OCR English Literature GCSE

Jekyll and Hyde: Themes
Duality

Duality

The theme of duality is one of the most prominent in the text. The novella is concerned with how an upstanding member of society can become a savage criminal. Stevenson shocks the reader by first presenting Jekyll and Hyde as two separate characters and then revealing that they are the same person. This shows how **a person can simultaneously possess conflicting personalities.**

The theme of duality is not confined only to the characters of the novella; Stevenson presents a Victorian London divided between strictly defined 'reputable' areas which are in close proximity to areas of poverty. Through his use of the theme of duality, Stevenson manipulates growing contemporary fears of **human nature's capacity for evil.**

"All human beings, as we meet them, are commingled out of good and evil". Here, the world *"commingled"* is the merging of two words 'combined' and 'mingled' to emphasise how it is impossible for humans to be only good or only evil, there will always be aspects of both in everyone's personality. Dr Jekyll reflects further on human nature by stating that *"man is not truly one, but truly two"*.

Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde

Dr Jekyl and Mr Hyde is the most obvious **form of duality** within the text. **There is conflict between Dr Jekyll's innermost desires and his outward presentation of himself.** This duality results in the creation of a different person: Mr Hyde.

The term *"duality of purpose"* shows that Jekyll is **divided between his duties as an upstanding member of society and his basal instincts**.

Stevensons uses **juxtaposing imagery** to emphasise the **disparity** between the **morals** of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde. Mr Hyde is described as *"that child of Hell had nothing human; nothing lived in him but fear and hatred"*. Here, *"child"* has **connotations of innocence** which is **juxtaposed** with the idea of *"hell"* which is a

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cess-pit of sin and is **symbolic of corruption and evil**. The observation that Mr Hyde *"had nothing human"* evokes fear and hatred in a contemporary reader who would have been terrified of the idea of 'devolution'.

Stevenson shows that the duality of human nature cannot be isolated through his use of **antithesis** in *"Even as good shone upon the countenance of the one, evil was written broadly and plainly on the face of the other"*. The **juxtaposition between good and evil** implies that the two elements are in a **delicate equilibrium**.

Stevenson's description of Jekyll and Hyde emphasises the difference between the two men: *"[The] man was a fellow that nobody could have to do with, a really damnable man; and the person that drew the cheque is the very pink of proprieties, celebrated too, and one of your fellows who do what they call good".* The description consists of a single sentence separated only by a semicolon. The cruelty present also in Jekyll's behaviour is demonstrated by the **plosive alliteration** used in *"pink of proprieties".*

Dr Jekyll starts to lose control over Mr Hyde which suggests that there is **fluidity** between the state of **being good and bad**: *"I had gone to bed Henry Jekyll, I had awakened Edward Hyde".* Here the **verb** *"awakened"* alludes to an underlying, deeper association between the two.

One of Jekyll's closing remarks was *"this too, was myself"*. This shows his awareness of the **duality in human nature**, alongside his admittance of his commitment to "*a profound duplicity of life*".

This would be a good place to include your personal opinion: do you respect Jekyll for his self awareness here?

Exam Tip

Whilst the character of Dr Jekyll is the most obvious example of duality in the text, it is important to make it clear to the examiner that you are aware that **Hyde is not a separate character to Jekyll**. Many people have interpreted the text to mean that when Jekyll takes the potion, he still thinks as Jekyll. However, he is able to act without guilt as Mr Hyde.

Duality within the setting

Stevenson's description of London (which is reminiscent of his contemporary Edinburgh) **heightens the sense of duality** within the text. At the beginning of the novella, there are alternating descriptions of the city. The juxtaposition between the city having *"an air of invitation"* to buildings being *"sinister"* creates a backdrop for the conflict between good and evil in the characters.

Through Stevenson's use of **structure** and **language**, the **duality of the city** is explored, particularly through contrasting the old town and the new town. Can you find more examples of how he has done this?

Literary techniques

Stevenson uses a **third person narrator** as well as Jekyll and Lanyon's perspective to tell the story. The **multiple narratives** due to the text's **epistolary form** not only adds to the horror of the text but also shows the reader how there are multiple ways at looking at everything.

Phrases such as *"double dose"* and *"double dealer"* point out to the reader that there is duality in everything. This is emphasised by the **alliterative consonants** used.

Other characters

Stevenson includes several characters which inhibit a form of **intrinsic duality**, such as Hyde's maid. Her description shows a conflict between **outward appearance** and **innermost voice;** *"she had an evil face, smoothed by hypocrisy: but her manners were excellent".* This **duality of good vs evil** is similar to the **conflict** between Jekyll (one's desired outermost expression of morals to society) and Hyde (one's innate repressed desires, that exceed the bounds of society). Yet here the two are **bound within the same person**.

Enfield is also potentially involved in dubious activities as he references in the first chapter that he was returning at *"about three o'clock of a black winter morning"*. You could also say that this behaviour is happening at night/in the dark which **symbolises secrecy through the obscurity of darkness**. The reader's associations with the **colour imagery** used in *"black"* would cause them to be suspicious of Mr Enfield who appears to be hiding something under the guise of darkness.