



Novel Insights, An International Journal of Multidisciplinary Studies

A Peer-Reviewed Quarterly Research Journal

ISSN: 3048-6572 (Online) 3049-1991 (Print)

Volume-I, Issue-IV, May 2025, Page No. 245-250

Published by Uttarsuri, Karimganj, Assam, India, 788711

Website: <http://novelinsights.in/>

DOI: 10.69655/novelinsights.vol.1.issue.04W.026



Hyde and Seek: The Psychological Depths of Evil in Stevenson's Classic Tale

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Received: 09.02.2025; Accepted: 26.02.2025; Available online: 31.05.2025

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Abstract

The paper offers a thorough examination of the writer's work "The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde," highlighting its lasting significance in addressing both sides of human characteristics and human psyche's negative sides, while also connecting the novel's themes to modern-day issues. In this work, Stevenson crafted not just a chilling portrayal of consciousness but also a framework for understanding what both psychology and literature have recognized as distinctly modern and profoundly unsettling. The paper delves into the medical and psychological elements present in "Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde." Initially, Stevenson conceived "Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde" as a "chilling shocker," but after burning the first draft and heeding his wife's advice, he reimagined it into the intricately dark narrative we know today. This compelling novel skilfully navigates the complexities of human character through the peculiar case of Dr. Jekyll, a benevolent scientist who transforms into his repressed evil counterpart, Mr. Hyde, at night. Anticipating the developments of modern psychology, "Jekyll and Hyde" stands as a remarkably original exploration of humanity's dual nature, alongside being a timeless tale of suspense and horror. Released in 1866, "Jekyll and Hyde" quickly became a success, granting Stevenson his initial taste of fame. While sometimes regarded as merely a mystery, the book has garnered significant literary acclaim.

Keywords: Medical and psychological elements, Psychology, Humanity's dual nature, Mystery

Introduction:

This Victorian fiction which was published in 1886 sent shock-waves through the minds of its readers. It gained popularity fast in the literary world and beyond, as people struggled with the disturbing notion that evil is not an external force like the Devil but rather exists within people. This occurred decades before Jung presented the idea of the shadow and nine years before Freud started his first psychoanalysis. Stevenson was already well-known for his children's poetry and *Treasure Island*, but he had long yearned to delve deeper into the weird "Other" that had plagued him from his early nightmares. He attributed a large portion of his literary achievement to the "Brownies," the "small people" from his inner world and dreamland, who served as the direct inspiration for *Jekyll and Hyde*. [1] His complicated love-hate relationship with his father, who supported him financially during Stevenson's lifetime

struggle with a serious respiratory disease that finally resulted in drug addiction as a coping mechanism, can also be interpreted as reflected in the novel. Stevenson saw the Other as the antithesis of the appropriate Scottish culture of the late 19th century and his father's rigid Calvinistic views.

Since he was a young boy, Robert Louis Stevenson had been fascinated with the tale of William Brodie, one of Scotland's most notorious outlaws. Although Brodie was a well-respected deacon, an accomplished cabinetmaker, and a city council member in Edinburgh, he had a covert and vile other life. Under the pretense of civic duty, he planned a series of break-ins, taking advantage of his wealthy clients' trust and using their keys to loot their residences. For years, he was shielded from suspicion by his charm and stature until his criminal activities were finally brought to light. Stevenson was intrigued by Brodie's duality, seeing in him not merely a criminal but also a symbolic transgression against the stifling moralism of Victorian England.

Having been raised in a strict Calvinist household, Stevenson was able to identify with Brodie's rebellion. Seventeen-year-old Stevenson grew more and more bitter at what he saw as hypocrisy on the part of his parents and society at large. Stevenson ridiculed these strictures and took on a bohemian existence in college. In a shocking display of rebellion, he began frequenting the same sleazy establishments Brodie had frequented, including opium dens, brothels, and taverns. Stevenson continued to identify with the outlaw figure he so highly admired by dressing in flashy, crime-suggestive attire. These pursuits not only marked a departure from his childhood, but they also prefigured the concerns that would come to define his greatest work.

But Stevenson's revolt was short-lived. A near-fatal relapse at 22 was precipitated by a lifetime battle with respiratory disease, probably tuberculosis. Thus, Stevenson was compelled to live off his father's wealth and a course of powerful narcotics. He needed drugs highly addictive combination of alcohol and opium, to survive the physical and emotional agony of his illness. Although these drugs provided him with temporary respite, they also involved him in a complicated psychological game of dependency, which had a deep impact on his portrayal of the main characters.

