



ReAction!
Chemistry in the Movies

Mark Griep &
Marjorie Mikasen

Chemistry Movies Blog
by Mark Griep,

sponsored by Oxford University Press and the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation
at tinyurl.com/chemmoviesblog

***Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1908) by Selig Polyscope**

The 1908 movie titled *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* by the Selig Polyscope Company of Chicago is widely accepted to be the first movie version of this story. It is also considered to be a lost film and no film scholar has ever reported seeing it. Nevertheless, the narrative of this Jekyll and Hyde adaptation is available in the lengthy synopsis published on pages 194-195 of the 7 March 1908 issue of *The Moving Picture World*. It is even possible that studio owner William Selig wrote this one himself because each movie studio provided its own synopses. The summary begins: "Presented in strict accordance with the original book, as to scenery, costumes and dramatic cast, involving each detail of pose, gesture and expression." In this case, "original book" means the script for the stage version. In fact, the movie is structure like a stage version. It begins with a curtain rising and ends with the curtain falling.

The first act takes place in the garden vicarage, where Dr. Jekyll woos Alice, the Vicar's daughter. He transforms because "he is irresistibly addicted to a drink of his own mixture" and then attacks Alice. When the Vicar interferes, Hyde kills him. The second act takes place in Mr. Utterson's London law office, where Jekyll feels remorse and envisions a noose around his neck. This is apparently followed by some comedy that is not described in the review (according to the stage script, it is a love scene between an Irish policeman and Jekyll's cook). The third act takes place in Dr. Lanyon's office, Jekyll's medical friend. At midnight, Lanyon sees an ogre on the portico of his building. The ogre is Hyde who enters his office, takes a drink of the formula, and astonishes Lanyon by transforming to Jekyll. The final act takes place in Dr. Jekyll's laboratory, where there is a "last struggle for the supremacy of his real being." Just as Jekyll wins, Alice pays him a visit. Her presence reminds him that he killed her father, which grieves him. After she leaves, he takes the formula to transform himself into Hyde who then "poisons himself to kill the Dr. Jekyll whom he hated."

Luella Forepaugh and George F. Fish published their moralistic melodrama script titled *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, or, A Mis-spent Life* in 1897. It contains the complete stage directions, lighting, and special effects that were used at Forepaugh's Theater in Philadelphia. On page 3 of the script, the transformations of Dr. Jekyll to Mr. Hyde and back are described. Dr. Jekyll was to wear a long-haired wig and, during the transformation to Hyde, the actor was supposed to crouch down and writhe while pulling the wig forward over his forehead and eyes until it formed a tangled mess. Jekyll was also supposed to wear a Prince Albert coat with a pleat down the center that was unraveled by pulling a string so that even his clothes were altered.

In the Forepaugh and Fish stage play, Jekyll is saintly enough to be engaged to the Vicar's daughter and Hyde is evil enough to kill the Vicar. The simple good/evil duality of this melodrama made it very popular among regional stock companies and it is likely that many people were familiar with this version.