

# AQA English Literature GCSE

Jekyll and Hyde: Themes  
*Secrecy & Reputation*



## Secrecy and Reputation

Stevenson creates a **suspicious atmosphere** in which characters are **forced to keep secrets out of fear of their reputation being ruined**. It is clear that the characters in the novella hold their reputation dear to them and fear for it being tarnished.

By including secrecy as a key theme which is woven throughout the narrative, Stevenson is **heightening tension**. It makes the experiments Jekyll is conducting to be more dangerous as there is more at stake if they go wrong.

### Secrets

There is a tension throughout the text as the reader knows that Jekyll's secrets would ruin his reputation if they are exposed to society. In Victorian society a **man's secrets could be used to ruin him**.

Enfield recalls threatening to expose Hyde to the whole of London as an alternative to killing him. Stevenson uses **olfactory imagery** (images linked to smell) in the **metaphor** **"make his name stink from one end of London to the other"** to show how Jekyll's reputation could be tarnished. As he was well known in society it is evident the whole of London would find out what he had done.

The novella is presented to be set in a **climate of secrecy** by Stevenson's use of the **metaphor** **"I feel very strongly about putting questions; it partakes too much of the style of the day of judgment. You start a question, and it's like starting a stone. You sit quietly on the top of a hill; and away the stone goes, starting others..."**. Stevenson is presenting the idea that asking untoward questions leads to a cascading effect throughout society which causes all reputation to be destroyed.

The use of **colour imagery** and **antithesis** between **"Dr. Jekyll grew pale"** and **"blackness"** in **"The large handsome face of Dr. Jekyll grew pale to the very lips and there came a blackness about his eyes. 'I do not care to hear more,' said he. 'This is a matter I thought we had agreed to drop'"** highlights a damaging transformation as well as a need to keep it a secret.

### Blackmail

Utterson later fears that **Hyde is blackmailing Jekyll with his secrets**. It has commonly been asserted that Utterson assumes that Jekyll may have entered a relationship with Hyde and Hyde is threatening to reveal this to ruin Jekyll's reputation.

Utterson states **"It turns me cold to think of this creature stealing like a thief to Harry's bedside"**.



- The **metaphor** “*turns me cold*” shows the severity of the implications of this accusation and the **animalistic connotations** of “*creature*” further highlights the criminality of the act and the need to keep it a secret.

In stating “*I cannot say that I care what becomes of Hyde; I am quite done with him. I was thinking of my own character, which this hateful business has rather exposed*”, Jekyll attempts to **dissociate himself from Hyde**. Stevenson also heightens the reader’s curiosity here by ambiguously referring to “*this hateful business*”.

Stevenson creates a particularly jarring effect by showing that Jekyll has given up in “*I wish you to judge for me entirely... I have lost confidence in myself*”. This shows that he no longer cares about retaining his reputation which would be uncharacteristic of a Victorian gentleman.

In “*He had his death-warrant written legibly upon his face*”, Stevenson shows that the ramifications of Lanyon discovering the truth led him to be at the point of death. Repetition of “*h*” and “*w*” sounds emphasise the difficulty Lanyon is in.

#### Narrative plot

Secrets can also be used to **manipulate the reader’s perspective** on the narrative plot. Within the text the reader becomes aware of the sequence of events at the same time as Utterson. This means **the realisation that Hyde is an extension of Jekyll shocks the reader at the same time as Mr Utterson**.

