Revisiting the Doppelganger Myth in Robert Louis Stevenson's the Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde

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Abstract – Stevenson’s The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde becomes the representative of the study of the psychology of man for the story’s ultimate end is to show the split personality of the human nature. One might be very pleased by his first encounter with a man, like Dr. Jekyll. He is renowned in the society, but through a deep survey of his character a new horizon will be open for us. In this paper, through Stevenson’s imaginary character of Mr. Hyde, Dr. Jekyll’s other half is recognized and it paves the way for the readers’ understanding of the duality in human nature. The paper examines Jekyll’s repressions, complexes, society norms and on the contrary Mr. Hyde’s freedom and the violent actions he ignores. Finally, the well known Dr. Jekyll turns into an ugly figure in the town everyone detests and it is shown that he wishes to fulfill his repressed desires of murder and joy at the expense of losing his life.

Key Words - split personality; human nature; duality; Jekyll, Hyde; repressions

1. Introduction

The novella of Robert Louis Stevenson’s The Strange case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde was published in 1886 for the first time. Different critics have given this novella several genres including fable, religious allegory, detective or crime fiction story, sensation fiction, Scottish devil tales, gothic novel and doppelganger literature. A lawyer who lives in London named John Utterson is curious to know any hidden relationship between one of his old friends, Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, who has aroused his suspicion. This case study investigated by Mr. Utterson is contemplated a rare mental condition called dissociative mental disorder in psychiatry and it is sometimes called split personality. In such a mental disorder, one is going to see the two levels of moral identification within a man: one personality is good and the other is evil. In this case, Jekyll and Hyde come to represent one person with quite different temperaments and behaviors in various situations.

The mystery of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde gradually is known to the reader through what Mr. Enfield, Mr. Utterson, Dr. Lanyon and Poole, the butler of Jekyll’s house narrate. What Jekyll wants is to separate the evil from the good aspects of his nature. He is able to make a drug secretly in his laboratory to free his evil side into the repulsive figure of Mr. Hyde. First, it is easy to return to Jekyll’s personality, but gradually he finds it difficult to be Jekyll and he is unintentionally turned to Mr. Hyde. He can no longer supply the drug and he is unable to reduplicate the chemical formula. Hyde is now wanted by the authorities since he has committed several crimes: he has trampled a young girl, disappearing into a door on the street and reemerges to give some money to her relatives with a check of 10 pounds signed by the respectable Dr. Jekyll. Hyde is witnessed by a servant girl beating a man to death with a heavy cane. The man is named Sir Danvers Carew who was also a client of Utterson. The police contacts Utterson who is suspicious of Hyde as a murderer. They go to Hyde’s apartment and find the strong wood broken and left behind a door with which he had beaten Sir Danvers to death. Soon Utterson visits Jekyll who claims to have ended all his relationships with Hyde and turns pale by Utterson’s question. Later, Dr. Hastie Lanyon, an acquaintance of Dr. Jekyll dies upon hearing Jekyll’s story, but before he dies he gives Utterson a letter insisting that he not open it until Jekyll dies or disappears. Utterson goes out walking with one of his friends, Mr. Enfield, and they happen to see Jekyll at the window of his laboratory who turns violent in his face and slams the window. Mr. Poole, Dr. Jekyll’s butler, visits Utterson desperately informing him that Jekyll has imprisoned himself in the laboratory for several weeks. The two decide to break into the laboratory after they hear that the voice and the footsteps coming from inside are not Dr. Jekyll’s. There they find Hyde’s body dead from suicide. A letter from Jekyll to Utterson is also seen promising to explain the entire mystery is seen there. Utterson gets home reading Lanyon’s letter first and Jekyll’s letter next. The first one is the mystery of Lanyon’s shock at observing Hyde being metamorphosed into Jekyll and the latter reveals Jekyll’s seeking to separate his good
side from the dark side. Jekyll reports that he delighted in becoming Hyde, but he was involuntarily turned into Hyde, so the first identity was not purely good as expected.

