



YA Café Podcast

Episode 14: *Jek/Hyde*

24 May 2018

- Danielle: [00:02](#) Welcome to the YA Cafe where we share conversations about books for teachers, readers, and caffeine addicts everywhere. On today's episode, we'll be talking about *Jek/Hyde* by Amy Ross. Grab a mug of your favorite beverage, friends, and let's talk books.
- Ad: [00:17](#) This podcast is made possible by Nouvelle ELA teaching resources. Find secondary ELA resources to engage and inspire like an "Intro to Shakespeare Escape Room". Nouvelle ELA, something new.
- Amanda: [00:33](#) Welcome y'all! As always, our first segment will be spoiler free so you can stick around even if you haven't checked out the new novel yet. I'm Amanda Thrasher
- Danielle: [00:37](#) and I'm Danielle Hall, an 8th and 9th grade English teacher and I blog at Teachnouvelle.com. Amy Ross's novel "*Jek/Hyde*" offers a new vision of the gothic novella, "*The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*" by Robert Louis Stevenson. In the midwestern town of London, science and research loom large. Lulu and Jek have been best friends forever but he's recently become distant, closing himself off in his lab. He's made a new friend, a bad boy, Hyde who seems to push their usual parties out of control. Lulu's hearing strange rumors about Hyde, and she begins to worry for Jek's safety ... dot, dot, dot, and her own feelings.
- Amanda: [01:14](#) That's very good. Excellent ellipsis. *laughter* So just a heads up for everybody going into this podcast, uh, this book was written by a friend of mine. I think it's a great book and we really enjoyed it and wanted to talk about it, but we also wanted to be upfront about it going in so people like "Mrawh! Nepotism in book reviews" *laughter* but, but we thought it was a great book so we wanted to talk about it.
- Danielle: [01:36](#) Reviewers talk just like that, "Nepotism in book reviews"
- Amanda: [01:40](#) Just like that. Everyone knows it.
- Danielle: [01:41](#) So the fact that this is set in the Midwest, is really interesting because, you know, we do have these stereotypes about the Midwest and the sort of technological advances that happen or don't happen there. And so I thought it was very interesting to hear about this town that's coming up, but also have the perspective of the looming corporation and how it contributes to the town and the town's economy, but you know, also controls the townspeople.
- Amanda: [02:07](#) I definitely agree and I thought that it really played into sort of the many fantasy aspects of it because for so many students reading this, this town would in a lot

of ways be a fantasy, like, their high school is extremely well-funded. *laughter* People are very interested in science and math and like, spend a lot of time really cultivating those skills. So for a lot of students this really adds into the fantasy of who lives in this world. So I liked, I liked a lot with the omnipresent shadow of the research organization and how that impacted Jek (so, Jek is obviously the Jek/Hyde character).

- Danielle: [02:37](#) And so this is of course a retelling of the classic tale by Robert Louis Stevenson, so there's this feeling going into it, you know, like we know what's going to happen and how can we make this interesting because, like, so we've split this show into spoiler and not spoiler, but what is a spoiler with a retelling that everybody knows, right?
- Amanda: [02:37](#) Right.
- Danielle: [02:58](#) So if you're new to the show, we do have a spoiler section later. So right now you can hang out with us even if you haven't read the book yet, but like, even if you've never read "The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde", you have some notion that these two halves are the same person, and I can tell you that as a person who has never read "Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde". Have you read it?
- Amanda: [03:22](#) No, I haven't read it either.
- Danielle: [03:24](#) But we still have this, this trope, you know, we have the Gollum/Smeagol thing which we'll come back to later, and we have a lot of instances of this in pop culture. So Amanda, how did this book fulfill your expectations?
- Amanda: [03:37](#) So I think it did a really wonderful job of building this darkened sort of relationship between these characters. Like, even before you factor Hyde into the equation, uh, it is clear that there is something unhealthy in the relationship between Lulu and Jek. Like, even though there's these trials, they're these childhood friends, um, there's clearly like places where Jek is willing to go, where Lulu is not. So ...
- Danielle: [03:37](#) Yeah.
- Amanda: [04:00](#) It's introduced very early in the book that Jek, um, creates these hallucinogenic drugs and tries them out on his classmates, which is another one of those things that would only happen in this place that's surrounded by a research facility. You have that happening and Lulu was clearly not comfortable with it, but this is even before any of the Hyde character starts to appear and this is already something that's definitely informing their relationship in, uh, kind of a dark way that Lulu doesn't love. But she's still there for him because she loves Jek and that, that having that push and pull to start with, uh, really I think informed everything that happened later.
- Danielle: [04:34](#) Yeah. And the other push and pull that exists with these two characters is that Jek's family is wealthy and Lulu's family is not. Right? And so, you know, not only is there this wealth component, but Jek is the smartest person in their class.

