

The Modern Psychology of Human Nature in R. L. Stevenson's Dr. Jackyll and Mr. Hyde

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ABSTRACT

The present paper is concerned with the modernity of the compound structure and psycho-analysis of the main character of Robert Louis Stevenson's famous fiction Dr. Jeckyll and Mr. Hyde and the deep moral issues it raises beyond the extents of its range as an entertainment.

The development of psycho-analysis into a science, which is part of the wider and more complex change of life and people as a whole, influenced literature to produce new methods of expression, emphasis on the multiple contradictory faces of the mind of man, exposure of the inner dark depths of his desires and ambitions, and an ardent zeal to explore the internal mechanism of the work of the brain, specially the one responsible for the initiation of evil. Hence, the depth of psychological construction of a character started to form an integral part of the modern Craftsmanship of the different genres of literature, particularly the novel, and to highlight the essential features and complexity of an author's thought. This aspect has its roots back in the late period of the Victorian age and the turn of the Twentieth century when an outburst of innovations in content and form in writing stemmed from the desire to break the antithetical rigid conctcs then concerning man's ideal social image and the conceded notion of the uniformity of the tendencies of an individual being either good or evil. The revolution of the hidden being of humans also became the best appropriate vehicle for artists and thinkers to picture their dissatisfaction with the moral deterioration, dishonesty, and hollow formalism of their contemporary world. Among those was R. L. Stevenson who maintained a lifelong pre-occupation with the concealed personality of man, and a persistence to convey his views in an elevated style in essence that motivated him to forge his own artistic and ethical theories to render the ideas he contemplated in his works profound interpretations and a distinctive quality of universality.

The aim of this paper is to trace the elaborate moral and psycho-analytical themes underlying the cover of Dr. Jeckyll and Mr. Hyde as a thriller in terms of the relationship between the innermost of man and his public self, in close association with Stevenson's advanced intuition of an individual's sound way of reasoning and living and the modern basis of psycho-analysis.

The paper falls into three chapters:

Chapter one is introductory, and deals with the central concepts of Stevenson's thought and work, the various influences, and the social Victorian background that generated the main motifs of the novel, in an effort to outline the framework of the author's mind to which the subsequent arguments can be tied.

Chapter two dissects the main features of the major character of the novel, "Dr. Jekyll", and the social and psychological reasons for the genesis and motivation of the metamorphoses into "Mr Hyde", through the examination of selected representative incidents and extracts of the novel. The chapter also illuminates Stevenson's sophisticated and scientific apprehension of the psychology of the human nature by means of which he achieves extending the theme beyond his place and time.

Chapter three tackles the ideas of the duality of the personality on the Victorian and the universal levels, within the religious and the moral context.

The conclusion sums up the findings of the paper.

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I. Introduction

Robert Louis Stevenson , The Artist

Robert Louis Stevenson (1850-1894) , was a post-Victorian novelist , essayist , and poet ; with whom survived a strong romantic streak in the novel He maintained in his art , as in his life , an elusive charm that included a variety of meanings . It was full of moral and intellectual qualities , that revealed a spiritual gift in tackling psychological problems and extreme pre-occupation with the self .1

Stevenson had his own theory of art which he elaborated in his critical essays . In section one of " A Humble Remonstrance " written in (1884) , where he was remonstrating with the novelist Henry James at that time , for advocating a theory of art , which saw art as striving for as exact an imitation of life as possible. Thus, a justification could be derived to regard Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde as a more serious work of literature than merely as a short thriller .

The essence of his point of view of the novelist's art , is that it is not necessary to seek for an effect which looks lifelike . He does not dismiss efforts to write in a realistic way , but " life " is too huge , too difficult to grasp , and too complex to be at home in a work of art :

Life is monstrous , infinite, illogical, abrupt and
Poignant ; a work of art , in comparison , is neat,

finite, self contained, rational, flowing and emasculate . 2

According to this statement , art can not compete with life, but it can do things which life , by its very nature , can not. Art's province is to entertain , to charm , and to start the mind working in new directions . He stresses that the education of the mind in unexpected ways is achieved when the mind is charmed and diverted by new ideas elegantly expressed. The function of art is to simplify , to trap some small section of life and put it on paper in artificial magnification . Thus, he crystalizes his ideas in an advice, in the same essay, to a young novelist :

And as the root of the whole matter, let him bear in mind that his novel is not a transcript of life, to be judged by its exactitude; but a simplification of some side or point of life, to stand or fall by its significant simplicity . For although, in great men, working upon motives, what we observe and admire is often their complexity, yet underneath appearances the truth remains unchanged : that simplification was their method, and that simplicity is their excellence. 3

On regarding Stevenson's philosophy, Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde may have the appearance of an ordinary horror story or science – fiction that offers little, especially in our modern age, but it presents a view of life which is utterly shocking, under the surface of the easy entertainment.

