



## CONTROLLING PRIMAL INSTINCTS: DR JEKYLL AND MR. HYDE

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### ABSTRACT

*Deep essence of human nature, which is similar in all men and which aims at the satisfaction of certain needs -are self preservation, aggression, need for love, and the impulse to attain pleasure and avoid pain .These impulses in themselves are neither good nor bad. We classify them and their expression in that way, according to their relations to the needs of the human community which demands good conduct and does not trouble itself about the instinctual basis of this conduct. In Freudian theory the thoughts and desires are transferred to the unconscious mind and motivate the behavior of the conscious mind in an attempt to be wholly and completely good. It can result in the development of a character.*

*This paper is an attempt at exploring man's struggle to contain primal instincts and existence of primal instincts today in human nature. For the purpose of this paper I have chosen The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr. Hyde by Robert Louis Stevenson which traces the elements of primal instincts in human behavior. R L Stevenson was a prominent writer in the Victorian period.*

*The novel The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr. Hyde serves as a study of human behavior. It is frequently interpreted as an examination of the duality of human nature; usually expressed as an inner struggle between good and evil, with variations such as human versus animal civilization versus barbarism. And the failure to accept this tension results in evil or barbarity or animal violence, being projected to others.*

*The story of Dr Jekyll and Mr. Hyde deals with Henry Jekyll who is widely respected, successful and a brilliant intellect but is only too aware of primitivism 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 the social criticism. During his experiments, he was able to create a concoction that enables him to free this evil in him from the control of good self, thus giving rise to Edward Hyde. . Both in body and soul Edward Hyde is completely different from Dr Henry Jekyll.*

**Key Words:** Primal instinct, human, nature, unconscious, mind.



## INTRODUCTION

This paper is an attempt at exploring man's struggle to contain primal instincts in human behavior today. In literature we have many works which show man's struggle and capacity to contain evil. like *The Lord of The Flies* by William Golding, *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* by Robert Louis Stevenson. *The Lord of the Flies* exemplifies man's capacity for evil which is revealed in his inherent human nature. The underlying evil within man is the most prominent theme of the novel. To portray this theme, *The Lord of the Flies* details the lives of a group of young school boys who have been stranded on a deserted island. As these youngsters struggle to survive they are faced with the challenge of sustaining life by nourishing and sheltering themselves, as well as trying to figure out how to be rescued. Along the way they endeavor to maintain a civilized order as well as their own humanity, however it becomes apparent that most of the boys are capable of evil perhaps due to their extreme circumstances. Golding employs specific literary devices to develop the novel's theme by utilizing characterization, diction and symbolism in this narrative on man's inhumanity towards man, whereby he is able to portray the theme that evil is an inborn trait of mankind.

The novel, *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* deals with Dr Jekyll who is widely respected, successful and possesses a brilliant intellect but is only too aware of primitivism 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 social criticism. Stevenson's novel presents the idea of eradicating people with primitive characteristics in people in order to cleanse the world of those characteristics. Stevenson's representation of Mr. Hyde correlates primitive features with malevolence; furthermore, it represents the idea that there is a savage nature within each human being, regardless of class or ethnicity. During his experiments, Dr Jekyll was able to create a concoction that enables him to free this evil in him from the control of his good self; this form of his soul is Edward Hyde. This form of his soul is both evil and amoral. Both in body and soul Edward Hyde is completely different from Dr Henry Jekyll. As from the Full Statement of the Case:

*"It was on the moral side, and in my own person, that I learned to recognize the thorough and primitive duality of man; I saw 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"(50).*

For the purpose of this paper I have chosen *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* which traces the elements of primal instincts in human behavior. R L Stevenson was a prominent writer in the Victorian period. He wrote many major works as *Treasure Island*, *Kidnapped*, and *Dr Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*. He was admired by many writers as possessing a consistently high level of "literary skill or sheer imaginative power". Stevenson had long been intrigued by the idea of how personalities can affect a human being and how to

incorporate the interplay of good and evil into a story. He had a dream, and upon awakening had the intuition for two or three scenes that would appear in the story *Dr Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*. The novel serves as a study of human behavior. The novel is frequently interpreted as an inner struggle between good and evil, with variations such as human versus animal, civilization versus barbarism, and the failure to accept this tension results in evil or barbarity or animal violence being projected to others. As in the novel;