He's at the top of the class, um, and so Lulu kind of wonders at the beginning of the book if he's squandering his potential by creating these drugs.

- Amanda: [04:59](#) But he's also making a lot of money at it.
- Danielle: [05:01](#) Yeah. He's making a lot of money. He's being successful and, um, we can clearly see the influence of the corporation. Like, he has these ideas and he gives them to his mother who takes them to her work, which, you know, she works for the corporation, so Jek is simultaneously working with the corporation and also rebelling against it by doing these essentially illegal experiments.
- Amanda: [05:27](#) Well they're not illegal though, right? Like, that was his whole thing because they're not, I'm not sure where the gray area was. They were in a gray area legally.
- Danielle: [05:35](#) He does have like, okay, so I found this to be a source of humor about the book that he has consent forms that people sign when they show up at his parties. So he has this whole clinical trial ambiance to his house parties and he likes to say that he's the scientist in the situation, but he's also like our basic supplier, right?
- Amanda: [05:56](#) Yeah. No, I definitely think there's a lot of that there. And then that whole, like the whole party scene was weird and I think it's, I think it's really interesting that we see these things through Lulus perspective because she's done this before and even though she doesn't love it, like she has played the role of taking notes.
- Danielle: [05:56](#) She's our DD by the way
- Amanda: [06:13](#) But, but they're not driving. She's like the Designated Note-Taker
- Danielle: [06:13](#) DNT.
- Amanda: [06:18](#) Like, she goes around and ask people like, "How are you feeling on this hallucinogenic drug?" And it, it certainly, I think that was really interesting thing because that has to happen with drugs, right? Like, drugs don't just appear, somebody does this and that's not something I'd ever thought about really. So skipping onto the Hyde character, uh, what are your overall thoughts on him?
- Danielle: [06:35](#) So, you know, Hyde is traditionally the villain and we're not supposed to love him, even from the get go, um, but he appears early on in the novel as sort of this shady character of gossip. Like, we hear about him through whispers and we don't come face to face with him for a long time and we just hear about him. People talk about him, no two stories agree, um, but I definitely liked this physical manifestation of, of the tension that already existed between Jek and Lulu. How about you? What did you think, Amanda?
- Amanda: [07:12](#) Oh, I thought the Hyde character was, um, really, he was really written definitely like in this very sexy way. *laughter* Like, he's clearly very magnetic, uh, but what I really liked about it is that he was, he had this sort of magnetism and compelling character, but no one could say what he looked like. And I really liked that because I really liked the, just some form of attraction that's because

of like, his swagger, like the things that he says or things like that, but all the characters meeting him, like couldn't even say what race he was, like how tall he was. They just had this vague impression of him, you know, this dark, interesting kind of person. Uh, and I really liked that. I thought it said a lot about, like, desire and Hyde I think for most people is like a manifestation of their desires, but what they don't want to admit that they want.