It is possible to interpret both characters as a confessional allegory. Similar to how an addict loses control of their addiction, Jekyll's ability to revert to his previous personality diminishes as he gives in to Hyde's cravings more and more.[2] Many academics think that Stevenson's lifetime usage of opioids contributed to his early death at the age of 44 from a brain haemorrhage, as he himself battled with such loss of control. As a result, the story presents a terrifying realization: darker instincts are not only exposed but take control when societal conventions and moral constraints are lifted.

This duality is relevant today, especially in the context of the American opioid epidemic. The similarities between Stevensons Jekyll and Hyde and the real case of the Sackler family are shaking. Sacks, owner of Purdue Pharma, introduced Oxycontin and actively sold highly addictive opioid pain. Like Jekyll, they introduced themselves as benefactors. However, the company's practices show a destructive ability like Hyde. Internal documents show sales employees encouraged doctors to reduce pressure, even if addiction and mortality rates increased. [Merri]Political lobbying and donations ensured the attention of regulators, allowing Purdue to hide damn data on drug addiction.

The consequences have been catastrophic. Since 1999, nearly one million Americans died which has devastated families, overwhelmed healthcare systems, and led to an estimated \$631 billion in economic losses over just four years. The case illustrates a modern form of "white-collar evil", as described by psychologist Mark Saban (2019) – a calculated, profit-driven manifestation of the same moral conflict Stevenson explored in his novella. Here, the Jekyll persona embodies a socially respectable, ostensibly moral corporation, while the Hyde reveals a hidden drive for unchecked gain at any cost.

Ultimately, both Stevenson's life and his fiction warn of the dangers lurking beneath the polished surfaces of respectability. Whether through Victorian Edinburgh's deacon-thief or contemporary America's corporate profiteers, the story remains the same: when ambition and desire are given free rein without ethical restraint, destruction is inevitable. The monstrous is not always a separate entity – it often begins as a reflection of ourselves.

The legend of two characters endures not only for its gothic tension but for its profound psychological and social insight. Stevenson's story captures the sinister reality that good and evil are not necessarily external but internal that the capacity for darkness lies within the most upright of individuals and institutions. For Jekyll, his descent into Hyde is not a transformation into something other but an unleashing of what has always existed. Stevenson's own life struggles with illness, addiction, and social conformity gave him firsthand knowledge of this duplicity, and his fiction has an almost prophetic power.

In our modern era, when public images are carefully managed and profit interests are masked behind moral facades, the themes of the novel are timelier than ever. The Sackler family's exploitation of the opioid crisis shows the very risks Stevenson cautioned against. Their cold calculation to value profit over well-being were not mistakes or acts of ignorance, but conscious decisions hidden behind a well-spun cloak of goodness and status. Sackler-named institutions – the Louvre, Harvard – were eager recipients of their largesse, unaware or unconcerned about the moral price. This is the dynamic of Jekyll wanting to do good while allowing his darker half to indulge in private, believing he could keep the repercussions at bay.

In addition, the opioid epidemic itself is a symptom of broader social breakdown. It shows how systems – health, political, and legal – are susceptible to being manipulated when they are inadequately controlled and where money is more valuable than regulation. As Jekyll cannot control Hyde, governments and health agencies lost control of the outbreak as addiction gained its foothold. The message of the novel is clear: ambition unchecked, disguised as respectability, can wreak havoc if unrestrained.

This is not only a cautionary tale of the duality of the self but a social critique of the ethical hypocrisy of society. The very same institutions, which are so placed so that the common good can be guaranteed, can become tools of destruction once ethics are forsaken at the altar of power or money. Stevenson's description of Jekyll and Hyde forces the reader to confront the ulterior motives in themselves and institutions. When good is a facade and evil hides in the shadows, the result is not only personal tragedy but social collapse.

Here, Stevenson's life and work take on a hauntingly contemporary relevance. His deep understanding of pain, of oppression, and of the allure of escape through addiction lent his fiction an ageless authenticity. The dualism he probed is not limited to 19th-century Edinburgh but can still be heard echoing in the boardrooms of drug companies, in the offices

of politicians, and even in people's everyday choices between self-interest and the greater good. Through *Jekyll and Hyde*—and the looming shadow of real-world horrors like the opioid epidemic—Stevenson bestows upon us a lasting lesson: evil does not come with a monstrous face. Usually, it smiles, speaks in elegance, and glides silently through power's corridors, poised to strike.

