

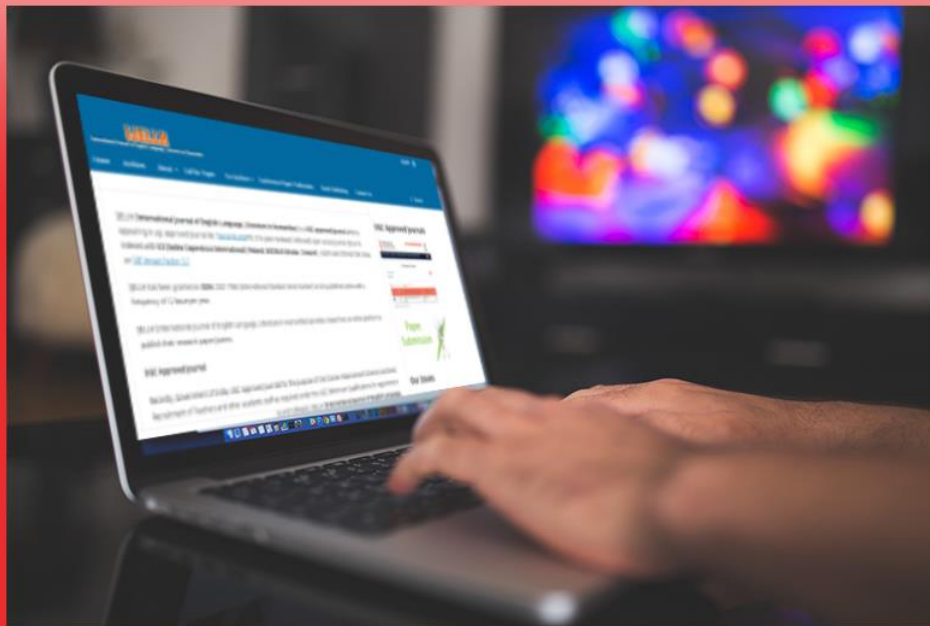
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A Study of 'Double Consciousness' in Stevenson's The Strange Case of  
Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde

Abstract: Stevenson's Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, a nineteenth century text, deals with the moral and social issues which preoccupied the Victorian people. 'Victorian ideas of respectability, gentlemanliness, criminality and other related social conditions are clearly manifested in this text. The novella commonly regarded as a metaphor of good-evil antithesis and duality of human personality is extremely concerned with the physical transformation of human body and its subsequent effects on the protagonist and the society. The emergence of Mr. Hyde from Jekyll's personality brings in the concept of duality in human nature that both good and evil resides in a single person. "It (the text) plunges immediately into the centre of Victorian society to dredge up a character ever present but submerged." [Saposnik 1971: 717] While the two characters have become a source of literary study in the split personality disorder, they also question the very notion of 'human consciousness.' And this paper is intended to examine the question of 'double consciousnesses in the two-characters, namely Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde.

Keywords: Double consciousness, Split personality, Dual-Brain, Self.

The reading of 'double consciousness' in this text can be approached in two ways – i) by studying the consciousness of Dr. Jekyll and the consciousness of Mr. Hyde and ii) by studying Jekyll's consciousness about his own self and the other that is Hyde's self; and the intrusion of Hyde's consciousness. By the word 'consciousness', I mean not only the awareness or the general perception of something, but also the working of an individual's mind in his or her conscious state, in other words, the thought process of the mind embedded with the self. In this paper, I have tried to approach the subject of double consciousness by placing the text in the Victorian conditions and ideologies; and also by bringing in the idea of Victorian dual brain theory, which can provide further light on the dual-working of a single brain. The paper seeks to show how Jekyll embodies a consciousness about Hyde's self, despite his own, and how Jekyll's consciousness gets totally effaced in the process of transformation, by Hyde's one, and there remains only Hyde in the end.