- Danielle: [07:12](#) Mhmm.
- Amanda: [07:56](#) And so the fact that people could not, uh, like, describe him later definitely informs that whole, like, 'this is what you want, but you don't want to say that you want it' and that, that comes back later.
- Danielle: [08:06](#) So do you think this is unreliable testimony? Like, do you think that they could articulate those things if they had wanted to?
- Amanda: [08:14](#) No, I don't think they could. Like, you heard the characters just struggling, like even those that didn't have the darker encounters with Hyde still struggled to say anything about him. Like what race he was, how tall he was, these basic physical characteristics that you wouldn't think would be difficult. Like, they couldn't recall it and I think that it wasn't that they didn't want to, that they actually couldn't.
- Danielle: [08:34](#) Yeah. So I think that this brings up an excellent opportunity to talk about the possibilities that exist in print that don't exist on screen.
- Amanda: [08:34](#) Oh yeah.
- Danielle: [08:44](#) Because you know, if we were watching this as a movie or as a TV show (and we love us some TV), but if we were watching this as a TV show, there would be an actor playing Hyde, and whether or not the characters could describe the actor, the audience would know for sure what he looked like. But as a reader we don't know and even, you know, eventually Lulu does encounter him, but she's the narrator so we can't trust her because she's afflicted by the same desire not afflicted by desire,
- Amanda: [08:44](#) Afflicted
- Danielle: [09:17](#) *laughter* But like, she has the same problems and inability to articulate as everyone else does and you know, that's to be expected. And so we do have this whole like, vampire thing going on, right? Like, there are no actual vampires. I mean like
- Amanda: [09:17](#) *laughter* To clarify
- Danielle: [09:35](#) In this dark, kind of sexy, but you know, possibly illegal atmosphere. It's kind of the same thing as liking vampire books.
- Amanda: [09:45](#) Yeah. And so I also think that because Jek/Hyde is gothic Victorian literature - so I am not super well versed in gothic Victorian literature - but I feel like this

translates really well to a modern sensibility of that aesthetic. Like, it wouldn't work to have gothic Victorian literature in the same way. I think this is very much like the point of retelling. I think that this is updating the story, but keeping the spirit of it in a really interesting way.

- Danielle: [10:11](#) I definitely think so too, and in her blurb on the books, Suzanne Young calls it "A fresh take on a classic story about the good and evil that lives inside of us all. Intriguing and imaginative." And it definitely is both of those things. And with that, friends, we'll take our first break and when we come back we'll share about Things We Like A Latte, then we'll return to our discussion of "Jek/Hyde" by Amy Ross and dig a little deeper.
- Ad: [10:53](#) Support for this podcast comes from Audible. Audible is offering listeners of the YA Cafe a free 30 day trial and a free audio book to get you started. Y'all, I love audio books. I listen to them all the time, whether I'm grocery shopping, or in the car or on a walk with Padfoot. It's just one more way to get more books in my day. Check us out at audibletrial.com/YACafe. Happy reading!
- Amanda: [11:22](#) Welcome back y'all it's time for Things We Like A Latte. Danielle, what's your brew of choice this week?
- Danielle: [11:24](#) My brew of choice this week is a book called "Girls Made of Glass and Snow" by Melissa Bashardoust, and this book is inspired by Snow White, inspired by some Russian fairytales, it's definitely got a fairytale vibe, but it's less of a traditional retelling. And it's really cool because it is a double perspective book between Mina who is our evil stepmother/Queen archetype and Lynette who was our Princess archetype, and we actually have a split perspective between Minas' teenage self, (which you know, is in the past, I guess). And then Lynette's teenage self, which is our present. And so these two young women are finding their way together and building their understanding of the world and their relationship with each other. And it was just a really delightful read in terms of characterization and atmosphere and definitely a great choice for a classroom library. How about you, Amanda?
- Amanda: [12:26](#) Um, so Danielle and I are doing this challenge called "Read the World" and we're trying to read a book from every country. Uh, so the book I just finished, I mean finished it about a week ago, uh, it was from Angola and it was called the "Book of Chameleons" by Jose Eduardo Agualusa, and it was wonderful. It was just delightfully weird and layered and I'm really not sure how to describe it. Sort of a mystery and a lot of really good characterization happens in very few words, um, it's a short read, it's very fast-paced. I definitely recommend it if you're looking to dig into something with a lot of, a lot of little pieces to pick apart a lot of layers, but also very accessible all the same. So that was, uh, "The Book of Chameleons" by Agualusa.
- Danielle: [13:06](#) So we're going to take a quick break and when we come back we'll return to our discussion on Jek/Hyde by Amy Ross. The rest of the show may contain spoilers so if you're leaving us here, please keep in touch on Instagram and Twitter @yacafepodcast. We'll be back after this quick break.