*“ It was the curse of mankind that these incongruous faggots were thus bound together- that in the agonized womb of the consciousness, these polar twins should be continuously struggling”.*

“Dr Henry Jekyll was a large well- made, smooth-faced man of fifty, with something of stylish cast perhaps, but every mark of capacity and kindness- you could see by his looks that he cherished for Mr. Utterson a sincere and warm affection”. But occasionally Dr Jekyll feels he is battling with good and evil that reside within him. He began to provide covert utterance to the evil in his soul by various unspeakable acts, thus leading to the struggle between his dual personality of Jekyll and Edward Hyde. He has spent a great part of his life trying to repress evil urges that were not befitting for a man of his stature. He creates a serum or potion in an attempt to mask his hidden evil within his personality. However in doing so, Jekyll transforms into Mr. Hyde, a hideous, and evil creature without any compassion or remorse.

In this way it can be said that in the novel Mr. Hyde is described with the features of a primitive man and the author links these features to his evilness and Jekyll is described as a respected man.

The issue raised in the novel finds resonance with the Freudian concepts of instincts, life and death instincts and the structural theory of mind. Freud found that some event and desires are often too frightening or painful for patients to acknowledge. Freud believed such information are locked away in a region he called the unconscious mind. This happens through the process of repression. Freud developed a structural model of the mind comprising the entities id, ego, super ego (what Freud called “the psychic apparatus”). These are not physical areas within the brain, but rather hypothetical conceptualization of important mental functions. These concepts of mental functions are id (instincts), ego (reality); super ego (morality). Freud assumed that id operates at an unconscious level according to the pleasure principle. The ego develops from id during infancy. The ego’s goal is to satisfy the demands of the id in a safe socially acceptable way. The super ego develops during early childhood and is responsible for ensuring moral standards. The super ego operates on the morality principles and motivates us to behave in socially responsible and acceptable manner. The life and death instincts theory by Freud deals with drives. The life instincts are those that deal with basic survival, pleasure, and reproduction. These instincts are essential for sustaining the life of the individual as well as of the continuation of the species. In the concept of death instinct Freud proposed that the goal of all life is death.

The present study of the novel traces the dual nature not only of one man but also of society in general. The failure to accept the tension of duality is related to Christian theology, where Satan's fall from heaven due to his refusal to accept that he is a created being (that he was a dual nature) and is not god. This idea is suggested when Hyde says to Lanyon, shortly before drinking the famous potion "-----and your sight shall be blasted by prodigy to stagger the unbelief of Satan" (47). This is because in Christianity, pride (to consider oneself as without sin or without evil) is the greatest sin, as it is the precursor to evil itself.

The reader is first introduced to Mr. Hyde through testimony of Richard Enfield, a distant cousin of the lawyer, Mr. Utterson. He describes his encounter with Hyde in a distressful manner, raising alarm in Mr. Utterson. The first time that Hyde is associated with evil is when Enfield describes the shock of witnessing Hyde trample over a young girl, leaving her lying in the street. Enfield says, "It was hellish to see" (Stevenson 33). Stevenson's description of Mr. Hyde is that of "a little man who was stumping along" (Stevenson 34). On closer examination of Hyde, Enfield describes Hyde in a sinister way: "a kind of black sneering coolness" and "like Satan" (Stevenson 34). Enfield points out that Hyde is not welcomed in the community as he describes him as being surrounded by "a circle of such hateful faces" (Stevenson 34). Enfield then says "he must be deformed somewhere; he gives a strong feeling of deformity" (Stevenson 35). He also mentions that it was strange for a man of his appearance to be wealthy. This establishes the idea that there is certain physical criterion that must be met as a measure of upper class society.

What is known of Mr. Utterson is that he is "lean, long, dusty, dreary, and somewhat loveable" (Stevenson 31). The narrator immediately establishes Utterson on the side of morality. Utterson has suppressed the inner primitive portion of himself and he only exposes the outermost segment of his being, which has been shaped by civilized society. He is Stevenson's portrayal of the complete civilized human. Utterson is able to distinguish the cruel behavior of Mr. Hyde, but is frightened upon looking at him. This is due to the idea that Hyde's rudimentary nature serves as a mirror for the suppressed, primitive nature of Utterson's inner being. Here we find the clear reflection of Sigmund Freud's concept of super ego.