Jekyll's experimentation to divide his personality into two can be located in the very discourse of Victorian preoccupation with 'doubleness.' "Victorian man was haunted constantly by the inescapable sense of division." [Saposnik 1971: 716] Jekyll's scientific findings about human anatomy enables him to split his self into two by means of a chemical potion, and lead a double life. This potion was supposed to release him from all established code of the ethics. The physical transformation of Jekyll into the person of 'Hyde' facilitates him to experience the life of a double-dealer. The character of Mr. Hyde, seen as a 'pure evil' with 'ape-like', 'troglodytic', 'hardly-human' features stands in sharp contrast to Dr. Jekyll who is handsome, modest, cultured and well-mannered. The creation of Mr. Hyde by Jekyll poses problematics reading the 'human consciousness' embedded in very individual's self. Jekyll, though initially able to revert back to his original self-infers that Hyde's anti-human tendencies do not submit to Jekyll's consciousness (the thought process in his conscious state of mind). Hyde, an 'atavistic', 'apelike', creature would defy all moral scruples. The physical

transformation causes Jekyll's 'consciousness' to undergo a change. He gets more and more tempted to his new self. Jekyll's 'consciousness' characterized by a balanced mental disposition having all the norms of a civilized society gets completely effaced out and substituted by Hyde's one.

That Hyde has a separate 'consciousness' beyond Jekyll's control is endorsed by his (Jekyll's) utterance that Hyde can destroy his (Jekyll) 'final statement' at any moment. Hyde, 'wicked, tenfold wicked' [Stevenson 2013: 172] to preserve his self can go to any extent. He has no moral qualms. He can trample upon an innocent child, murder a respectable man (Danvers Crew), and sink his teeth into someone's neck.

Hyde's anti-human behavior finds a scientific explanation in the context of Victorian dual brain theory which can offer further light on the intricacies of Hyde's 'consciousness.' Anne Stiles makes some important observations in her essay regarding Hyde's criminal tendency by linking it to the contemporary dual brain theory. She reveals how the dual brain theory circulating during the Victorian era posited that the left and right hemisphere of the brain could function independently. "The left brain was associated with masculinity, whiteness and civilization while the right brain was the supposedly inferior or feminine seat of emotions, instincts and the unconscious". [Stiles 2006: 884-885] This reveals that Jekyll embodies the left hemisphere attributes (which is seen in his handsomeness, whiteness, logic, intelligence, humanness etc) and Hyde represents the right hemisphere traits for he is 'apelike', 'troglodytic', 'hardly human' creature, characterized by ugliness, darkness.

Hyde's criminal tendency is the very result of his deformities, ugliness. Even the Victorian research conducted on the brains of criminal lunatic revealed how a crime prone brain had shrinkage on their left hemisphere and thereby developed an imbalance accounts for his criminal and anti-human traits in his consciousness. Hyde does not lack anything; he can resemble any other human being in his shrewdness and physical strength. He can think on

his own, recognize his servant, his friend Lanyon, as revealed from his letter to Lanyon, "I am here at the instance of your colleague, Dr. Henry Jekyll, on a piece of business of some moment." [Stevenson 2013: 156] Hyde's act is more a result of his urge to survive than any other else. His anti-human traits will not let him submit to other people. Hyde, who is concerned only with the sadistic delights and gratification of animalistic desire had very little care for Jekyll. Jekyll tell us, "Hyde was indifferent to Jekyll". [Stevenson 2013: 189] In this way, Stevenson examines the germ of double-consciousness in a single human being by bringing in a physical transformation in Jekyll's body. Jekyll begins to experience the taste of both world's moral and amoral, good and evil, balance and imbalance.

In Jekyll's case, the reading of double consciousness becomes more problematic in the sense that he is very much concerned with his own self and also with Hyde's. While Hyde was indifferent to Jekyll, the doctor was always enthralled by this new persona. As Jekyll puts, "my new power tempted me until I fell in slavery." [Stevenson 2013: 178] His indulgence in Hyde's personality, an another 'consciousness' which will free him from making any moral judgments.

Jekyll is one who is more conscious of Hyde than Hyde is of Jekyll. Hyde an embodiment of 'lower elements' in soul spreads horror in the society. His movements cannot be regulated by Jekyll's consciousness but yet he (Jekyll) can sense what this crude Hyde has done. He can smile, looking at the mirror over what has happened. So, he (Jekyll) is in a way, aware of Hyde's all movements, though in unclear images. Mighall puts "Jekyll appears to be observing the behavior of two distinct individuals that happen to exist in his consciousness." [Stevenson 2002: XXII] That is why Jekyll experiences a kind of criminal responsibility too. He is scared of punishment, scared of losing his social positions by Hyde's criminal activity.

