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The Strange Case Of Dr. Jekyll And Mr. Hyde

A Critical
Analysis &
Study Guide

James Del Mojones



To: Allah, Muhammad, Hamid, Aadheela, Vassen,
Narendra, Amina, Lim & my Family...

Without whom this would have been possible

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Biography of Robert Louis Stevenson

Robert Louis Stevenson {originally named Robert Lewis Stevenson} was born November 13, 1850 in Edinburgh, Scotland, the only son of respectable middle-class parents.

Throughout his childhood, he suffered chronic health problems that confined him to bed. In his youth, his strongest influence was that of his nurse, Allison Cunningham, who often read Pilgrim's Progress and The Old Testament to him. In 1867, Stevenson entered Edinburgh University as a science student, where it was tacitly understood that he would follow his father's footsteps and become a civil engineer. However, Robert was at heart a romantic, and while ostensibly working towards a science degree, he spent much of his time studying French Literature, Scottish history, and the works of Darwin and Spencer. When he confided to his father that he did not want to become an engineer and instead wished to pursue writing, his father was quite upset. They settled on a compromise, where Robert would study for the Bar exam and if his literary ambitions failed, he would have a respectable profession to fall back on.

In order to fully comprehend the world in which Stevenson was raised, it is necessary to understand that there were two Edinburghs, both of which helped mold his personality and life outlook. On the one hand, there was the respectable, conventional, deeply religious, and polite New Town. On the other hand was a much more bohemian

Edinburgh, with brothels, shady characters and underhanded dealings. The juxtaposition of these starkly different parts of town made a deep impression on Stevenson and strengthened his fascination with the duality of human nature, later providing the theme for *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*.

In the fall of 1873, Stevenson fell ill, suffering from nervous exhaustion and a severe chest condition. His doctor ordered him to take an extended period of rest abroad. For the next six months, he convalesced in the South of France, and worked on essays. On his return to Edinburgh, he spent much of his time writing book reviews and articles and experimenting with short stories. Slowly but surely, he earned a name for himself in journalism and his pieces began appearing in distinguished journals such as *The Fortnightly Review*. While establishing his name as a writer, Stevenson met an American married woman, Fanny Vandergrift Osbourne, who was ten years his senior. Osbourne had traveled to Europe in an attempt to escape her estranged husband's influence. For three years, Stevenson, who was still in ill health, continued his relationship with her and eventually followed her to San Francisco, where she divorced her husband and married Stevenson in May 1880.

In 1878, Stevenson published *An Inland Voyage*, which recounts a canoeing holiday in Belgium. In August 1880, the Stevensons returned to England. He and his wife wintered in the South of France and lived in England from 1880-1887, a period of time was marked by great literary achievement. Stevenson's first novel, *Treasure Island*, was

published in 1883, followed by *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1886) and *Kidnapped* (1886). Stevenson's work was highly popular and he received great critical acclaim.

Upon his father's death in 1887, Stevenson chose to leave England and sailed for America, where he stayed for a year. In May 1888, accompanied by his wife, stepson, and mother, he set sail for the South Seas. Stevenson grew so enchanted by the life of the South Seas that in December 1889 he bought an estate in Apia, Samoa, convinced that he could never again endure the harsh winters of his native Scotland or England. Apia was a perfect location because the climate was tropical but not wild, the people were friendly and hard working, and there was good postal service in the country. Stevenson lived at his 300-acre estate, Vailima, in the hills of Apia until his death in 1894. While in Vailima, Stevenson wrote a great deal, completing two of his finest novellas, "The Beach of Falesa" and "The Ebb Tide", two novels, *The Wrecker* and *Catriona*, the short stories "The Bottle Imp," "The Isle of voices," and "The Waif Woman." He also published short works under the title *Fables*. Stevenson left a significant amount of work unfinished, including *St. Ives*, *The Young Chevalier*, *Heathercat*, and *Weir of Hermiston*, which he worked on enthusiastically until the day of his death. On December 3, 1894 he dictated another installment of the novel, seemed in excellent spirits, and was speaking with his wife in the evening when he felt a violent

pain in his head and lost consciousness. Stevenson had suffered a brain hemorrhage and died a few hours later at the age of forty-four.

About Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde

Robert Louis Stevenson wrote Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde at Bournemouth in 1885, while convalescing from an illness. The original idea occurred to him in a nightmare from which his wife awakened him. In fact, Stevenson was disappointed that she had interrupted a "fine bogey-tale," but eventually developed the idea into a full-length narrative. Originally, Stevenson's idea was to compose a straightforward horror story, with no allegorical undertones. However, after reading the original version to his wife, she suggested more could be made of the tale. After initially resisting, Stevenson burned the original manuscript and rewrote the entire novel in only three days.