Stevenson had written the story under the influence of chaotic complexities of an age of conflicting attitudes. He excelled in portraying a mental and psychological situation that raises a multitude of universal questions . Is life like this ? Are we all inhabited by a Mr. Hyde who is not in balance with our public selves, but is striving to achieve self – expression which might ultimately lead to our ruin ? Are we apt to be Jekylls, and there is a Hyde within ourselves capable of enslaving us ? And numerous other wonderings . Stevenson depicts the real inner tendencies of the Victorian mind so tactfully that it is quit applicable to any human nature all over the world, in any age. An intact combination of psychology, mythology, and beautiful art of knitting an exciting plot, lies beneath the thriller from of the story .

The Social Background of the Victorian Age

Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde was written in September and October of 1885 in the midst of various dramatic novelties invading every field : social, religious, scientific, artistic, and intellectual.

The last two decades of the nineteenth century witnessed the growth of deficiencies of the Victorian compromise. Many values in art, philosophy, and literature which had been generally respected during the Mid-Victorian age were becoming subtly altered. The consequences of the industrial revolution aroused the thought of the great minds of the age. Although advanced machinery achieved prosperity, yet, the human being paid the price for it, which resulted in serious contemplation of the responsibility attached to the making and the possession of money. Thomas Carlyle (1795-1881) fiercely attacked his age for its mechanical equation of people with money and potential profits. John Ruskin (1809-1900) and William Morris (1834-1896) were equally scathing in their attack on what was mean and ugly in the public appearance of their age, and advocated standards of artistic integrity which would create for all British people, rich and poor, a life which could be lived without suffering, physical or spiritual . 4

The late period of the nineteenth century also marks an observable decline in religious faith which the Victorians found hard to come to terms with. In public, many Victorians faced difficulty to abandon their standards of religious beliefs and attendance at worship, as they found it difficult to do other than conform to society's standards of dress and behaviour. The Victorian age was one of conformity in many ways, the Royal Family setting fashions of dress which were imitated widely, and rules of moral and ethical conduct which was held in a high esteem and regarded beyond criticism. Religious life was a major part of all of this. People were expected to go to church regularly, and to adhere to Christian criteria in their lives, but many of them failed to reconcile these public pressures with their lack of belief .

Stevenson's Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde , picks up several themes and attitudes of the age. It magnifies the beguiling notes in Victorian personality by showing how private individuals adjusted their credences and deportment to those they had to display in public. It is a prominent characteristic of Stevenson and his contemporaries to revolt and protest against the Victorian fake respectability.

The taste for melodrama and shocking literature was developing as a part of the spirit of the age at that period. In an age of conformity and decency, the emotional outlet of thrill enjoyed a fair share of attraction. Most of the novels were realistic to the point of being sordid and depressing . " The post Victorian novelist tended to detach himself from his story instead of invading it , as did Thackeray and others of his generation " 5 . Their generation was increasingly confined to cities , the physical adventure of travel was limited to the newfangled horse tram-ways and suburban railways. Their regulated and dull lives found their outlet in literature , in the second-hand danger and experience effectively . This resulted in producing famous fictional characters , such as Sir Arthur Canon Doyle's Sherlock Holmes , and

Stevenson's exciting individuals like pirates and warriors , and so many others. 6

II. The Psychology of Human Nature in Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde

Genesis and Motivation of the Metamorphoses

Stevenson present under the exterior of the grotesque , melodramatic thriller entertainment , a profound psychoanalytical insight into human condition , and a moral allegory with stern religious overtones . The picture he draws of the struggle between the co-existing good and evil within man , is ahead of his time , since all the psychological motifs behind it form most of the Twentieth Century basis of Freudian and modern psychoanalytical theories. The figures of 'Dr. Jekyll ' , and 'Mr. Hyde' are still quoted either as a caption or an illustration of some debatable point of modern schizophrenia .

Every aspect dealt with in the climactic concluding chapter of the novel , where full projection of the duality issue is given , is found in detail in modern theories . "Jekyll's Full Statement" displays the social and religious factors that motivated the psychological genesis of the problem . Stevenson starts from the very roots of environment and circumstances under which Dr. Jekyll has developed his personality and conduct ; to clarify eventually the metamorphoses he underwent .

