Poole describes how Hyde did 'cry out like a rat'. The connotations of disease and filth are clear. In the same chapter, as Utterson and Poole break into Jekyll's study, they hear '[a] dismal screech, as of mere animal terror'. In Jekyll's own account in chapter ten, he describes how 'the lower side of me...began to growl', going on to write about 'the animal withing me'. In a very obvious sense, the animal imagery presents Hyde as wild and dangerous. However, as we have already explored in the chapter on context, it can also be tied into nineteenth-century theories regarding evolution.

In 1859, Charles Darwin published his work *On the Origin of Species*, where he detailed his theory of biological evolution. In *The Descent of Man* (1871), Darwin suggested that apes and humans may have a common ancestor. He did not suggest that humans had evolved directly from apes, but the connection between the two was enough to create fear in Victorian Britain. Many saw Darwin's theories as a cause for concern: if people had evolved from animals, did this discredit the Biblical account of creation? Was science disproving the existence of God? And, more specifically, if people had evolved from animals, was it possible to devolve back into an animalistic state? Is there always an 'animal' within us? Stevenson addresses these fears in *Jekyll and Hyde*.

There are quotations related to Hyde which leave us in no doubt that Stevenson was referencing Darwin's work in his presentation of the character. In chapter two, Utterson describes Hyde as 'troglodytic'. A troglodyte was a cave dweller from prehistoric times. This suggests that Hyde has devolved into a primitive state.

There are also numerous references to apes employed when describing Hyde, which link to Darwin's theory of shared ancestry between humans and apes. The murder of Danvers Carew is committed 'with ape-like fury'. In chapter eight, Poole describes how Hyde 'like a monkey jumped from among the chemicals'. Finally, at the very end of the novella, Stevenson uses two instances of ape references when Jekyll describes both his 'apelike tricks' and 'apelike spite'. This double usage in such a short space can leave us in no doubt—Stevenson is tapping into contemporary concerns related to evolution, in order to create fear in his readers. This presentation of Hyde suggests not only that there is a primitive, animalistic side to all humans, but that it is possible to devolve into this dangerous state.

Hyde and the Fear of the Lower Classes:

There are only two crimes committed by Hyde that are reported in detail in the novella. The most horrific of these is the murder of Danvers Carew. Stevenson uses the murder of Carew to tap into Victorian society's fears related to lower classes. According to the witness, Carew bows and approaches Hyde with 'a pretty manner of politeness'. The witness describes Carew's face as 'innocent' and having an 'old-world kindness of disposition'. Once she looked at Hyde however, she 'conceived a dislike' and goes on to describe how Hyde 'carried on like a madman', attacking Carew with 'an ape-like fury' and showing 'insensate cruelty'.

Carew represents the upper class of Victorian London. The 'old-world kindness' refers to the established values among the Victorian middle and upper classes who were nervous and worried about the influx of others not like them into London, for fear their way of life would be altered or overtaken.

As we have explored in more detail in the chapter on context, the 1800s in Britain was a time of great change. One of the most challenging things for the established upper classes in Victorian society was the influx of people viewed as working class or lower class into the big cities of Britain. They were coming in search of work and housing, but the cities of the time, especially London, were quite unprepared for them. The sudden increase in numbers made the upper classes nervous. They were clearly outnumbered and began to create areas of these cities where they would not go and other areas where they would socialise. This division of the cities into 'no-go areas' was interesting because it created an 'other' in London specifically.

Hyde represents the dangerous elements of London in the Victorian period. He lives and 'socialises' in Soho, one of the places to which respectable Victorians would not have ventured (publicly at least). His actions are not tempered or constrained either by the rule of law or by what society expects of him. By setting Hyde's lodgings in Soho, Stevenson taps into his readers' fears of the lower classes. Readers would see in Hyde, a lower-class criminal, wreaking havoc on middle- and upper-class London.

Hyde as Middle- and Upper-Class Symbol:

Clearly, it is possible to view Hyde as a despicable, villainous creature, used by Stevenson to tap into fears about lower-class London and an animalistic, devolved state. However, there is another way to analyse the character of Hyde: as representative of the true, hidden nature of upper-class Victorian society.

If we interpret Hyde as an animalistic, devolved, lower-class villain, there are numerous parts of the text that refuse to fit into this interpretation. For starters, Hyde views himself as a gentleman. When apprehended for the trampling of the child in the opening chapter, Hyde states '[n]o gentleman but wishes to avoid a scene'. Indeed, as Stephen Arata points out in his book *Fictions of Loss in the Victorian Fin de Siècle: Identity and Empire* (1996) the noun 'gentleman' is the word most frequently used to describe Hyde in the novella. This is just one way in which Stevenson hints at the idea of Hyde representing the middle and upper classes.