Immediately upon its publication in January of 1887, Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde was recognized as a grand work. An anonymous review in "The Times" praised the book highly, observing that, "Nothing Mr. Stevenson has written as yet has so strongly impressed us with the versatility of his very original genius." The review concluded with the plea that the story, "be read as a finished study in the art of fantastic literature."

Critics claim that Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde was the first work in which Stevenson sustained a full-length narrative that was not only exciting, but also well-composed story with a powerful and timely parable.

Stevenson lived and wrote during the Victorian era, when Queen Victoria ruled England. The Victorian era brought a great deal of technological progress and the advancement of European power throughout the world. However, during the height of Stevenson's writing at the end of the nineteenth century, artists, writers and intellectuals were beginning to move away from the celebration of "progress" that had so defined the times, and were questioning the relevance and permanence of the global domination of Western culture. As a part of this increasingly pessimistic group of writers, Stevenson based this book on his own experiences. He focuses on a milieu he knew well: the upper middle class highly social world of powerful men in which issues such as appearance and dress are extremely important. In examining this superficial existence, Stevenson targets the hypocrisy of social strata and the danger of allowing the innate evilness of human nature to run free in his narrative of a respectable doctor who transforms himself into a savage murderer.

The conclusion of the book reveals the now universally known revelation that Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde inhabit the same body. Dr. Jekyll is the picture of social class and professional excellence, while Mr. Hyde is the embodiment of Jekyll's otherwise hidden evil nature. By distinctly separating these two ironically inextricably combined polar opposites, Stevenson examines man's relationship with good and evil, and comments on the constant war and balance between the two. In the broadly cultural context of the Victorian era, Hyde might be comparable to Western culture's fascination with

perceived "savage" countries and cultures, specifically in Africa and the West Indies, while Jekyll is the embodiment of English manners, pride, and high culture. In examining, visiting and conquering remote countries, England and Europe believed they were civilizing savage peoples, most often working to convert the inhabitants to Christianity. Although fascinated by these strange new cultures, Europeans dismissed their ways of life as base. Thus, Dr. Jekyll represents the European approach to colonization in his examination of base, savage ideals. However, he proves unable to control his evil self or hide (Hyde) his fascination with it and thus dies in the process of trying to regain his original refined identity.

Many critics have mentioned the undercurrent of homosexuality in Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde. The men in the novel have very close personal relationships, women play no role in the story or in the men's lives, and at times, it seems that outsiders believe Dr. Jekyll and the mysterious Mr. Hyde's relationship is sexually deviant in nature. However, this notion is never directly expressed. Interestingly, in every stage or film version of the story from 1920 to the present, both Jekyll and Hyde's involvement with women has been an essential part of his/their image. Stevenson's 1886 narrative contains no focus on women or romantic relationships, and is instead an "intellectual" horror story that examines the fundamental nature of man.

Although Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde is widely recognized as a monumental piece of fiction, Stevenson's concept of duality within human identity was not completely original. In

fact, he had encountered precursors to his tale long before he wrote the novel. Most frequently as influential to the development of Stevenson's work are E.T.A. Hoffman's *The Devil's Elixirs* (1816), Thomas Jefferson Hogg's *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner* (1824), Edgar Allan Poe's *William Wilson* (1839), and most significantly, Theophile Gautier's *Le Chevalier Double* (1840). Gautier's story centers on the protagonist, Oluf, who has a double nature and leads a tormented life, much like *Jekyll and Hyde*.

The strange case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde as a study in dualism

Abstract

R. L. Stevenson's novel, *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* is a prominent example of Victorian fiction. The names Jekyll and Hyde have become synonymous with multiple personality disorder. This article seeks to examine the novel from the view point of dualism as a system of philosophy and as a religious framework and also from the view point of Freud's structural theory of the mind.

Keywords: Dualism, literature, psychiatry

DUALISM

Dualism derives from the Latin word *duo*, meaning two. Simply put, dualism can be understood as a thought that facts about the world in general or of a particular class cannot be explained except by supposing ultimately the existence of two different, often opposite, and irreducible principles. Dualism is most often discussed in context of the systems of religion and philosophy.

The purpose of this book is to examine Robert Stevenson's famous novel, "*The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*" from the view point of the above mentioned systems and to discuss the novel from a psychological perspective.

THE AUTHOR AND THE NOVEL

Robert Balfour Louis Stevenson was a Scottish novelist, short story writer, and poet. Born in 1850, he was a qualified advocate but earned his living as a writer. He was chronically afflicted with tuberculosis, and dabbled with various psychotropic drugs such as alcohol, cannabis, and opium. He is well known for his dark and sinister tales like *Markheim*, *Thrawn Janet*, and racy adventure novels such as *Treasure Island* and *Kidnapped*. Successful and famous, he died at a young age in 1894. Interestingly enough, Stevenson later claimed that the plot of *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* was revealed to him in a dream.