Jekyll's recounting the experiences of finding his hands transformed into Hyde's is a testing to Jekyll's consciousness of the events in the person of Mr. Hyde. Jekyll's being ready

to accept his new fate and favouring his other self [by making a house to stay in the person of Hyde and drawing a cheque in his (Jekyll's) own name to maintain the social position] are suggestive of his concern for Hyde. Hyde's self-had already begun to inhibit in Jekyll's consciousness and the determination to stay away from this atavistic creature proves a failure for the Victorian gentlemanliness had a suffocating effort on Jekyll and he sought the pleasure of Mr. Hyde. He began to be 'tortured with throes and longings' [Stevenson 2013: 192]. He says "my devil had been long caged and he came out roaring" [Stevenson 2013: 193], that is Jekyll could experience Hyde's animalistic behavior, but his temptation towards the amoral life shatters his very temple of consciousness, and he begins to suffer the pangs of double-consciousness.

The subject of 'double-consciousness' is even more questionable in the two events – Jekyll's final statement and his death. Stevenson's sophisticated structuring of narrative which unravels the whole mystery through the confessional statement of Jekyll, - a man of double personality provides very little scope as to the veracity of the narrator's truthfulness. Because he speaks through the voice of one whose reason and objectivity have been compromised by addiction. The narrator is in every risk of entering into the persona of Mr. Hyde. The same complicity can be located in the event of Jekyll's death. It can be a suicide by Dr. Jekyll or a murder of Dr. Jekyll by Mr. Hyde. In other words, Jekyll's 'self' or his 'consciousness' died long before this, when his first transformation took place without the administering of the 'potion' or 'drugs'. Towards, the end, the potion becomes unnecessary for the very thought about Hyde can transform Jekyll into the person of Mr. Hyde. So, the drugs, invented by Dr. Jekyll which was supposed to be an easier which made Jekyll feel 'younger, lighter, happier in body' [Stevenson 2013 : 172] turns out to be a deadly drugs or potion. Towards, the end, the text suggests not only an 'irreversible' physical transformation but also an irreversible transformation of 'consciousness.'

So, the notion of ‘double-consciousness’ in the character of Dr. Jekyll is all pervasive and through this representation, Stevenson explores the Victorian anxieties, the debates surrounding the dualities of personality or self and other logical problems. The death of Jekyll, in the person of Hyde is suggestive of the over-coming power of evil over the good. Hyde is the result of Jekyll’s own repressed desire and men’s primitive animalism which exists in all human being. Jekyll’s utterance of ‘that man is not truly one, but truly two’ [Stevenson 2013 : 166] is a testimony to the plurality of self. This text is a product of Victorian ideology and social conditions, where hierarchical order, social positions play a vital role, as far as the notion of respectability and gentlemanliness is concerned. Too much repression of primitive desire caused Jekyll to seek gratification of his in scrupulous desire which Victorian people were supposed to be impervious to. As Jekyll reveals – “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.” [Stevenson 2013: 163-164]

Hyde, being an embodiment of debased figure, ugliness and lower elements helps Jekyll to put off the veneer of moral scruples. Had Jekyll been able to exert control over Hyde’s ‘consciousness’, the purpose of transformation would have been a total failure to cater to his animalistic desires. Hyde’s uncontrollable ‘consciousness’ and his animalism shatters Jekyll’s ‘consciousness.’ Though Jekyll can sense what Hyde has done, he becomes a mere puppet in Hyde’s self and this finds validity when Jekyll says “It was Hyde, after all, and Hyde alone that was guilty.” [Stevenson 2013: 182] In the end, there is only Hyde, no Jekyll. To conclude, we can say Jekyll ‘consciousness’ represents a balanced self, whereas, Hyde’s one represents an imbalance in everything – both mind and body. Hyde’s mental disposition is more a result of created illness a mental disorder in human psychology brought about by a physical imbalance (transformation) which goes away as soon as Jekyll restores himself to his original ‘self.’

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