

# Into the Brains of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde – A Psychoanalytic Reading of the Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde by RL Stevenson

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## Abstract

In the 19th century, England witnessed innumerable changes around. From new medical inventions to literature soaring new heights, each day was marked with novel ideas. Gothic literature too had paved its way through the mists of the new world, but the question is, was gothic mere supernatural events or just unexplained and unexplored scientific or medical incidents? One such incident has been portrayed in the work of RL STEVENSON, *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*. Behind the garb of a gothic novel, Stevenson talked about a psychological illness. This paper is an attempt to bring forth the elements of the unexplored psyche of the novel.

*Keywords* - Victorian Era, Mental Health, Gothic, Psychoanalytic, Mind, Freudian Concept, Evil

## I. Introduction

Known for his out-of-the-box concepts, R.L. Stevenson, first published *The Strange Case of Jekyll Hyde*, in 1886. Science fiction as well as a gothic novella, the work aptly encapsulates the science and medical advancements as well as its ignorance in the Victorian era. Despite having no formal knowledge of psychological theory, Stevenson used the themes of mental turmoil and illness in his works, probably gaining all the knowledge from the journals he read published by renowned psychiatric experts and doctors. The concepts of 'Double Brain' were the talk of the medical and scientific arena, his works *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, and *Markheim*, revolve around various psychic concepts. With the emergence of the Royal Society of London, the scientific minds of the day were guided to become a wide network for practical and philosophical investigation of the

world around, specifically the physical world. This led writers and other scholars to find new themes for their work which was backed by science, mental illness gradually paved its way and got recognition and

As the novella begins with a third person (Mr Enfield) taking a stroll with Mr Utterson, introducing Mr Edward Hyde, a rather inhumane man, who trampled over a little girl and later went inside a "door" which was also the 'door' to Dr Jekyll's 'home'. Stevenson used the metaphor of 'door' to symbolize the 'mind' of the protagonist, providing the readers the first glimpse of a bipolar disorder in the character of Dr Jekyll. As the novella comes to an end Dr. Jekyll states, "man is not truly one, but truly two," as a reason for conducting the experiment and that he "was radically both" (Stevenson 1809), referring to the good and the evil that resides inside of him. He struggled with the ability to hold back his

instinctive pleasures, so he dreamt of separating his good, moral self, from his compulsive, evil self. The inner turmoil of him can be seen as the extremities of the id and the superego constantly clashing. According to the modern definition and symptoms of the disease, now known as 'bipolar disorder', formerly referred to as 'manic-depressive disorders' matches aptly with what Stevenson mentions in his characters of Jekyll and Hyde.

Bipolar Disorder has been categorized by DSM-IV (Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorder) into four types, based on the intensity and harm done to the patient and the environment. Bipolar I Disorder, Bipolar II Disorder, Cyclothymic Disorder, Miscellaneous Category. Among the four categories, the novella showcases the first type of the disorder, the type where the patient experiences "episodes of mania especially major depressive disorders." (Sarason and Sarason, 369). An instance of the maniac change had been witnessed by Dr Lanyon, a fellow mate of Dr Jekyll, he is totally shocked by what he witnessed. Shunning this "experiment" of Dr Jekyll as "Unscientific balderdash" (Stevenson 14) treatments from the medical fields, but not in the masses, hence adding the term 'strange' to any unexplained medical and scientific phenomenon. Apart from being one of the most well-acclaimed works of Stevenson as well as a notable read from the Victorian Era, the novella *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, paved the way for many scholars to look at the work from lenses other than that of gothic.

## II. Literary Review

While analysing the text, Psychoanalytical Criticism became one of the most used theories to read about the subconscious levels of the protagonist has been working throughout the novella. Ranging from Freudian Concepts in Literature to Split Personality Syndrome in the field of Psychology, the text has been read by critics, students, and readers of both fields.

Stiles Anne's work *Robert Louis Stevenson's Jekyll and Hyde and the Double Brain* (2006) is about the famous theory of 'double brain' which meant that a person has two types of personalities(brains) in her/him upon which he/she works.