Connecting with Hyde's savage appearance is the feature of the empowerment he brings to Dr. Jekyll. There is also a reflection of Freud's concept of id in man, as;

*"The evil side of my nature, to which I had now transferred the stumping efficacy, was less robust and less developed than the good which I had just deposed" Jekyll reflects on the strength he felt from turning into Hyde: "I was not only well known and highly considered, but growing towards the elderly man, this incoherency of my life was daily growing more unwelcome. It was on this side (Hyde) until my new power tempted me until I fell in slavery" (Stevenson 82).*

When Mr. Utterson encounters Mr. Hyde, the reader is given a clue that Utterson finely distinguished that Hyde and Jekyll are the same person. What is unique about this observation is that the physical appearance of Hyde is the way in which he is being judged by Utterson: “small and plainly dressed, even at that distance, went somehow strongly against the watcher’s inclination”. This should be an unreasonable way to pass judgment, but due to his good nature and accurate awareness, Utterson has been established as credible. Furthermore, upon this direct contact with Hyde. Utterson asks him to show his face. The way Hyde is described: “pale and dwarfish...the impression of deformity namable malformation.....a displeasing smile.....murderous mixture of timidity and boldness, and he spoke with a husky, whispering and somewhat broken voice” (Stevenson41) does not distinguish a distinct characteristic i.e. necessarily negative of Hyde. His appearance simply unfamiliar; so in Utterson’s mind there must be something menacing about this man who does not look, walk, and talk like himself. With the unfamiliarity in mind, Hyde is perceived through Utterson as savage. He then depicts Hyde’s laugh as animalist and unrefined as he recalls that Hyde “snarled aloud with a savage laugh” (Stevenson 41). Even laughter, which is a raw emotion, must be contained in civilized society to a proper tone and volume.

The negative connotation of Hyde’s appearance can be explained through scientific literature of the late nineteenth century. Herbert Spencer wrote on the physical features of the primitive man and states “evidence taken in the mass implies an average relation between barbarianism and inferiority of size” (Spencer 321). The generalization of categorizing behavior from physical appearance as Edward Tylor explains the uniformity in various indigenous tribes from all parts of the globe. The notion that all indigenous cultures harbour the same physical and psychological characteristics sets the stage for any individual exhibiting features that seem primitive to be deemed uncivilized. Utterson immediately reflects on the encounter he has with Hyde by calling out to God, which, again, establishes alliance with civility; “god bless me, the man seems hardly human!” (Stevenson 42). He goes on to say that Hyde resembles a being of prehistoric times. Utterson’s association with good is met with a control of evil: “O my poor old Jekyll, if I ever read Satan’s signature upon a face, it is on that of your new friend” (Stevenson 42). This contrast of good and evil establishes the idea that persons that have features or characteristics that are unfamiliar are viewed as less developed on the evolutionary scale, therefore condemning them to savagery and evil-mindedness.

In his article “*Dr. Jekyll’s Two Bodies*” Martin Danahy points out, “when he (Jekyll) becomes Mr. Hyde he switches from a ‘decent’ and respectable body into the ‘indecent’ body of a working-class man...while the hedonistic body is marked both as ‘degenerate’ and of lower social class” (Danahy 23). While Stevenson demonstrates the fundamental principles of primitivism in man by giving a man of small stature and dark skin a villain role, it is meaningful to note that Mr. Jekyll willingly transformed into Hyde knowing the power he has over him. This power became empowering to him because he is able to step away from artificial cultural rigidity and allow himself to indulge in his instincts and impulse without the scrutiny a gentleman may face. This conscious decision to liberate himself from

civilized culture makes Jekyll nothing more than a well-desired, well-educated savage, which demonstrates that this primal care is within each human being.

Although Stevenson illustrates that within each person there is an inherently primitive, uncivilized side, he portrays this primitiveness as evil and a threat to society. Furthermore each individual who cannot suppress this uncivilized nature must be stopped because it is a threat to the civilized society. Dr. Jekyll says in his letter, “My devil had been long caged, he came roaring out” and “the spirit of hell awake in me and raged” (Stevenson 86-87). It is significant to note that Utterson chosen his friendship based on similar social class and personality characteristics. If Dr. Jekyll, who is a high class man , has within him a primal force that can overtake his sophisticated nature each individual has the possibility of having the same unrefined, ferocious core within him or her. This is what makes this novel so haunting. On the one hand, those with a basic uncivilized nature are a threat to the civilized world and must be stopped in order to prevent the degeneration of the human species.

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