

**The Nineteenth Century Novel**  
**Prof. Divya. A**  
**Department of Humanities and Social Sciences**  
**Indian Institute of Technology – Madras**

**Lecture - 55**

**Themes and Contexts in R.L. Stevenson, The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde**

Hello and welcome to week 12's 333 lectures. In today's session, I will be discussing some of the key themes and contexts in R. L. Stevenson's *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*. So I am also going to be showing a lot of illustrations just to give you a sense of how the characters and the world of Stevenson's novel was brought before the readers since the 20th century.

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"Hyam and Company :a successful Victorian clothing manufacturer and outfitters with a chain of shops in London, Birmingham and Leeds."



This is a Victorian representation of the kind of outfits both gentlemen and gentlewomen, you know, put on in that period. So clothing was a cue to one's identity, status and place in society. So this is an illustration which is part of an advertisement by this company Hyam and Company, a successful Victorian clothing manufacturer and they had a chain of shops in London, Birmingham and Leeds.

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S G Hulme-Beaman, 1930

flashback /  
embedded  
narrative  
by Mr. Enfield.



Mr Hyde  
Dr Jekyll.



This is a representation of the sinister block of building into which Mr. Hyde enters at the beginning of the story. In fact, if you remember that story is a flashback or an embedded narrative by one Mr. Enfield, and this is the sinister block. And you got to remember that this sinister block is attached to the respectable residence of Dr. Jekyll. So they are all part of one unit.

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S G Hulme-Beaman, 1930



animal  
barbarity.



This is an illustration by Hulme-Beaman, and this is from the 1930, and it illustrates the murder of that elderly MP by Hyde. Look at the hands of this particular evil man Hyde. He also enjoys his crime, he is, you know, there is a kind of glee, a murderous glee on his face when he tramples over and offers blows to this man until he is dead. And the hands indicate that he is almost an animal rather than a human being, there is a lot of barbarism here.

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Actor Richard Mansfield in the stage adaptation of Dr  
Jekyll and Mr Hyde,



This is actor Richard Mansfield, and there was a stage adaptation of this particular novella in the Victorian period, late 19th century, and Mansfield played both Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde. And he is particularly interesting because due to the impact of the intensity with which he played Hyde, he was thought to be a serial murderer of a particular chain of murders committed in London of that period. So I will show you what that is in a minute.

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### Reality and Fiction

- Whitechapel Murders, 1888
- "Richard Mansfield, who famously played Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde in the stage adaptation produced a year after the publication of the novel, was accused of being the Ripper murderer by a member of the public."



So that chain of murders was called the Whitechapel Murders, and it occurred in 1888, and Richard Mansfield who famously played Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde in the stage adaptation produced a year after the publication of the novel was accused of being the Ripper murderer by a member of the public. So that was the extent to which this particular novella had an impact on the psyche of the Victorian society, and Richard Mansfield kind of caught the imagination of the public by his intense portrayal.

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Whitechapel Murders and Hyde

- 'With a transport of glee, I mauled the unresisting body, tasting delight from every blow (ch. 10). The ferocity of the attack mirrors the intensity of the Ripper murders.'

Dr. Jekyll who is Mr. Hyde  
Sir Danvers Carew  
Dr. Jekyll -> narrate the experience of Hyde

And I am showing you the excerpt which is referencing the particular murder of the elderly gentleman. And “with a transport of glee; I mauled the unresisting body, tasting delight from every blow.” So this excerpt as I have pointed out is from Chapter Ten, and the I here refers to Dr. Jekyll who is Mr. Hyde, the man who is attacking Sir Danvers Carew. So it is very interesting that Dr. Jekyll is able to understand the joy of brutality experienced by the character called Hyde.

So if you notice that this letter is written by the scientific gentleman Dr. Jekyll, but when he is confessing, he is able to narrate the experience of Hyde as well. So at one point in the letter he says that I was able to, you know, feel the desire of Hyde to come out. I have been suppressing him and he is trying to get out. And he is in touch with the emotions and the thought process of the evil psyche that is within him and that is something we need to notice.

So even though Dr. Jekyll is trying to disassociate this evil nature within him into a separate body and character, he is in tune with the evil side as well. So we are really not sure if he is successful in his attempt to differentiate the two. And as I said, the ferocity of the attack of Mr. Hyde mirrors the intensity of the Ripper murders, and people thought that the murderer was in fact Richard Mansfield.