Apart from the psychological concepts bio-scientists and critics have referred to the text from a perspective of animalism too. Andrew N Rowan in his article, "Scientists and Animal Research: Dr Jekyll or Mr. Hyde?" (1995) talks about the "Dichotomy" of animalism and humans during the Victorian era,

*The Anxiety of the Unforeseen in Stevenson's Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (2016) By Ben D. Fuller writes about the anxiety and defective evils prevalent during the Victorian era, according to

Ben D Fuller "Stevenson created a character, Mr. Hyde, who exemplifies the concentrated evil present in not some, but all people."

In her work, *Dr. Jekyll's Closet* (1990), Elaine Showalter (American literary critic) explores the idea of repressed Homosexuality in the novella. "Unable to pair off with either a woman or another man, Jekyll divides himself, and finds his only mate in his double, Edward Hyde."

Apart from the literary field, the novella has been read by psychologists David Hawkin through the lenses of 'Covert Emotional Abuse' (a type of "narcissist" disorder abuse, where the abuser ruthlessly manipulates the victim's emotions to gain power and control). He talks about the concept of "he is" until "he is not", Dr. Jekyll says Dr David Hawkins "is friendly until he is not, he is sociable until he is not".

## III. Data

The material in this thesis has been incurred through 'secondary data,' which includes the novella *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (1886) by R. L. Stevenson. The other forms of data which have been instrumental in framing

the paper are journals, e-lectures, articles and books on abnormal psychology.

#### IV. Methodology

Research methodology is the method used by a researcher to churn a topic with a motive gaining or proving a particular idea or hypothesis. In this paper, quantitative research methodology, specifically the 'critical analysis method' has been used to talk about the suppressed psyche of the protagonist (Dr Jekyll), with special reference to the Psychoanalytic Criticism (Freudian Concept of Id, Ego and Super Ego).

#### V. Content

"I saw that of the two natures that contended in the field of my consciousness, even if I could rightly be said to be either, it was only because I was radically both." - RL Stevenson.

Robert Louis Balfour Stevenson was born in Edinburgh, Scotland, on November 13, 1850, a sickly child with his parents having high hope for him, similar to Alexander Pope, he too overcame his health-related ailments to become one of the most celebrated authors of his era (Late Victorian Era). Notable for his works like *Treasure Island*, *Kidnapped*, *Markheim*, *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*, *A Child's Garden of Verses*, Stevenson is famous for putting his experiences during voyages and his childhood traumas, into paper. The *Treasure Island* for instance was written after he returned from his first trip to America. Owing to his ill health the Stevensons were often at the sea, traveling to new places in search of medications or treatments, this helped Robert to gain experiences and add to the richness of his work.

The novella *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*, was primitively conceived by RL Stevenson, in his dream, from which he could only recapitulate the 'transitional phase of Dr Jekyll to Mr Hyde'. This concept of dreams and

its implication has been described in Sigmund Freud's book '*Interpretation of Dreams*' where he talks about the two broad classifications of dreams; Manifest and Latent. In other words, the pictorial images in one's sleep is called the Manifest Part of the dream, while the symbolic meaning of the dreams seen is categorized as the Latent Part of the Dream. Sigmund further divided the human brain / conscious, into three parts; which he called the "Iceberg Theory". According to the theory of Mental Iceberg, the human psyche is divided into three parts the "ID", EGO" and "SUPEREGO"; which collectively form the complex human behavioral pattern. ID is the crude and primeval part of the human brain that contains the erotic and destructive moods and concealed memories, the SUPER-EGO acts as a moral principle, and the EGO is the realistic part that oscillates between the periphery of the id and the super-ego. In his Psychoanalytic Criticism, Freud asserts that an imbalance between any of the three mental realms can lead to psychological disorders.

The suppressed desires of the mind gradually overpower one's sane self, leading to insanity, like in the case of Dr Jekyll his Super-ego or Unconscious Level of mind. (Refer to Fig 1.).