Despite his undoubtedly violent crimes, Hyde is regularly presented as calm and often well mannered. Enfield explains how Hyde was 'perfectly cool and made no resistance' when he accosted him in chapter one. When Utterson greets Hyde in chapter two with 'Mr Hyde, I think?', Hyde 'answered coolly enough'. Lanyon describes how Hyde knocked 'very gently on the door' and spoke to him 'civilly enough'. These actions seem more akin to those of the upper-class gentlemen of Utterson, Jekyll and Lanyon than to what we might imagine from a primitive, dangerous monster. But perhaps the most compelling evidence to the argument can be found in the description of Hyde's lodgings in chapter four.

On their way to Hyde's lodgings in Soho (the dangerous lower-class end of London), Utterson and Inspector Newcomen are about to apprehend a murderer. Yet, when they gain entrance to his lodgings, the description is truly shocking:

Mr. Hyde had only used a couple of rooms; but these were furnished with luxury and good taste. A closet was filled with wine; the plate was of silver, the napery elegant; a good picture hung upon the walls, a gift (as Utterson supposed) from Henry Jekyll, who was much of a connoisseur; and the carpets were of many plies and agreeable in colour.

Although the room has been ransacked, Hyde's lodgings are as tastefully arranged as any in the novella. They certainly draw parallels with the description in the previous chapter of Dr Jekyll's own home: 'low-roofed, comfortable hall paved with flags, warmed (after the fashion of a country house) by a bright, open fire, and furnished with costly cabinets of oak'. Structurally, Stevenson has surely placed these two similar settings so close together as to encourage the reader to draw parallels between the two characters.

Just why are Hyde's lodgings so respectable? Arata explains that *Jekyll and Hyde* 'turns the discourses centering on...criminality back on the professional classes that produced them, linking gentlemanliness and bourgeois virtue to various forms of depravity'. Stevenson, then, attempts to evoke in the middle- and upper-class Victorian reader a sense that perhaps those around them who live in similar high style could be capable of great depravity. This, of course, ties in with Stevenson's message: the dual nature of humanity means all are capable of great evil—not just the lower classes.

In the description of Hyde's apartment, we read 'a good picture hung upon the walls, a gift (as Utterson supposed) from Henry Jekyll'. By 'good picture', Stevenson means a high-quality painting, which would require sophistication of taste to pick out. Utterson supposes the picture is a gift from Jekyll because he simply cannot conceive that the evil Hyde would be able to pick out or value such a picture.

In a letter to Stevenson, F. Myers told the author he didn't think this part of the text made sense—he didn't see why Jekyll would buy a picture for Hyde. Stevenson replied: 'I rather meant that Hyde had brought it himself' (referenced in *Robert Louis Stevenson: The Critical Heritage* (1971), edited by Paul Maixner). From this letter, it is made clear that the lodgings of Hyde were furnished by Hyde himself, not by Jekyll. Note also the 'closet...filled with wine'. In *The Transforming Draught: Jekyll and Hyde, Robert Louis Stevenson and the*

Victorian Alcohol Debate (2006) Thomas Reed points out how at the time the novella was written wine was virtually unknown in the East End. Again, Hyde is a person of taste and sophistication. Stevenson is suggesting the upper classes are just as capable of evil as the lower classes. We get a sense of this in the novella when Jekyll explains how, in reference to his sinister behaviour, 'Many a man would have even blazoned such irregularities as I was guilty of'. We do not know what Jekyll's irregularities are, but we read here that many in society would do just the same without any concern whatsoever. And it seems that Jekyll is not alone. Let us consider the nocturnal wanderings that take place in the text.

Both of the crimes described in detail in the text take place at night, and it is at night that Utterson finally manages to meet Hyde, described as taking place after 'ten o'clock' in chapter two. As in many modern horror stories, the night-time setting is associated with evil. However, it is not only Hyde who is out on the streets of London at night. In chapter one, we learn that Enfield 'was coming home from some place at the end of the world, about three o'clock of a black winter morning'. The reference to 'some place at the end of the world' has led some critics to conclude that Enfield was in the lower-class East End (for example see *Robert Louis Stevenson: Writer of Boundaries* by Richard Ambrosini and Richard Dury, 2006). If Enfield had been in the East End, then obvious parallels can be drawn with Hyde, whose lodgings are found in the same part of the city. Similarly, Danvers Carew is walking the street 'in the small hours'. The suggestion that he is out posting a letter after midnight seems unlikely at the very least. Even the austere Utterson is kept awake, again at night, with thoughts of any 'old iniquity' which might come back to haunt him. The night-time setting for all these supposedly respectable gentlemen is used to symbolise the illicit side of their behaviour. Whilst Sunday walks and regular dinner parties might abound in middle- and upper-class society, so do the nocturnal wanderings of the supposedly morally superior gentlemen.