

AQA English Literature GCSE

Jekyll and Hyde: Themes
Repression



Repression

Arguably, all of the characters, apart from Mr Hyde, **repress parts of themselves**. Stevenson makes a point about the strict nature of Victorian society by showing that Dr Jekyll, a character who has repressed his desires throughout his life, is now no longer able to contain himself. This is manifested in the character of Hyde.

The part of Jekyll's psyche which he has repressed to an unhealthy degree is his Id (his basal 'animal-like' desires). Hyde is symbolic of Jekyll's Id.

Repression within Victorian society is also seen in the characters of Utterson, Enfield and Lanyon but to a much lesser extent.

Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde

Descriptions of violence

Stevenson uses **restrained** and **formal language** when describing horrific events. This was to make sure he didn't break any indecency laws. This is ironic as even when writing the novella Stevenson's creativity was constrained by Victorian society's rules around literature.



The graphic violence is described with a **restrained formal tone** which is seen in the matter of fact descriptions of **“the man trampled calmly”** and **“something displeasing”**. The lack of description means the reader is forced to imagine and embellish the events themselves, leading to potentially more horrific images being created in the minds of the reader.

In contrast to this restrained description of violence, the murder of Carew is especially brutal. The **metaphor “storm of blows”** and the **auditory imagery “audibly shattered”** are graphically violent, demonstrating Hyde's true nature. The violence which has suddenly erupted from Hyde implies that he is a concentrated form of everything Jekyll has repressed. Indeed, it could be interpreted that Hyde's violence is a product of the repressive, upper class Victorian society.

Hyde as a release from repression

In the final chapter, Dr Jekyll explains how he felt he had **“concealed [his] pleasures”** in society. He creates Hyde as a release from this repression. He references the **atmosphere of repression** he was born into, and mentions how **“indeed the worst of my faults was a certain impatient gaiety of disposition, such as has made the happiness of many”**, suggesting **repression is a societal issue** not just one personal to his own character.



Other characters

Mr Utterson

Mr Utterson is described as “**cold, scanty and embarrassed**”, typical **traits of a repressed individual**. Throughout the novella, it becomes evident that he channels his passions into his investigation as well as his profession.