The structure of the novel sets the persons who read up as a detective, the task of which is to unravel an odd case that ends up commenting on themselves and humankind in general. It challenges us to think about how we conceal the darker half of ourselves in an effort to maintain an acceptable and morally upright image. The novel is about a proper Victorian doctor from the turn of the 19th century, a man who is a Calvinist and is experimenting with a medicine that will divide and keep separate his darker half. This will allow him to live openly while presenting a purer face to society. As Mr. Hyde grows more powerful through these successive transformations, he descends into unrestrained evil, eventually overwhelming Dr. Jekyll's conscience. When his secret truth is revealed by a friend, the "good" doctor, driven by the fear of public shame, commits suicide. The novella ends on a confessional letter written by Jekyll prior to his death, explaining why he conducted the experiment and how it got beyond his control. The discovery brings home a deep insight into the evil that lies within all of us and emphasizes the necessity of building a persona that is better aligned with the values and moral principles of the archetypal Self. In his suicide note, Jekyll expresses the belief that all humans embody a blend of good and evil, identifying Edward Hyde as "the lethal side of man." Jekyll's life lacked vitality and freedom, in stark contrast to Hyde's electrifying existence. What initially seemed like "undignified" pleasures for Mr. Hyde quickly escalated into "vicarious depravity." He transformed into "a being inherently malign and villainous," entirely self-absorbed and "drinking pleasure with bestial avidity from any degree of torture to another"; his mind became engulfed in fear and hatred, twisting him into a "child of hell." [3]

What astonished readers in the 19th century were that this book came from the renowned author of cherished children's poetry and the adventure tale, *Treasure Island*. Even more unsettling for a society deeply rooted in conservative Christianity was the disturbing idea that evil resided within us: the Devil we envisioned as "out there" was actually a reflection of our own inner struggles. This marked a significant shift in the perception of gods, evolving from powerful entities in nature and the external world to psychological forces within ourselves. Nietzsche famously declared in 1882, "God is dead. And we have killed him." The most alarming question he posed was, "What water is there for us to clean ourselves?" The evident evil in the world did not vanish simply because people ceased to believe in a deity beyond our realm, along with his earthly counterpart, the Devil.

A literary genius created both characters in a way that foreshadowed the emergence of contemporary psychoanalysis by nine years, starting with Freud's first psychoanalytic case, "The Dream of Irma's Injection", in 1895. With his gripping descriptions of self-analysis and in-depth examinations of his clients' thoughts, he astounded the world by exposing the most sinister facets of our conscious existence and our self-presentation. [4] He described the psychological processes that underlie duality, including the negative aspects of undesirable characteristics, the projection of our darker selves onto other people and subsequent hostility toward them, and the somatization—the conversion of psychological problems into physical symptoms.

The main finding is that the novel *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* goes beyond merely depicting a split personality; it actually illustrates the psychology of addiction. Dr. Jekyll is portrayed not just as a man with conflicting traits, but as someone grappling with the "ravages of addiction" and "chemical dependency." His transformation into Mr. Hyde stems from his "repeated consumption of the undisclosed psychoactive substance" to which he is addicted. This analysis delves into Robert Louis Stevenson's use of the dual themes of infection and ingestion in *Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*. These themes are framed within the nineteenth-century focus on managing psychological and physiological health, the threat of invasive contagion, and the risks associated with urban food production.[5] By looking at Victorian sources discussing invisible chemical impurities in tainted food, along with physicians' views on the conscious monstrosity of contagion through the medical theories and practices of that era, this discussion proposes that Stevenson intertwines two distinct forms of ingestion-related terror into a complex interplay of moral and medical disgust in *Strange Case*. However, the history of *Jekyll and Hyde* criticism indicates that many readers have interpreted the story as merely a straightforward exploration of duality in the human experience.

Conclusion:

This Norton Critical Edition of R.L. Stevenson's *"Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde"* offers a variety of background materials, performance adaptations, and critical essays that dive into the story's themes of morality, allegory, and self-alienation. The section labelled "Backgrounds and Contexts" includes considerable information on the tale's publication history and its relevance within Victorian culture. It features excerpts from his essay "A Chapter on Dreams," in which Stevenson describes the genesis of the plot, and twelve of his letters in 1885-1887. Ten of the contemporary reactions by authors like Henry James, Gerard Manley Hopkins, and Julia Wedgwood also shed light upon the original reception of *Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*. Stevenson's 1885 story, "Markheim," which foreshadows *Jekyll and Hyde* and sheds light upon the Victorian sensation fiction market, is also featured in this book. Literary forms key to the reception of *Jekyll and Hyde* are analysed by scholars Judith Halberstam, Jenni Calder, and Karl Miller. Victorian theories of atavism, multiple personality disorder, drug addiction, and sexual perversion are discussed by four scientific articles, one of which was written by Stephen Jay Gould. Walter Houghton and Judith R. Walkowitz analyse the wider social significance of Victorian political fragmentation and moral homogeneity. Articles by C. Alex Pinkston, Jr., Charles King, and Scott Allen Nollen in the "Performance Adaptations" section discuss the ways in which *Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* has been staged in the past century and its continuing relevance as a filter through which to view changing social and psychological issues.

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