Mr Edward Hyde

Hyde is Jekyll’s alter ego and the result of Jekyll’s attempts to separate the good and evil sides of his nature. Hyde is the embodiment of the dark side of the scientist’s nature: pure evil in human form. In Chapter 10, the moment of transformation is described as ‘a grinding in the bones, deadly nausea, and a horror of the spirit that cannot be exceeded at the hour of birth or death’; Jekyll welcomes the change, confessing to a ‘heady recklessness’ that ‘delighted me like wine’.

Hyde is smaller than Jekyll but in this form he feels younger, lighter and happier. In Chapter 10, he suggests that the smaller figure is ‘nine tenths a life of effort, virtue and control’ and because Jekyll’s unrestrained evil ‘had been much less exercised and much less exhausted’. He admits that Hyde’s body has an element of deformity and decay but he has no sense of disgust at what he has become and instead welcomes it. Hyde enables Jekyll to satisfy his more sinister self and his undignified urges without any hint of shame or guilt.

These urges, however, soon give way to Hyde’s much more monstrous activities and Jekyll describes Hyde as ‘inherently malign and villainous’ (Chapter 10). He exempts himself from blame, saying that the guilt is all Hyde’s, and so his ‘conscience slumbered’ (Chapter 10).

The casual assault of the young child and the murder of Sir Danvers Carew are two examples of Hyde’s capacity for depravity and violence.

There are frequent references to Hyde’s animalistic nature. For example, he is described as being ape-like by the maid who witnesses him kill Sir Danvers Carew; Poole notices that he moves like a monkey; Utterson detects a ‘hissing intake of the breath’ (Chapter 2), which implies a snakelike quality and also identifies his savage laugh; later Poole also recalls a ‘dismal screech, as of mere animal terror’ (Chapter 8) coming from Hyde (which might give us a brief moment of sympathy for him). To Utterson, he is hardly human.

There is universal disgust from those who meet Hyde. Enfield identifies “something downright detestable” (Chapter 1) in him while Utterson is also filled with disgust, loathing and fear on meeting him. Jekyll is aware of this, but

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Activity 1

1. Reread the description of the first time Jekyll changes into Hyde in Chapter 10, from ‘I hesitated long before…’ to ‘… I had lost in stature.’ How does Stevenson make this passage dramatic?

2. Find a quotation at the start of Chapter 2 that gives a physical description of Jekyll suggesting his darker side. Explore its significance.

3. Jekyll is an overreacher, someone who pushes the boundaries of science in his quest for knowledge, and is ruined as a result. Research the character of Victor Frankenstein in Mary Shelley’s novel Frankenstein. He is also an overreacher. What similarities are there between Jekyll and Victor Frankenstein?

4. Imagine that Jekyll has a Twitter account. Using the last chapter, write 15–20 tweets for Jekyll to explain his thoughts and feelings. Each tweet should be no more than 140 characters in length.

Make sure that you support your comments and analysis of characters with carefully selected quotations from the novella. These should be short – ideally no longer than one sentence.