

Dr. Jekyll's Closet by Elaine Showalter

Presented By: Alex Avila, Quin Hoffman, Savannah Keown, Andrea Millan-Arcila, and Kyle Woodruff

1. What is the thesis or primary claim of the essay?

"Elaine Showalter reads *Jekyll and Hyde* as a narrative of male homosexuality, and then goes on to consider issues of gender in the novella's real-world parallels and in its twentieth-century adaptations" (Showalter 1)

2. Which context or contexts are most important for the essay you are presenting?

Victorian-era understanding of gender and sexuality in consideration of the scientific insights, social, and legal ramifications of the time; Stevenson's alleged real-life desire to live a double life; Double life ideals existing in Jekyll & Hyde both as the text is published and within the original manuscripts; The influence of Jekyll and Hyde on Late 20th century films, novels, and science within the context of their respective social norms.

3. What are the author's methodological assumptions?

Showalter assumes that Stevenson was gay and projects his sexuality onto the plot, characters, and themes of his writing. While Showalter makes a compelling case, using contemporary scientific and social paradigms, along with personal details of Stevenson's own life in order to parallel his suspected mannerisms with those of a stereotypical gay man.

4. How does the author construct his or her argument?

Showalter presents her argument by weaving in historical context with insights into Stevenson's personal life and evidence from the text. She begins by introducing historical happenings closely related to the themes in Jekyll and Hyde, then delves into Stevenson's personal life, making connections to the text, drawing conclusions on Stevenson's curiosity and internal struggles.

- **Example:**

Fact of the Novel: The characters are middle-aged bachelors who have no relationships with women except servants.

Source: Critic Alice Brown states that Mr. Stevenson "is a boy who has no mind to play with girls."

Showalter Argues: Jekyll and Hyde's intimacy is conveyed instead through male names, bodies, and psyches.

Textual evidence: "Man is not truly one, but truly two."

Conclusion: Unable to pair off with either woman or another man, Jekyll divides himself and finds his only mate in his double, Edward Hyde. Jekyll is thus both odd and even, both single and double.

5. What are some of the key pieces of evidence the author uses? Do they convince you of the validity of the author's claims?

Showalter uses literature, societal norms, in addition to the scientific and medical understandings of the Victoria-era.

- The cultural phenomenon of homosexuality - Showalter backgrounds various laws surrounding criminalizing homosexuality during Stevenson's life.
 - "For most middle-class inhabitants of this world, homosexuality represented a double life, in which a respectable daytime world often involving marriage and family, existed alongside a night world of homoeroticism" (Showalter 2)
- Male hysteria - Showalter connects medical and scientific literature of the time.
 - "timid and fearful men, whose gaze is neither lively nor piercing, but rather, soft, poetic, and languorous. Coquettish and eccentric, they prefer ribbons and scarves to hard manual labor."- Emile Batault's observational description of hysterical men in a psych ward.
- Painting of Stevenson by John Singer Sargent - Stevenson thought the painting was lovely but refused to display it in public or private. His reaction speaks to Showalter's assertion that Stevenson craved a double life.
 - The painting was "too eccentric to be exhibited. I am at the one extreme corner; my wife, in this wild dress, and looking like a ghost, is at the extreme other end... All this is touched in lovely, with that witty touch of Sargent's; but of course, it looks dam queer as a whole."- Stevenson on the painting of himself and his wife.

6. How would you characterize the style of the essay, and does that style suit the aims of the essay?

The core language is clear, straight forward which helps Showalter make their case and show their understanding and analysis of the homosexual lens and narrative they find in Stevenson's work.

- Use of Stevenson's original text to highlight her reading and communicate her analysis in an accessible way:
 - "In another scene, he shares an intimate evening with his clerk Mr. Guest, his own confidant; at least "there was no man from whom he kept fewer secrets." Perhaps because his own life is so involved with repression and fantasy, Utterson becomes "enslaved" to the mystery of Hyde: "If he be Mr. Hyde ... I shall be Mr. Seek.'" (Showalter 6).

