

SCHOLARLY ARTICLE

Psycho-Social Disorder and Death in *The Strange Case of Dr.*

Jeckyll and Mr. Hyde

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Abstract

Stevenson's *The Strange Case of Dr. Jeckyll and Mr. Hyde* explores the human psyche where the conflict between good and evil is at work. At the end of the novella, the suicide of Jeckyll is obvious to restore the psycho-social order which was disrupted by the advent of evil. This paper explicates how the order was disrupted and the death of Jeckyll restores that order because Dr. Jeckyll is in a position that he wants to reverse but finds the situation irreversible.

Keywords: irreversibility, psycho-ethical order, disorder, duality, conflict.

In the last few decades of 19th Century England, Christianity was the religion of moral conduct. God-fearing people had to follow moral codes; emphasis was given to social behaviour and gentlemanship. However, underneath the apparent gentlemanship, there was terrible repression of human desires. In fact, the stronger the well-mannerism was, the more subjugation of desire took place. *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1886) explores the world of the human psyche where he found, like Sigmund Freud, a conflict between good and evil. But it is not a “psychological fiction,” so far as we understand the term. Yet it is psychological because Stevenson explores the evil desires of the human psyche. Apparently, the writer does not inquire into the mind of a character but presents a man living in a society where man must comply with the rules and behavioural codes accepted by it. The man is judged from two different perspectives: from psychological and social perspectives. Initially, the man is viewed externally, not internally, as a social being who must abide by social rules, obligations and morality. The psychological dimension is found in the last chapter—where the man, in defence of himself, analyses the human psyche from his own perspective. Stevenson first shows us the man as a social being and, then, he reveals the man beyond the behavioural rules of society and dives into the world of the psyche where good is always threatened by evil. But man finds it hard to satisfy the evil in society. Thus a psycho-social disorder is created in this circumstance.

As it has already been pointed out Stevenson wrote *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* in a time which was marked by conservatism, sexual restraint, morality and well mannerism. Victorian conservatism compelled people to abide by strict rules and regulations which led to the repression of basic human desires. The novella brings out the heinous desires of human beings resulting from such repression. The dual personality of Dr. Jekyll stands for two contradictory sides of human beings. But the novella does not convey the triumph of the good over the evil—the good is diminished by the ruthless evil over which human beings have merely any control nor can it be removed by law, administration and society. Dr. Jekyll’s suicide at the end of the novella suggests that his transformation from good to evil is irreversible. From the social perspective, the ethical equilibrium is restored with the abolition of the wicked. It is necessary for the psycho-ethical order which was earlier shattered down by the advent of evil.

The ground for evil at work has been prepared by the gothic setting of the novella. The gothic concentration is narrowed down from the London streets to the laboratory and then to Mr. Hyde. The readers' attention is first drawn to the gothic with the description of the street being "small and what is called quiet, but it drove a thriving trade on the week days" (Stevenson 4). Immediately the attention is shifted to the laboratory: "a certain sinister block of building thrust forward its gable on the street. It was two storeys high; showed no window, nothing but a door on the lower storey and a blind forehead of discoloured wall on the upper; and bore in every feature, the marks of prolonged and sordid negligence" (Stevenson 5). Now, the readers are taken to the man: "It wasn't like a man; it was like some damned Juggernaut" (Stevenson 6). The gothic is not merely a setting to the novella but it provides the wicked with a platform to intervene in the psycho-ethical order and to disrupt it with its heinous activities. When the novella begins, the psycho-ethical order has already been destabilised by the evil acts of Mr. Hyde. Mr. Enfield introduces Mr. Hyde to the readers. So, there is no doubt about the disruption of order here rather the question is whether the condition is irreversible at all.

Dr. Jekyll, a renowned physician and scientist, is the mask for restraint, gentlemanship, and well-mannerism of the Victorian period under which there are always evil desires. Yet he is well aware of those desires and settles his property in the name of Mr. Hyde after his death or "disappearance or unexplained absence." Hyde, on the contrary, is the evil and hidden desires under the mask of self-restraint and gentlemanship. Strangely enough, he is the other half of Dr. Jekyll or the alter ego. Apparently, the psycho-ethical equilibrium is maintained by the two sides of the same person. But, in reality, it is not because since Dr. Jekyll let his evil desires come out of him through the bestial persona of Mr. Hyde he lost his good side and sold his soul to evil. Subh M. Singh and Subho Chakrabarti rightly point out,

Stevenson seems to make a comment not only about the dualism present in every individual but also in society as a whole, where the aristocracy that superficially was genteel and refined, had dark secrets to hide behind the high walls of the mansions in which they lived. Most of the action takes place in the night time and much of it in the poorer districts of London, considered the abode of evil-doers. Most significantly, Mr.

Hyde enters and leaves Dr. Jekyll's house through the *back* door which seems a metaphor for the evil that lies behind the façade of civilization and refinement.

Thus evil is at work in the atmosphere of the setting destabilizing the order. So, Dr. Lanyon is required to maintain the order which is being turned upside down. Lanyon is not contributing to the plot of the novella very significantly. Obviously, Dr. Lanyon is the only witness to the fact that Jekyll and Hyde are the same person. But, Lanyon's importance to the story lies somewhere else. The dispute between Dr. Jekyll and Dr. Lanyon that Mr Utterson was first familiarised with was nothing but Jekyll's deviation from the accepted scientific perspective. Gradually, Lanyon becomes a strong contrast to Jekyll; thus, Lanyon maintains the ethical equilibrium of the world of the story, whereas Dr. Lanyon constitutes the righteousness of the world and stands for the traditional medical treatment, Dr. Jekyll gradually loses his moral excellence and stands for scientific research open to be tempted by danger and evil. Dr. Jeckyll has a satanic urge to destabilize the normalcy of psycho-ethical order by invoking evil and committing criminal activities. Probably, to counterbalance this satanic urge, Stevenson created the character of Dr. Lanyon, who might have otherwise been left out of the story.