According to this concept, the superego can be embodied by society itself. Dr Jekyll's whole fight in life is to maintain his image of a decent man in the public eyes and to hold himself back from his urges in order to present himself positively to society.

"I saw what I saw, I heard what I heard, and my soul sickened at it; and yet, now when that sight has faded from my eyes, I ask myself if I believe it and I cannot answer. My life is shaken to the roots."

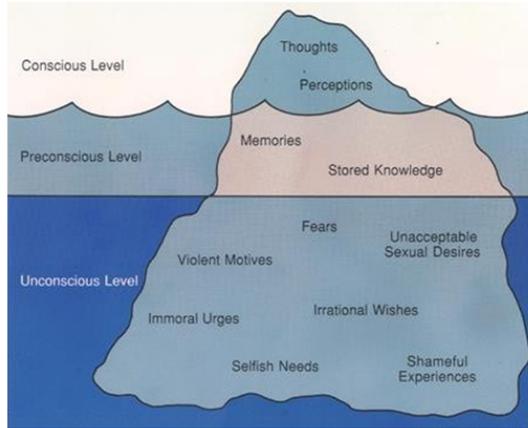


Fig 1. Freud's Concept of a Mental Iceberg, Mathis, Micah.[15]

Stevenson creates a hero in Dr. Jekyll, who is well aware of the evil in his own being, and tired of the duality in his life, finds a way out through his experiments on himself and letting loose of the pure evil part of himself as Mr. Hyde, hence 'both' can indulge in a life unregulated by the demands of the other or the societal chains. Dr Jekyll can also be seen as an alter ego of Stevenson as he too had, had a dual life. A life of bullied student, a sick child during the day and that of a turmoiled young lad visiting brothel after the sky turned as dark as his inner self. Dr Jekyll in one of his dialogues asserted that, he learnt to distinguish the in-depth and primitive dichotomy of the minds of man.. There are frequent examples of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde being the same person, a result of a rather 'balanced' manic episode.

The 'iceberg' makes its hardest of attempts to stay stable but gradually towards the end of the novella, Mr Utterson and Mr Poole find a dead 'Hyde' in the clothes of 'Dr Jekyll.' In the last episode of the Superego taking over the Id, 'Hyde' finally 'Revealing' himself. Jekyll's enjoyment of

Hyde's behavioural patterns and activities gives Hyde ample time to form fully, and of the two men, gradually gaining power, Hyde takes over Jekyll, leading to him committing suicide. Suicide is one of the last resort patients with psychological disorders turn to. Jekyll too unable to hold back himself succumbs to 'himself' and ends 'their' lives.

## VI. Conclusion

Using his characters to portray the world, Stevenson aptly encapsulated three major ideas in his novella. The first is the idea of 'Victorian morality', wherein, the Victorians were expected to behave in a certain "moral" manner, in order to make a decent image in society. The second idea of Stevenson is the contribution of the society in causing an imbalance in the psyche. As mentioned in the above lines, the societal pressure and its perception of mental disorders are shown in the novella through the character of Dr Lanyon. Lastly, readers find a resemblance between RL Stevenson and Dr Jekyll, in his work 'A Chapter on Dreams' (1888) Stevenson presents his past (childhood and his life as a bullied student), and the way they developed into fearsome dreams while he was still a student, leading to a 'double life. But it should be noted that duality is a short-lived phenomenon, with either of the personalities taking over, the person often succumbs to the evil trait, like Dr Jekyll.

The paper has been studied in presence of some limitations. The lack of a proper knowledge in the

field if psychology became one of the most recurring shortcomings while analysing the brains of the characters as well as getting a general understanding of the discussed disorder. Apart from the mentioned shortcoming, primary data too held back the research from reaching its epoch. The thesis, although tried to add a few points to the research gaps left by the scholars, the justification of the statement 'the character of RL Stevenson, as a homosexual' described by Annie Stiles, has been left unexplained owing to the lack of information.

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