Henry Jekyll was born to a large fortune , enjoyed social honour , middle class comforts , and the professional standing . But he was also so distanced from true communication with other men that he conducted his scientific experiments in quite a disastrous secrecy , which led to his undoing . The real tendencies that troubled a Victorian mind , and resulted in a mechanic rigid way of life are disclosed in Jekyll's words :

The worst of my faults was a certain impatient gaiety of disposition , such as has made the happiness of many , but such as I found it hard to reconcile with my imperious desire to carry my head high , and wear a more than commonly grave countenance before the public . Hence it came about that I concealed my pleasure ; ... and began to look round me , and take stock of my progress and position in the world , I stood already committed to a profound duplicity of life ... It was thus rather the exacting nature of my aspirations , than any particular degradation in my faults (that) severed in me those provinces of good and ill which divide and compound man's dual nature ... I was driven to reflect deeply and

inveterately on that hard law of life ... which lies at the root of religion , and is one of the most plentiful springs of distress . 7

[Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde
By R. L. Stevenson .]

In terms of twentieth century psycho-analysis, Stevenson sows here the seeds of what is known medically as Psychosis or insanity . that one virtually destroys himself if he so far abandons loyalty to reality, and yeild to impulses contrary to laws or social standards . These impulses become active and powerful to escape all inhibition and express themselves in a chaotic disorganized fashion regardless to any reality . A common factor to all forms of psychoses is the dereism, which is the rejection of the reality principle as a determinant of behaviour in favour of the pleasure principle . 8 Another prominent element manifest in the case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde is the schizoid personality. In it, the person is " incapable of maintaining satisfactory object relationship with the outside world, whose loves and hates were not easily transplanted from the childhood soil in which he grew, to the new requirements of the world. " 9

According to these scientific facts, Jekyll bred Hyde as a mask for his pleasures. In Mr. Hyde as Hyde, he was able to do the things and taste the pleasures on which society frowned. The Victorian society expected a code of behaviour from its public figures, and the public figures in the novel certainly live by that code. In the first place, the private society depicted there is a strictly professional one, revolving round medicine and law. Apart from Dr. Jekyll, the other characters, Utterson, Enfield, Guest and Lanyon do not seem to be indulging in the pleasures of the flesh in their gloomy, dim, foglanden neighbourhood, Soho. They seem to be comfortable, easygoing, yet they are unfulfilled, unmarried, devoted only to their careers in the context of their society.

The absence of female characters might be attributed to the nature of these men's professions since women in Stevenson's time were not allowed to practice them till the twentieth century. Secondly , very little is shown of either Utterson , Lanyon, or Jekyll at home, where they might have had a wife and family. The main focus is on the their public lives, in a strictly masculine preserved world. Moreover, each man has risen to the top of a complicated occupation and has presumably devoted long hours to it, which other men might have spent in social life leading eventually to a happy marriage. They preferred solitary life, Jekyll in his laboratory; and Utterson in his library, indulged in his law books, which left them rich, successful and lonely in their middle age .

The two female characters that appear among the masculine cast of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, are the maid who reports Hyde's murder, and the

smooth-faced hypocrite who keeps his house. Both of them are classless, placeless, and utterly of superficial roles. It is quite logical that a world like Hyde's would be found terrifying for a woman, as well as his unspecified sinister deformity.

Jekyll on the other hand, lacks the companionship of a wife, with no one to confide except his dry legal friend. He is driven to his experiments without the help of someone to tell him when to stop, or to advise him against its dangers. Under the influence of the drug, he enjoys adventurous times, while if he had a wife, he would not have needed this continual escape and stimulus. To be Hyde is to break away from the stiff monotonous respectability of life, to live a more balanced and mature life. Only hints are given of what Hyde does in nocturnal London, but it is possible that among his other activities are meetings with women, something which Jekyll seems to do without in his public life. Thus, his escape is explicable in terms of the needs of an unfulfilled man, and the lofty cover is to maintain an external polished reputation, which is important for a man in Jekyll's age, and social and scientific stature.