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**Themes**

- Duality ✓ *Dickens' Fiction*
- Evolution *Mr Hyde Dr. Jekyll*
- Degeneration )
- Criminal psychology *desires, hopes, aspirations, Criminal mind*

So these are some of the themes of this particular novella. I did talk quite a bit about duality, the idea of doubleness, twinning, and this is a common theme not only of Stevenson's work but it is also quite common in Dickens' fiction too, *A Tale of Two Cities*. And since I have discussed this aspect, I will just move on to the next one, evolution. So people believed that, especially after Darwin's work, that people evolved from a lesser being to a superior being.

So human beings are an evolved species, full of sophistication, civilization and full of moral order to a certain extent. And now, this novella is offering them a picture of society, especially a set of characters who are kind of going back in time somehow. So people, especially people like Mr. Edward Hyde, are considered to be degenerate specimens, figures who are backward in the evolutionary process.

And there is a fear that we will regress, go back in time, and go back to an earlier version of humanity which is closer to the animal world rather than, you know, to the human society. The other theme that interests us in this particular novella is criminal psychology. What are the desires, aspirations and preoccupations of the criminal mind? And in this novella, especially in the final chapter, we get a sense of a kind of a window into the mind of Mr. Hyde as well as Dr. Jekyll who is somehow the father of this creature too.

So we have once again the trope of the Frankenstein monster in this particular novella too. So I will come back to the criminal psychology aspect in a minute.

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**Themes and genre**

- Dark side of humanity
- Duality of one person
- Duality of society

Gothic fiction:  
"sinister alter ego" or double

Absence of motives

Why Hyde???

Circles of Reason  
Sir D. Casanova  
attracted on the girl

Further themes involve, you know, representation of the dark side of humanity. There is always this, you know, underbelly of society that is suppressed and oppressed and does not get to, you know, be represented in the narrative, and that side is given a good picture, a portrait, in this particular novella. And the other aspect that we need to think about is the duality of one person, a person can be more than one identity, and that idea is represented in this novel.

So Dr. Jekyll does not mean just this scientific gentleman, he is also Mr. Hyde who indulges in you know, pleasures of the body, and who indulges in some other unacceptable, you know, pleasure such as inflicting pain and injury on the other. And this further leads us to the next idea of the duality of society. Society is also not, you know, single minded in terms of its, you know, goal. There are various pressures, there are various perspectives, there are various kinds of people. Society is not homogeneous, it is heterogeneous. And duality and multiplicity of society becomes evident and that concept is also explored here.

Now, I have talked about the idea of gothic fiction in one of my sessions which analyzed the first four chapters of this work, and I want to mention here another perspective. A particular kind of setting is, you know, a key to the way the plot, you know, unfolds, and you gothic fiction is known for its eerie, bizarre, dark settings set in various locales, and the locale, kind of defines the identity of gothic fiction. But I want to talk about the notion of sinister alter-ego here. Gothic fiction is also known for this particular characteristic, you know, there are doubles.

And these multiple identities cause trouble for the central characters, and which are resolved in the way the gothic fiction attains closure. So sinister alter-egos are also a specific characteristic of this particular genre of literature. I want to go back to that point about the dark side of humanity. We do not know much about this side, and that is also symbolically represented in the reason or the lack of reason for the murder of Sir Carew, Danvers Carew and the attack on the girl.

We are never told, even in the confession of Dr. Jekyll, as to why Hyde attacked these people. We do not know the reason behind that. So the darkness of human beings as to why they do the things they do is also symbolically encoded or embodied in this particular attribute of Hyde, the absence of motives.

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Themes

- "Respectability and degradation" *Dr. Jekyll + Mr. Hyde*
- "Abandon with restraint" *Dr. Jekyll's*
- "Honesty with duplicity" *Dr. Jekyll's*

London streets:  
"respectable"  
streets side by  
side with streets  
"notorious for  
squaioir"

Further themes include the cheek-by-jowl existence of respectability and degradation. If you look at the very obvious example, Dr. Jekyll is also Mr. Hyde. Other examples can be extracted from the figure of Mr. Enfield too. You might want to ask this question, what is Mr. Enfield doing at 2:00 a.m. or 3:00 a.m. in the morning when he meets with Mr. Hyde attacking an innocent girl?

So what exactly is he doing at that time? Where is he returning from? So is he respectable or does he have some kind of secrets which he is suppressing and not letting anybody know? And further, there is this reference by Dr. Jekyll in his letter which states that you know, I have not done anything that my neighbors are not doing. So he is pointing out the fact that crimes are committed by, even by respectable middle-class beings, human beings.



And the point is that they are not made much fuss of during the daylight. So degradation and respectability exist side by side. So that idea is also interesting to note. There is also this theme of abandon coexisting with restraint. You know, people indulging in a lot of crimes, at the same time, you know, they are restrained at different points of the day; you know, there is this really bad neighborhood which is coexisting with a respectable neighborhood.