There had been several viewpoints about Robert Louis Stevenson’s Dr. Jekyll and his doppelganger, Mr. Hyde. Bloom argues that a single felt idea gives coherence to Stevenson’s long fictions. This unifying idea is the one which can be found in Jekyll and Hyde. Some books, such as Treasure Island, Kidnapped, The Master of Ballantrae and the Weir of Hermiston have the mythological concept of the devil as angel with the theme of the beauty of evil and the unloveliness of good ([3], p. 15). Elsewhere, Reid mentions that multiple personality is one of the psychological issues in his writings which can be found both in his fiction and non-fiction. Besides, Stevenson’s character and the characters found in his fiction are all victimized to degeneration, emasculation, morbid introspection and primitive resurgences. He was obsessed with the mental instability and one’s divided identity ([9], p. 56). Psychologically speaking, one can visit his double by resorting to the evil side of his personality. This will lead to man’s degeneration, his mental crisis and an identity failure. As a result, man is going to lose his real consciousness and substitute it with a false one in so much as to forget his real being.

Stevenson is said to have experienced the duality of personality through which he has been able to demonstrate it in his own writings. Reid argues that via exploring the relations among the dreams, myth-making and literary creativity, young Stevenson is proved to have experienced two distinct consciousnesses, a waking and a dreaming self. The narration of the third person point of view paves the way for our understanding the fact that he has dreamt in sequence and he has led a double life: One side of his life is believed to be the true one, and the other cannot be proved to be false, so Stevenson’s dreams inspired him to formulate his ideas into creating Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde as his doppelganger ([9], p. 26). The tensions in Stevenson’s life, Gray asserts, are the result of his own high standards of life, his clash with his devout family and selfish as a child all and all led him not only to Freud’s concepts of superego versus id, but it also his creation of The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde. The role of doppelganger or the duality of life can be seen in Dr. Jekyll who attempts to suppress his inferiority and his dark and diabolical life ([10], pp. 11-53).

Among the many attitudes on Stevenson’s The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, Stephenson argues that the book shows Utterson the lawyer is entangled in the affairs of Dr. Henry Jekyll known as a renowned gentleman who has to face his alter ego, Mr. Hyde. He adds that this is a dark gothic tale of the duality in human nature. It seems that the dual nature of the mankind is taken from the duality of the vibrant and exciting city of Edinburgh at that time [12]. Elsewhere, Ousby states that the mentioned story has attracted much commentary: it is a story like the Armenian James Hogg’s Private Memoirs and Confessions of Justified Sinner considered a doppelganger myth and the pre-Freudian ego and libido. It is emphasized that Hyde is not a diabolic alter ego, but it a part of Jekyll’s personality. That is to say, Jekyll is a mixture of good and evil ([8], p. 263). Furthermore, Bloom argues that Andrew Lang has noted one of the most striking features of this novel in an early review: the heroes are all middle-aged professional men. The interest in the professional men is portrayed in the grotesque figure of Edward Hyde. In addition, the novel shows Edward Hyde’s degeneracy ([3], p. 185).

In this paper, we can see how the principal character of the novel faces his tragic struggle. Jekyll takes pleasure in metamorphosing and becoming Hyde. Man’s endeavor to separate his good from the evil is portrayed as clear as possible in this novel. The separation seems to be something superficial which happens by the drug Dr. Jekyll makes in his laboratory, but the case turns out to be an unreal one at the physical level. In fact, man has got a dual nature. Sometimes, the good side of man is going to win over the evil side in a way that man prospers in life. On the contrary, man is mostly overwhelmed and surrenders to the satanic powers around him. He is deceived, turns bad-tempered, commits different crimes and has no alternative, but to accept the defeat at the end of life ultimately. Jekyll is the name of everyman addressed in the public, but Hyde will surely be our true name when we behave inhumanely.