Man and His Alter-Ego

Stevenson makes a comment on his society through his novel, that the Victorian frame of mind pushed people like Jekyll and his circle, to live so distanced from one another. Alienation and lack of inter-personal relations which are necessary to establish a healthy intact community and personal life, isolate Jekyll from his fellow human beings. Although Utterson is a close friend to Jekyll, yet he discovers ultimately that he has never known his real inner feelings and character. But Stevenson seems to involve Jekyll himself as the real contributor to his own estrangement as he refuses any mutual exchange of points of view in discussing his experiments with Dr. Lanyon. If he had discussed his work with Lanyon instead of despising him with an accusation of rigidity of mind, then perhaps he could have been saved from self-destruction. Instead, his preoccupation with his own personality and character deepened, to be his own main source of data. He stresses these aspects and shows the results of this alienation from the normal process of discussion and argument in his " Full Statement " : saying :

I, for my part, from the nature of my life, advanced infallibly in one direction, .. only. It was on the moral side, and in my own person, that I learned to recognize the thorough and primitive duality of man; I saw that, of the two natures that contended in the field of my consciousness, even if I could rightly be said to be either, it was only because I was radically

both... It was the curse of mankind that these incongruous faggots were thus bound together – that in the agonised womb of consciousness these polar twins should continuously be struggling. 10
Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, Stevenson.

Stevenson tackles the idea of the duality of human nature and mind in a novel perspective. He indicates that man consists of two personalities, good and evil, and at a level too deep and instinctive to be eradicated. The conflict he depicts between those two elements, includes a major controversial concept of the Victorian age, which is the reconciliation between science and religion. Through Jekyll, he rejects the idea that people can be totally good and stresses that the existence of an evil part in the human character is inevitable. Man is a mixture of the two, and to assume to the public a favourable façade is at the cost of stifling the undesirable bad side. Thus, the successful honoured appearance of Jekyll, is only a cover to conceal Hyde. The extent to which the evil part is restricted and deadened depends on the depth of man's moral values. In Freudian terms, Jekyll's desire for the knowledge of his real self is explained as an expression of a desire repressed according to certain moral and social criteria. Once one's own defects are conceived, an imaginary compensation of an ideal self, known as the Ego-ideal, is sought. This Ego-ideal refuses to stay contented with one's real self, and tries to take the upper hand and construct a satisfactory norm, yet it retains certain recognizable resemblances to the real self. 11 Jekyll regarded this excessive forwardness as a defect in himself, in the sense that it deprived him of enjoying life wholeheartedly, and with less care to people and social rules. Therefore, he dug out Hyde from his innerself and found through him the satisfaction he lacked. Despite the extreme contradiction between their personalities, their combination in one person is confirmed in many aspects. It is manifest when Jekyll, while embodying Hyde, still argues with Lanyon to defend his scientific experiments and theories, which proves that the original mentality remains present, no matter how it is kept in the background. A further proof is that Dr. Jekyll arranges a luxurious wealthy atmosphere for Mr. Hyde to thrive in utmost leisure, similar to his own, which means that he tries to maintain the best of both worlds. They share the memory, but not the ethical standards. Jekyll is justful and sensitive, that he retains his faculties of conscience, and he feels acutely and miserably the crimes he has committed as Hyde. The latter on the other hand, is pure evil, totally indifferent to others, including Jekyll whom he wanted to remain as a shelter to escape punishment. He maintains only an intentional selfish instinct of self-preservation, devoid of any compunction. His underdeveloped character gradually strengthens by the habitual use of the drug, as an Ego-ideal at first, but it grows later into a destructive irresistible force that takes the upper hand

without even taking the drug, in moments of inattentive mindedness. Jekyll's failure to separate the two "incongruous faggots" inside man is Stevenson's conviction of its impossibility.

III. The Psychology of Duality in the Religious and Moral Context

Dr. Jekyll's fear of detection increased, as Mr. Hyde has become a hunted well-known criminal, therefore he abstained from the drug for a period. Consequently he "... began to be tortured with throes and longings, as of Hyde struggling for freedom, and at last, in an hour of moral weakness, I once again compounded and swallowed the transforming draught" 12 This marks the reversal of master - subordinate relationship between Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde.

Stevenson connotes a religious and moral theme in this situation of yielding to temptation of evil. The Orthodox Christian moralists of Stevenson's time believe that "sin once indulged in, becomes a hard habit, ... which is very hard to break." 13 The vivid inner mental struggle between man and his will to overcome temptation, is so real, and so tactfully portrayed that it is universal, and any ordinary human being can experience it in his daily life, over any aspect. It is a striving of a man with his pledge to God rather than to himself, to repent and cease sinning, which is found not only in Christian faith, but also in Islam, and in any other divine religion. It shows the inherent tendency to sin in man, that however he tries to avoid it, it finds its way out to be committed, and despite any decent comforts and privileges that lessen the chances of its existence. Hyde, with all his fiendish behaviour and crooked mentality, is quite fit to symbolize the devil and the way he allures man.