Again, we always find Mr. Utterson as a loyal friend. But, he has an enquiring mind to know the truth, not as a detective but as a friend. He is a mixture of a friend, a detective and a silent observer. As a result, Mr. Utterson is not the right person to maintain the equilibrium vis-à-vis Dr. Jekyll's evil side. Sometimes, he may seem to be impartial and indifferent to the destabilization of order. In fact, he is not Mr. Seek at all, rather he is the person what is said at the beginning of the novella: '...he had an approved tolerance for others; sometimes wondering, almost with envy, at the high pressure of spirits involved in their misdeeds; and in any extremity inclined to help rather than to reprove. "I incline to Cain's heresy," he used to say quaintly: "I let my brother go to the devil in his own way."' (Stevenson 3). He really let Dr. Jekyll go to the devil by accepting his request. Though Utterson is worried about his friend's strange attitude and intimacy with Mr. Hyde he is the archetypal indifference who can never be Mr. Seek.

Superficially, Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde are sufficient to exhibit the psycho-ethical conflict of the novella. But, the two split personalities present rather the conflicts between the apparent and the reality, the mask and the hidden, and the superficial gentlemanship and the repression. Dr. Jekyll sold

his soul to the devil at the moment he chose to transform himself into Mr. Hyde because he let Mr. Hyde do the evil. It was only the consciousness of the evil that remained. When one is conscious of his evil one has some good but when one allows one's evil to do the evil we really question one's goodness. So, Dr. Jekyll does not represent the good; he cannot. Earlier he imbibes both the good and the evil. Since Dr. Jekyll long ago loses the goodness of his soul, he is only permitted to live with his evil. The door to the laboratory, which was once a way to intrude into the world of evil, is ironically shut for him eternally to return from it. The key suggesting a possession of the forbidden world of evil desires is broken by Dr. Jekyll intending to reject it but the evil in him has grown so powerful that he cannot control himself. Rather Dr. Jekyll himself blocks his way to come back from the world of evil.

The process of surrendering himself to the devil was not sudden. Dr. Jekyll long ago thought of it: "The evil side of my nature, to which I had now transferred the stamping efficacy, was less robust and less developed than the good which I had just deposed" (Stevenson 77-8). Though Dr. Jekyll was aware of the ugliness of the devil, he was attracted by the youth and liveliness of his evil side presented as Mr. Hyde:

[W]hen I looked upon that ugly idol in the glass, I was conscious of no repugnance, rather of a leap of welcome. This, too, was myself. It seemed natural and human. In my eyes it bore a livelier image of the spirit, it seemed more express and single, than the imperfect and divided countenance I had been hitherto accustomed to call mine. (Stevenson 78)

This is not narcissism and narcissistic personality disorder but one's love for the devil and to do evil because his attraction for Hyde was only for his evil nature. However, Stevenson assigned a concrete structure for the evil side of the human psyche. He attributed the alter ego not only a different personality but a different human shape as well. The troglodytic appearance, rude and inhumane behaviour, dwarf-like stature, and wild desire for committing the crime are sufficient to distinguish Dr. Jekyll from Mr. Hyde. This world of duality is gothic: the desolate London streets, the long uninhabited building, and an atmosphere of murder, horror and suspense prevailing in the story air a feeling of gothic. Yet, the gothic elements are presented to us so realistically that we hardly suspect any

bizarreness in the duality presented concretely. This hyperrealistic representation is recognized only at the end of the story.

Stevenson combines the elements of gothic, science fiction, psychology and detective story together. The duality, apelike appearance, moral and religious conflict and Dr. Jekyll's experiment with chemicals constitute the scientific base. The novella upholds the Victorian dilemma between orthodox Christianity and scientific research which was seen from an ethical point of view and questioned whether scientific development would be able to give way to moral development. Charles Darwin's epoch-making idea in *The Origin of Species* (1859) threatened Christian orthodoxy and, especially, the biblical idea of Creation was put to be suspected. At the same time, man's innate superiority over the animal world was questioned by the Darwinian idea of human beings evolving from apes. Mr. Hyde's apelike appearance is thus not only suggestive of the animal instinct in human beings but the primitive desire also.

Dr. Jekyll possesses a Marlovian desire to experiment with the 'primitive duality in man' in spite of knowing well of its possible consequences. His strange instruction in the will, opening a bank account in the name of Mr. Hyde, owning a house for Hyde in Soho, and his encounter with his colleague Lanyon revealing Hyde's real identity suggest that Henry Jekyll could foresee the predicament of this scientific research. Scientific research is, here, a satanic urge—a modern Mephistopheles in disguise of science and research. Driven by this urge, Dr. Jekyll must sell his 'better self' to the Mephistopheles. Like Faustus, Dr. Jekyll knew the possibility of its evil consequences; but for the sake of knowledge, he must sacrifice his good only to repent at the end. The process was slow; so Henry Jekyll must have had enough time to forebear the consequence of it. But the process was irreversible. He cannot undo what has already been started. The only thing he can do now is to continue with the devil in the troglodytic shape of Mr. Hyde with all the possessions legally passing to him. This status quo may continue until some others like Dr. Lanyon maintain the psycho-ethical order. But Lanyon fails to bear with the visualization of evil and dies, and the world is exposed to the devil to be exploited, polluted and then destroyed. So, to restore the psycho-social order, the devil must be abolished and, since it is impossible for Jekyll to abolish Mr. Hyde and reverse the process of his

journey from Dr. Jekyll to Mr. Hyde, he must, at the cost of his life, restore the order that he denied earlier at the cost of his good.

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