Honesty is also coexisting with duplicity, and Jekyll is a good example of that. And we also get a sense that there are several people with a lot of secrets which are not, you know, exposed, and therefore duplicity is kind of beneath the surface of the respectable veneer that is there in Victorian society. So especially London's streets are pointed out in terms of the, you know, the contrast between the two streets.

There are respectable streets living side by side with streets notorious for squalor, and the place in which Mr. Hyde lives is also of such a notorious spatiality, and even the by-street which is adjacent to the thoroughfare is also another example of this kind of neighborhood. And if you look at the entryway to that cellar door, it is marked with graffiti, there are, you know, notices put up as to police asking for the whereabouts of a particular criminal and things like that, so it is a very close coexistence.

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**Doubling**

- "Fear of regression"
- Victorian anxieties and social fears
- Veneer of class-conditioned respectability shattered"
- "criminals are also found in educated, wealthy, and seemingly respectable echelons of society."

Handwritten notes: Mr. Hyde, bent, upright - animal characteristic, Gorilla, like a monkey, Gentlemen = monsters., Dr. Jekyll

As I point out, there is a fear of regression among the society, about people going back in evolutionary time, and that is, you know, discussed in the context of Mr. Hyde. And if you see Mr. Hyde's figure that is illustrated in some of the illustrations I shared over this course,



you can see that Mr. Hyde is usually bent, he is bent, he is not upright. He does not stand straight, he is bent, and that is an animal-like characteristic.

And in fact as I pointed out earlier too, he is constantly referred to as being ape-like and then there is also the reference to him jumping like a monkey among the cabinets that are lying about in the surgical room near the cabinet. So he is like a monkey too. And there is this, you know, analysis of Darwin which states that, you know, in terms of evolution human beings have evolved from a species which is related to the ape.

And you know, this particular novella captures the anxieties of people with regard to evolution and progression and regression. So Victorian anxieties are also captured here, there is the social fear that gentlemen could be monsters. Earlier there was this belief that, you know, middle classes are not the class which would indulge in criminal behavior. It is usually the working classes and the lower classes which are thought to behave in, you know, such ways which are, you know, negatively affecting the society.

But for the first time there is this fear that masquerading in middle-class identities are monsters which will damage or which will attack the vulnerable and the innocent. So that kind of anxiety and fear is also embedded in the figure of Dr. Jekyll who is a respectable man, who is a scientific gentleman, who is very pious, charitable, yet he is also a murderer wanted by the police in the guise of Mr. Hyde. So there is a lot of social fear about not identifying who is the real criminal.

And the veneer of class-conditioned respectability is shattered. As I pointed out just now, if you are middle class or upper class, it does not automatically mean that you are highly respectable. Because beneath your respectability, there could be criminality, moral disorder, dysfunctionality, all you know, hidden underneath the gentlemanly outfits of which representation I showed a minute ago in those in that advertisement for gentlemen and gentlewomen's clothing. And people started to believe that criminals are also to be found in educated, wealthy and seemingly respectable echelons of society. So criminals are not, you know, members of the working classes or classes below that alone, they can be found among the educated classes, among the wealthy classes, and among the respectable ladders of society too.

So that is indicated through the figure of Dr. Jekyll very powerfully by R. L. Stevenson in this novella.

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Themes

- The respectable and the disreputable
- "The respectable façade not a guarantee against dark secrets"
- Double/plurality of human consciousness
- Decent side; good side vs Amoral; evil side

Mr. Utterson  
Dr. Lanyon

So further themes, as I pointed out, the coexistence of the respectable and the disreputable. If you can go back to that scene where we saw the housekeeper of Mr. Hyde, we realized that she is a woman who is evil-minded, and she is, you know, the housekeeper of Mr. Hyde. So Mr. Hyde apparently to begin with is considered to be a gentleman, but then he has in his employee figures who are, you know, so obviously disreputable.

And then you can also argue that you know, the disreputable all congregate together, and that is also one further way to look at the combination of people in this particular novella. Or, you can say that the respectable Mr. Utterson is friendly with the disreputable, the really disreputable Dr. Jekyll, because we know that heart of hearts he is also a man who is a threat to the society.

And as I said, the respectable façade, the respectable exterior is not a guarantee against dark secrets. There could be something hidden underneath, you know, even a man like Mr. Utterson or even Dr. Lanyon, we do not know. With the exposé of Dr. Jekyll, you know, there is every legitimate reason for wanting to probe if these men are completely morally upright. There is a plurality of human consciousness.

Human beings are not absolutely good at all times. And therefore, this novel also projects the idea that there are different kinds of consciousness existing within one human being. So there

is the good side, there is the decent side, there is the evil side and there is the amoral side, the indifferent to anything. All these perspectives are coexisting within the human consciousness.