Although Stevenson might have not had in mind an intention for an allegory, yet "he was inordinately fond of sermonizing, [which] found a more vivid medium in fiction, through narrative and character." 14 It reveals his artistry in including in such a piece of entertainment serious moralization. He externalizes the intestine troubles of mind with allurements, through Jekyll's agonizing hesitation to bring out Hyde. Thus, the area of moral responsibility is shifted from an inherited religious context to the uncertainties of individual psychology. Dr. Jekyll is not resigning to an external sin, but he is realising an internal ingredient part of his disposition. Mr. Hyde cannot be "repented from" like sin, and then left behind as an unfortunate episode of a life advancing towards goodness. He knows Jekyll fully from inside, and in a frightening way that he knows how to torment him. But he does not push Jekyll too far, lest he spoils the fun of having a host body that can escape capture by law, and subjection to death which would affect both.

Psycho-analytically, Hyde stands for the subconscious, and the transition to it makes it prevalent. His fury after a long period of suppression,

and fear of being terminated by Jekyll through suicide, is expressed by scribbling on Jekyll's pious books. This act is construed as :

Certain compulsions of an immoral kind (raging from the utterance of blasphemous or obscene words through such minor misdemeanours as those involved in petty theft, to serious crimes such as rape and murder) may involve a temporary overcoming or dissociation of the Super-ego (i.e. the sub-conscious area in the brain which is responsible for the moral conduct and thought.) . 15

Finally, Dr. Jekyll remains defiant till the end in his admiration of Mr. Hyde's selfishness. He describes it as "wonderful", despite his bitter disapproval of Hyde's crimes. It is not clear who commits suicide at the end, whether it is Hyde out of sheer evil habit to abscond castigation, or Jekyll to avoid public indignity and scandalization .

Conclusion

R. L. Stevenson uses the science fiction device of the drug to expose a conflict existent in every human mind. Even the setting of the gloomy streets and dim sinister places, where Hyde usually appears, imply symbolically an evil vicious part of man, fit only to be hidden. The cloudy, misty, damp atmosphere also suggests moral inversion. He puts forward in Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde , a tragic view of life which depicts humanity as trapped by the very trait with which we are born; trapped into lives of antagonism and extreme opposites. Man is fated either to suffer terribly, or to face suicide and death in order to escape. It is a bleak view, but it is realistic to those who are sensitive and tormented under the pressures of life in the Victorian age, or our present morbid one. His ultimate message is that man can develop a taste for evil inspite of good breeding, material comforts, and social stature. He also shows the impossibility of living in extremes, either in total advantageousness, or excessive diabolism. The fallibility of his age is fully displayed through this mental crisis, with a strong tone of universality in essence, as the split identity issue of man is eternal and may take its worst form in our socially diseased modern age.

Notes

- 1- Robert Keily, "Robert Louis Stevenson", Victorian Fiction. Ed. George H. Ford, (Newyork : MLA, 1978), pp. 333-347 .
- 2- R. L. Stevenson, "A Humble Remonstrance", Essays by Robert Louis Stevenson, Introduced by William Lyon Phelps (Newyork : Charles Scribner's Sons, 1918), p. 259 .
- 3- Ibid, p. 265-ff .
- 4- Walter E. Houghton, The Victorian Frame of Mind, (Newyork : Yale University Press for the Wellesley College, 1985), pp. 1-23 .
- 5- George K. Anderson and William E. Buckler, The Literature of English, rev. ed. In 1 vol. (Glenview , Ill. : Scott, Forceman & Co. , 1967) , p. 938
- 6- G. K. Chesterton, The Victorian Age in Literature. (London : Oxford University Press , 1947) , pp. 148-151 .
- 7- R. L. Stevenson, Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, Introduction by John Kelman (London : Collins Clear-Type Press, n.d.) , pp. 201-3.
- 8- Karl A. Menninger, Man against Himself , (Newyork : Harcourt, Brace and Company. 1938), pp. 212-ff .
- 9- Ibid , p.213 .
- 10- Stevenson, Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde , pp. 204-6 .
- 11- J. C. Flugel, Man, Morals and Society, (London : Duckworth , 1948) pp. 33-35 .
- 12- Stevenson Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde , p.231 .
- 13- G. P. Landow, Victorian Types, Victorian Shadows, (Boston : Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1980) , p.11 .
- 14- G. B. Stern, Robert Louis Stevenson , (London : Longman's, Green & Co. , for the British Council and the National Book League, 1961) , p.19.
- 15- Flugel, Man, Morals and Society, p. 205 .

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