- Use of technical language, breaking it down to reinforce their argument and fit and frame their article:
 - "Indeed, the *fin de siècle* was the golden age of literary and sexual doubles. "Late Victorian duality," writes Karl Miller in *Doubles*, "may be identified with the dilemmas, for males, of a choice between male and female roles, or of a possible union of such opposites. The Nineties School of Duality framed a dialect and a dialectic, for the love that dared not speak its name—for the vexed question of homosexuality and bisexuality" (Showalter 2).

7. What is your own assessment of the article? Does it have a strength or weakness that stands out to you?

- Kyle's Assessment: I was underwhelmed with Showalter's comparisons to 20th-century adaptations. Some of the areas where she goes into detailing the films inspired by Jekyll & Hyde could have used more analysis or additional information as to why the choices were made to adapt the project in the way they did (more information on the norms of those times). I felt the article ended abruptly and did not fully wrap up or dig into the influence of real-world medicine in the United States.
- Savannah's Assessment: I think that Showalter's evidence is great, but her comparisons to the modern adaptations make the argument feel somewhat forced. Given the context and background of Stevenson and the period he wrote in, her argument is strong, but it fails in making that point last past the Victorian era in a way that stands out or convinces me thoroughly. While Jekyll and Hyde can obviously be examined with a fine-tooth comb to create an argument about homosexuality during that time, anything beyond that falls flat.
- Quin's Assessment: Showalter's analysis of the text and their roping in other texts relevant to the time of Stevenson's writing is well done. One key example is using *Psychopathia Sexualis*, to help further the homosexual lense to the core text. The analysis of the other forms of *J&H* does feel forced and hurts the core argument centered on the duality of Stevenson's hidden homosexuality.
- Andrea's Assessment: The way she forms her argument is quite powerful as she uses appropriate evidence to advance her argument. However, her methods are also problematic. Her assumptions about Stevenson's sexuality and biased speculations cause her to handpick evidence to advance her thesis. While her later use of different film adaptations corresponds to her analysis of different centuries of psychoanalytic interests, it also takes away from the strength of the beginning of her argument.

- Alex's Assessment: I believe Showalter's strengths are that she maintains a very objective view throughout and allows her voice and personality to permeate through the pages. It is informative but also engaging work. Where it lacks is, once again, her assumptions of Stevenson's own life, which feels as though she might have been leaving some details out in order to make her case more compelling.

8. Are there particular features of the article that might make it a useful model for students in this class?

- Uses integrated quotes to enhance her analysis and provides a smooth transition from the source material to her argument:
 - "In another scene, he shares an intimate evening with his clerk Mr. Guest, his own confidant; at least "there was no man from whom he kept fewer secrets." Perhaps because his own life is so involved with repression and fantasy, Utterson becomes "enslaved" to the mystery of Hyde: "If he be Mr. Hyde ... I shall be Mr. Seek." He begins to haunt the "by street" near Jekyll's house and to have rape fantasies of a faceless figure who opens the door to the room where Jekyll lies sleeping, pulls back the curtains of the bed, and forces Jekyll to rise and do his bidding" (Showalter 6)
- Introducing Stevenson and his interests before analyzing the text, establishing trust with her reader before presenting her analysis:
 - "In an essay on dreams, he described his passionate aim to "find a body, a vehicle for that strong sense of man's double being" which he had felt as a student in Edinburgh when he dreamed of leading "a double life—one of the day, one of the night." (Showalter 2)
- Provides relevant era-specific background and definitions to make the text accessible for her readers
 - "In representing the effects of splitting upon the male body, Stevenson drew upon the advanced medical science of his day" (Showalter 10)
 - "As a number of scholars have noted, the homosexual significance of "queer" had entered English slang by 1900. "'Odd,' 'queer,' 'dark,' 'fit,' 'nervous,'" notes Karl Miller" (Showalter 8)
 - "Finally, the image draws upon the Victorian homosexual trope of the left hand of illicit sexuality." (Showalter 12)