The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde deals with a Dr. Henry Jekyll who is widely respected, successful, and possesses a brilliant intellect but is only too aware of the duplicity of the life that he leads, and of the evil that resides within him. Dr. Jekyll covertly provides utterance to the evil in his soul by various unspeakable acts, but is afraid of doing so openly because of the fear of social criticism. In the course of his experiments, he succeeds in producing a concoction that enables him to free this evil in him from the control of his good self, thus giving rise to Edward Hyde. Edward Hyde is pure evil and amoral. Not only is his psyche different from Dr. Jekyll but also his body is grotesque and deformed. Thus, Dr. Jekyll thinks that he can receive the pleasure that both parts of his being crave without each being encumbered by the demands of the other. However, Mr. Hyde evokes feelings of dread and abhorrence in Dr. Jekyll's friends

who beseech him to give up his "friendship" with this Edward Hyde. Edward Hyde gradually becomes ever more powerful than his 'good' counterpart and ultimately leads Dr. Jekyll to his doom. "Jekyll and Hyde" as an eponymous term has become a synonym for multiple personality in scientific and lay literature and the novel has also been considered a case demonstration of substance dependence.

DUALISM, RELIGION, AND THE NOVEL

A religion that is dualistic admits not only that the universe comprises good and evil, or light and darkness, but also that though these are eternally opposed they are coeternal, coexistent, and equipotent. This is an important distinction from nondualistic, monistic religions where evil comes about as an accident during creation of the Universe or as a result of powerful beings that can be good or bad as per what serves them or injures them and not because they are evil for the sake of being evil. Here, the good and the evil are often derived from the same source or from one another, much like the Pandavas and Kauravas in the Mahabharata. Zoroastrianism is often cited as an example of a dualistic religion where the concentration of all that is good is around Ahura Mazda, and all that is evil around Ahra Mainyu. These two forces are at constant war and only at the end will good finally vanquish evil. Interestingly, Christianity, the religion Stevenson was born into, rejects dualism and preaches a monistic origin to the universe from one, infinite, and self-existing spiritual being who freely created everything. However, the dualism of the human soul and the body which it animates

was made clearer and is emphasized by the church. In the same vein, Christianity holds that evil is the necessary limitation of finite created beings and is a consequence of creation of beings possessed by free will. As an imperfection inherent in the manufacturing process of individuals, evil is tolerated by God.

In the novel, Stevenson creates a hero in Dr. Jekyll, who aware of the evil in his own being, and sick of the duplicity in his life, succeeds by way of his experiments on himself in freeing the pure evil part of his being as Mr. Hyde, so that each can indulge in a life unfettered by the demands of the other. As Dr. Jekyll says, "With every day and from both sides of my intelligence, the moral and intellectual, I thus drew steadily to that truth by whose partial discovery I have been doomed to such a dreadful shipwreck: that man is not truly one, but truly two." He further adds, "... that I learned to recognize the thorough and primitive duality of man;... if I could rightly be said to be either, it was only because I was radically both". Mr. Edward Hyde he describes as, "a second form and countenance substituted, none the less natural to me because they were the expression, and bore the stamp, of lower elements in my soul" and that, "Edward Hyde, alone in the ranks of mankind, was pure evil". Thus, Stevenson creates in Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, two equipotent, coexistent, and eternally opposed components that make up a "normal" individual. Here, good and evil are not related but are two independent entities, individuals even, different in mental and physical attributes and constantly at war with each other. Evil now does not require the existence of good to justify itself but

it exists simply as itself, depicted as being the more powerful, the more enjoyable of the two, and in the end ultimately it is the one that leads to Dr. Jekyll's downfall and death. This is because Dr. Jekyll in the last phases of his lucidity recognizes the danger that Mr. Hyde poses to society and altruistically decides to do away with himself. Stevenson seems to discard Christian notions of monism and embrace dualism as described above. The novel needs to be looked at in the context of its setting of Victorian London. 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.

DUALISM, PHILOSOPHY, AND THE NOVEL

Dualism as a philosophy signifies the view that the universe contains two radically different kinds of being or substance-matter and spirit, body, and mind. The ancient Greeks distinguished profoundly the soul and the body as the dictum states: "The body is a tomb." Evil therefore was a result of an infinite soul trapped in a finite body. Plato for instance was strongly dualistic in that he expressed the view that the soul exists independently of the body. The rational soul is a spiritual substance distinct from the

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