- Amanda: [13:38](#) Welcome back to the YA Cafe. We're continuing our discussion on Jek/Hyde and if you haven't read this yet, we want to warn you again that this segment will contain spoilers
- Danielle: [13:38](#) Spoilers!
- Amanda: [13:38](#) and more drugs.
- Danielle: [13:49](#) *laughter* All right, so Amanda, you wanted to talk about this Jek being the 'nice guy' thing that occurs in the book?
- Amanda: [13:54](#) Yeah, so this book actually came out before the whole #metoo movement that we're in the middle of right now I uh, and I thought it was really interesting to read Lulus' reactions to hearing about all of these things that Jek is doing. Like Jek is, you know, funding these parties were Hyde is doing these terrible things, are rumored to do these terrible things and even though Lulu already knows a lot about the darkness of Jek's character, like she knows that he gives drugs to classmates and like she, she has like a lot of insight about who Jek is and so she still looks at this and says, "Oh no, Jek would never do that". And you see a lot of that with people. I mean, I think it's lessening now that people are realizing that never looks good, but you had a lot of people who were like, "Oh no, I know this person, they're my friend and they would never do this". Like, so I thought that that was an interesting parallel. But also, you know, Lulu is 17-year-old girl so she gets a pass this time.
- Danielle: [15:00](#) Yeah, and she's deeply loyal and, you know, her loyalty stands in the way of her willingness to accept this truth about Jek's involvement with Hyde and you know, she has her own encounters with Hyde and she is forced to come to terms with that quite quickly. So what did you think about those encounters?
- Amanda: [15:15](#) Um I, I don't think they played into the whole #metoo part of it, I think they play more into what we were talking about earlier. Uh, because when we were talking earlier about how like Lulu has these desires that she does not want to voice, even to herself. And you see that in her narration and when she has these interactions with Hyde she still doesn't want to admit to herself how much she enjoyed it, and things like that.
- Danielle: [15:35](#) Yeah. So I do want to jump in here and say that the book definitely deserves a trigger warning for dubious consent.
- Amanda: [15:35](#) Yes.
- Danielle: [15:41](#) And we referenced this in the spoiler-free section of the show that there are these dark encounters with Hyde and when we say that we mean that like people, classmates, students, who have taken these drugs, they have sexual, sometimes nonsexual, um, encounters with Hyde but, but they classify them as like, "Whoa, I can't believe that happened at the party last weekend". And so there's definitely a question of consent in terms that these are like minors who are impaired and cannot consent to what is happening.

Amanda: [16:12](#) I mean, you, you say minors, but also remember Hyde is a minor as well

Danielle: [16:17](#) Right. He is a minor as well.

Amanda: [16:20](#) So that's good as far as the trigger warning goes, yeah that's in there, but it's also not ever the, um, like the narrator in those situations.

Danielle: [16:26](#) Right. She doesn't take the drugs.

Amanda: [16:27](#) So like, I think that one of the things, well it's fair to bring it up, like it's definitely something that's in the atmosphere of the book, but it's not something that's really in your face. But you really want to talk more about Lulu and what you wanted from her.

Danielle: [16:40](#) Yeah. So at the end of the book, Lulu has the opportunity to explore her own "Hyde" and to consider for the first time, what it would look like if she were able to bring this being into existence and what this darker Lulu would be. And like, it wouldn't have been a retelling at that point, but I kind of just wanted that book like "Lulu and Hyde" or you know, whatever.