2. Discussion

A thorough analysis of Dr. Jekyll’s character in Stevenson’s The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde can lead us to understanding the double vision of his character. Jekyll has both the good and the evil inside him and these qualities are apparent both in his appearance and character. Jekyll reshapes himself by the drug he makes in his laboratory. He turns to a troglodyte. In Bloom’s view, Hyde is marked by his physical deformity and decay and as Utterson exclaims, he is hardly human. He is associated with the troglodyte proletariat in his growing degeneracy. He spends his dissipated life in savagery, and he is bad-tempered and his appearance indicates that he’s a lower class committing the crimes a moneyed gentleman does. At one hand, he is known by the gracefully looking figure of Jekyll in the public and on the other hand he is the portrayal of his doppelganger emerging in Hyde’s character. Hyde has a discriminating palate for wine. Art furnishes his lodging and there are carpets of many colors in his room. A gentleman lives in such a place not a savage, so the figure of Hyde has both an immoral leisure class and dishonest underclass qualities ([3], pp. 187-8). Hyde’s actions are inhumane which are considered in contrast to Jekyll’s appearance who is a nice gentleman. First, he abuses children by trampling on a child at night and as Ambrosini argues, the degeneracy of this man is indicated in his child abuse and this indicates his moral insanity. Any reader, he
insists, can understand Jekyll/ Hyde’s sexual exploits in the fearful city of London at that time. Jekyll/ Hyde indulges in child prostitution during his night forays in the nether city of London at that time ([1], p. 254). Second, the murder of Sir Danvers Carew takes place under the floodlight of the gloomy city. Although the light makes vivid the crime, Jekyll/ Hyde does not hesitate to murder the man. Ambrosini asserts that he is not afraid of his crime being detected by the lamplight and this illumination makes Hyde’s crime even more fierce and brutal. Third, he haunts the dark and nightmarish city where ragged children play with the criminals and prostitutes passing by ([1], pp. 260-1).

Jekyll experiences the doppelganger in his character throughout his life. He finds a plurality of the self by the conflicts he finds in his own life. Mighall argues that “man is not truly one, but he is truly two”. Jekyll believes that this is his lower self giving courage to him to look for a specific drug to help him dissect his good part from the evil part in the laboratory. Jekyll knew himself a compound and he needs a psychological therapy because he finds within himself an evolution of two memories in which the memories are independent of one another. When Jekyll appears, Hyde disappears and when Hyde appears, Jekyll disappears. As a result of such a memory merging, Jekyll could live a double life ([16], pp. 146-7). The following excerpt from Stevenson’s Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde will suggest that Jekyll himself knows well his dual nature:

“It was thus rather the exacting nature of my aspirations than any particular degradation in my faults that made me what I was and, with even a deeper trench than in the majority of men, severed in me those provinces of good and ill which divide and compound man’s dual nature. In this case, I was driven to reflect deeply and inevitably on that hard law of life, which lies at the root of religion and is one of the most plentiful springs of distress. Though so profound a double-dealer, I was in no sense a hypocrite; both sides of me were in dead earnest; I was no more myself when I laid aside restraint and plunged in shame, than when I labored, in the eye of day, at the furtherance of knowledge or the relief of sorrow and suffering.” ([13], pp. 57-8).

Good and evil are the two sides of the same coin Jekyll and Hyde represent in their life. In the same way that we can see John Silver in Treasure Island presenting himself as a trustworthy man, but he proves to be a two-faced individual who is opportunistic in betraying and killing others, Jekyll faces a double life via his doppelganger, Edward Hyde. Kristinsdottir asserts that no character as Jekyll and his alter ego, Hyde, can represent the idea of the double sided characters. Jekyll’s working in the lab and his transformation into a devilish creature culminates in the creation of his famous doppelganger. Jekyll with his split personality can show both a gentleman with multiple mindsets who is able to both put up a good front in the public and manifest his criminal mind through Hyde. The murder of Sir Danvers Carew is a case in point that Jekyll shows his underlying driving force for murder. Another point is that he kills or maims just to seek pleasure, not for having any serious intention [11]. There is no real reason why Hyde maimed the child and why he shouted at Sir Danvers in that depopulated street at that time of the night. The central theme of Stevenson’s The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde is the divided self and the split personality or the duality of the man’s nature. One part is the physical appearance of man which acts like a mask one wears, but the other part which needs more clarification is Jung’s concept of the shadow. In Guerin’s view, shadow is the darker side of our unconscious self. It is the less favorable part of our being that we like to hide it from others ([5], p. 205). In Dryden’s view, the other self or the evil side of the human nature can only be recognized through a psychological analysis of a character, and this division of personality can be viewed in terms of repression that happened to Dr. Jekyll on account of his business and role in the society. Stevenson uses the confession as the narrative form in order to concentrate on the repression of Dr. Jekyll. He himself confesses that he could not be as free as others were for he was a doctor known in the city. The hysterical Mr. Hyde is a male homosexual whose forbidden desire has been repressed echoing one of the Freud’s principal ideas on repression. Dr. Jekyll’s hidden self is revealed through Mr. Hyde, and the familiar Dr. Jekyll transforms into the unfamiliar Mr. Hyde who is uncanny to the town’s people. Jekyll who is a self styled transcendent scientist tries to metamorphose into Hyde in order to separate his evil side from his good side ([4], pp. 51-7). But this part of the psyche is inseparable from the dual nature of man, and through the two sides is that man becomes a whole.

