

Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde - Critical Reflections

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English IV - Honors

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That was amazing! That was terrible! That sucked eggs! That was awesome! Statements of evaluation like these seem to be as natural as breathing oxygen, and we often make them without thinking. Usually, they are without much consequence—we make them, register them and move on. However, what happens when persuasion is on the line? What about when the actions and reactions of others are on the line? What about when money, a job, a promotion, or an acceptance to the school of your dreams hangs in the sticky web strands of an evaluative critique? These are the times it makes sense to have proof for the statements. This means that we should practice providing evidence for our critical evaluations all the time—even when simply reporting our opinions about a movie or a book we read. Yes, ladies and gents...SPES applies even to such seemingly mundane, trivial activities such as evaluating the effectiveness of an opening scene to a book or a movie.

That said, we are going to turn our critical crosshairs in Robert Louis Stevenson's direction. According to the film review site MORIA, Stevenson's dualistic dynamite tale of a man who spirals downward into his sin-stained soul has been adapted to television or movie screens over 30 times, making it the most adapted horror tale in history of cinematography (MORIA). Now not all of these adaptations have been heralded with equal critical acclaim. Many have been little more than self-indulgent flops, simply rehashing the same, tired plot with no more insight into the mind(s) of Jekyll/Hyde, or even into their famous author, Stevenson himself. As a class, we have already read, discussed, and tested on the novel. Today, we are going to exercise our first amendment protected right to speak freely about our perceptions and insights into several of the video versions. The first one we shall view is the 1920 silent-film version, followed by the 1931 adaptation, which offers an explanation for the senseless murder of Sir Danvers Carew (it has something to do with a certain gender that the original novel lacks). The third version emerged in 2007, and radically veers from the text in setting, and, some would argue, theme. The proliferation of female characters may be a point of criticism for some, especially when compared to the absence of any significant female figures in the original 1886 text, and the wholly extraneous injection of one in the 1931 screen adaptation.

While we are viewing these clips, look for your initial opinion about what you see. It is most certainly a starting point. But go on to ask yourself the following evaluative questions:

- What was my gut response to what I just watched?
- What was effective about the scene?
- What was weak?
- What was spot-on – just like the text?
- What was conspicuously different?
- What worked about the scenes?
- What could have been improved?
- How may the original intended audience have perceived the scene?
- Why may the scene(s) not work well for a modern audience?

You will turn this in at the end of today's class! Remember: I am looking for original thinking and insight, not simply a regurgitation of thoughts I feed you. Look. Think. Write.

Link 1: 1920 DJMH version: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kjQaAK5Vof4> start at 24.00 and watch the transformation

Link 2: 1931 DJMH version: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GynMi0E7B5g> watch the entire transformation

Link 3: 2007 DJMH version: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uDQ_WwbTRg0 opening scene of Jekyll (transformation)