Amanda: [17:03](#) Yeah. That level was really, really read weird to me because the whole thing that happened and you know like, Jek committed suicide to kill Hyde and that was like, "This went poorly."

Danielle: [17:14](#) Right? Like, that was your model and it didn't go well.

Amanda: [17:18](#) Yeah. So while I agree, I think that was really interesting, I thought it was a weird line of thought for Lulu to have after watching her best friend die.

Danielle: [17:25](#) Right? I agree. I think this would have been cool as a gender swap retelling.

Amanda: [17:31](#) But I don't think, like, with what we do know with the character of Lulu, I don't, I don't think she's the one who would chase that rabbit hole down to Hyde the way that Jek did. You know?

Danielle: [17:31](#) Yeah.

Amanda: [17:38](#) Like, so I think it would have been a very different book. I'm not sure if she would have like willingly gone forward even with that mindset that she had at the end. I don't think Lulu is a character who would have that sort of, like, interest in the beginning because she didn't even love the fun drugs that Jek took all the time. And so it's hard to imagine why she would go for drastic personality-swapping things.

Danielle: [17:58](#) Yeah. So can we talk about Lulu's agency here? Because for the first part of the book I felt like, you know, she understands that there's this mystery and she thinks she's chasing it, but like do you feel that she's chasing it as much as she could have chased it?

- Amanda: [18:13](#) Yeah, I mean I think that it's also, it's very difficult to pull off both as an author, as a reader to suspend your disbelief because you know what's happening. So it's hard for us to like understand, like, were Lulu would go because we do have Jekyll and Hyde in our cultural consciousness, so we're reading this book and we're like, "Oh, it's the same person". But like, if your best friend starts acting weird, like, "Oh, it's the same person" *laughter* is not a conclusion you'd ever jump too. So yeah, I mean, I think that she was trying to unravel this mystery the best she could with the information that she had. Do you disagree? Do you think she should have done more?
- Danielle: [18:47](#) *sigh* You know, I just, I really feel like she dragged her feet in the beginning and I think that part of my feeling comes from what you're talking about where I know what's happening even before I ever open the book. And so it felt like, you know, she's walking down the dark stairs into the basement and I'm like, "What are you doing?" Or, or worse it feels like she's not walking down the dark stairs into the basement and I'm like, "Clearly there's something in the basement, you gotta go check out the basement."
- Amanda: [19:14](#) So, so really she's never going to make you happy is what you're saying.
- Danielle: [19:18](#) I guess that's true, I'm hard to please here. So like, what value do you think exists in this book? Like beyond a retelling and I'm not like *annoying voice* "What value do you see in this book?", like I'm asking, like, I always ask myself with retellings, like, "What is the value of this retelling?" "How does this push the story further?" "Were you surprised at any point?" That's my question.
- Amanda: [19:42](#) So having not read the original Jekyll and Hyde but being aware of its presence in pop culture obviously, um, I think that there was not a lot that surprised me. But I really liked that the retelling, like I liked the juxtaposition of the dark atmosphere of the story with like, the bright setting in the town.
- Danielle: [19:42](#) Yeah.
- Amanda: [19:59](#) Like I thought that this was really interesting because you think about new technology as being shiny white glass buildings like all these kinds of
- Danielle: [19:59](#) Like the Apple store,
- Amanda: [20:07](#) Right. So it's basically the Apple store. *laughter* So like having, having the ability to have, like, something this dark, and it feels like the whole book is laced with shadows, being able to have that sort of atmosphere in this setting that's so like bright and you think about it as the future and all these things. I think that it holds a lot of value because it shows there's still a lot of mysteries to human nature and a lot of darkness inside ourselves even as we turn the world into the Apple store. *laughter* So, so it's not going to go away just because we have, like, we've shined this light in a lot of dark places. We can never shine the light truly, fully inside ourselves. *laughter*

Danielle:

[20:45](#)

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