One can witness lots of symbols in the above mentioned novella concerning the duality of man. Reid asserts that the tale’s allegorical and symbolic significance is shown in the characters of Jekyll and Hyde. These two characters symbolize the old battle between good and evil ([9], P. 93). Mighall at one hand refers to the dismal quarto of Soho, the muddy ways, the slatternly passengers and on the other hand the illuminating lamps which stand for knowledge and had never been extinguished. Soho is a place for criminals and the poor which it stands for the East End being compared to the pleasant and delightful Western End of London, so it provides a suitable location for Hyde’s dwelling. This can symbolize the geographical location for Hyde’s living in Jekyll who was a respectable man of the community ([6], P. 33). In addition, Baranoglu argues that Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde represent the divided personality of the man by dramatizing the conscious and the unconscious mind of man through the representation of their character. Hyde stands for the unattainable desires of Jekyll in his childhood. Jekyll finds out that Hyde experiences his unfulfilled pleasures in the life, and the
sweet sensation of the sin was novel to him and it gave him an ecstatic feeling ([2], pp. 37-40).

Stevenson manipulates language by playing at pair words in order to show the duality of the human nature. Freud’s the concepts of the conscious and the unconscious mind can be very much similar to both a person’s appearance and the dark recesses of the mind or the id where our repressed desires and emotions lie and it can also stand for the untamed passions of the man. Bloom argues that Stevenson uses some contrastive pairs in this respect, such as energy and order, licentiousness and morality, spontaneity and craft. The raging energies of the id are versus the modesty of Dr. Jekyll ([3], p. 200). Jekyll’s morality is known in the city and no one doubts him until he shares Hyde’s handwriting, and the point as Bloom asserts, is that separating Jekyll’s handwriting from Hyde is a difficult task. Hyde is able to write Jekyll’s cheques and Jekyll can write Hyde’s letters ([3], p. 203). Therefore, Jekyll’s morality is under question by Hyde’s identical handwriting and letters. Ogunc elsewhere speaks of the duality in the pair characters of the novella: Despite Lanyon and Utter who are the prosperous people of the town, Jekyll is worried about caring for the conventions in the society. He wants to follow his own ways rather than having a grave countenance before the public, and this grows uneasiness in his behavior, so he decides to reveal his other self which is evil via Hyde’s character ([7], pp. 3-4).

3. Conclusion

Stevenson himself called Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde a fable, just like a dream allegorized into mortality. He always thought about the idea of duality that good and evil are inherent in human being. When Stevenson wrote the first draft of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, his wife read it and she was so shocked that she threw it in the fire. He also had some nightmares at nights that he was woken up by his wife and through which he could find the necessary materials for writing his novel. He himself declared that there are two natures in the field of his consciousness which he could not rightly be said to be either. He added that he was radically both, and this idea formulates his idea into writing Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde. This is the respectable Dr. Jekyll or Stevenson himself who has shaped Mr. Hyde or the evil part of the Stevenson himself. The ecstasy the evil side of Stevenson’s character or Mr. Hyde achieves is gained via the good side of Stevenson himself or through the respectable Dr. Jekyll in Soho where the story takes place.

Upon closing the discussion about the duality of man in Stevenson’s The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, We can say that Stevenson has focused on the actions done by Dr. Jekyll’s alter ego, Mr. Hyde, who has always violated the moral norms and the standards of the society. In the seemingly unequal fight between the good and the evil side of the human nature, sometimes the latter wins, as such happened in Dr. Jekyll’s story. Dr. Jekyll relished from the metamorphosis, forged Dr. Jekyll’s signature and his satanic power even made him murder a human being. He was surrounded by the evil side of his character. He experienced excessive pleasures in his life while being headless of their destructive consequences and this guaranteed his downfall toward the gloom. This is the story of a man who ran from the pinnacle of success and fame to the abyss of hell.

Acknowledgements

We would like to express our heartfelt thanks to Dr. Shahram Afrougie who helped us revise our topic and formulate our thoughts in writing such a paper which to him it seemed unique among the works currently published.

References


Vitae

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