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Charles Darwin, *The Descent of Man* (1871)

- 15 years before *Jekyll and Hyde*
- Darwin: humankind had 'descended from a hairy, tailed quadruped' which was itself 'probably derived from an ancient marsupial animal'.<sup>[1]</sup>

Evolutionary trajectory.

19th C turn of the century.

Now Charles Darwin's *The Descent of Man* was published in 1871, and critics believed that this particular work, published 15 years before *Jekyll and Hyde*, also had an influence on this particular novella. So what did Darwin want to explore or you know, discover in his work? He suggested that humankind had descended from a hairy, tailed quadruped which was itself probably derived from an ancient marsupial animal.

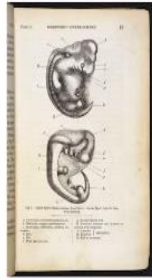
So he is tracing the evolutionary trajectory from an ancient marsupial animal to a tailed quadruped, a creature that has four legs, and then you know, there is this assumption that human beings have evolved into bipeds. So if we look at Mr. Hyde, we can see that, you know, he is associated with a hairy quadruped rather than a sophisticated, civilized, human, *Homo sapiens*.

So as I pointed out, there is this threat that human beings will go back in time, evolutionary time, especially, you know, in the period of the late 19th century. At the turn of the century, such anxieties were becoming predominant.

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### The Descent of Man, 1871



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This is the illustration from The Descent of Man.

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### The Descent of Man, 1871

- “The sole object of this work is to consider, firstly, whether man, like every other species, is descended from some pre-existing form; secondly, the manner of his development; and thirdly, the value of the differences between the so-called races of man”



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What is the object of Darwin in this work? It is “to consider, firstly, whether man, like every other species, is descended from some pre-existing form; secondly, the manner of his development; and thirdly the value of the differences between the so-called races of man.” So Darwin has several agendas, and one of the agendas is to find out the differences between the various races of human beings across the globe.

And the other objectives are to find out if there is a pre-existing form for human beings and how human beings have evolved from this particular prototype, a prototype of creature that is finally evolved into the human species.

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### Dr Jekyll and Hyde

- Hyde = "Ape-like appearance"
- Contemporary criminological theory = delinquents exhibited visible traits of evil nature
- In Dr Jekyll's case, it is proved untrue

So as I pointed out, Hyde has an ape-like appearance, so he is a part of the earlier, you know, stage of the human evolution if you look at it in Darwin's terms. And in terms of the contemporary criminological theory, there was this belief that delinquents, who are delinquents? People who commit errors, mistakes, crimes, exhibited visible traits of evil nature. So criminals would look like criminals.

When you see a man who has committed a crime, you would know that he is, you know, a part of the category of criminals. So the evil nature is captured visibly on that person's personality and demeanor. So that is contemporary criminological theory, you know, contemporary, by contemporary I mean 19th century. In Dr. Jekyll's case it is proved untrue, that is what some critics believe.

But if you look at Mr. Hyde, this theory fits to a T, this theory is you know, proved in Mr. Hyde's case, because as soon as you see him, you are repulsed, you think that this man is capable of every kind of criminal activity. But in the case of Dr. Jekyll, it is proved untrue, but because it is proved untrue, because you cannot guess that this man is capable of such activities that Mr. Hyde does.

So by looking at the Jekyll's face or figure who is upright, gentlemanly, genial, you do not think that he would capable of injuring a innocent girl or murdering an elderly gentleman. But he is capable of hiding Mr. Hyde within him. So the complexity of the problem is laid bare in this particular novella by Stevenson.

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### L'Uomo Delinquente, 1876



Now I want to talk about this book, the Human Delinquent published in 1876. So almost contemporary with the work of Stevenson. So what does this figure suggest?

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### Cesare Lombroso

- "Working from anthropometry, the study of racial characteristics through measurement of the body, he proposed a theory of criminal pathology based on an anomaly of the skull which predisposed the subject to deviant social acts."

*disturbing physical deformity → evil acts*  
*Skull - normal size is evil minded*



He suggests that working from anthropometry, the study of racial characteristics through measurement of the body, he proposed a theory of criminal pathology based on an anomaly of the skull which predisposed the subject to deviant social acts. So the point is really clear in the last phrase, which says that anomaly, the defective skull would make the man capable of performing deviant, you know, antisocial acts.

So if your skull is not of the normal size, it would mean that you are evil minded, and that you will commit acts which would damage the safety and security of society. So again this is a disturbing theory. Why? Because it suggests that physical deformity would mean that the

person is capable of evil acts. So it is criminalizing the disabled, this particular theory of Cesare Lombroso.

And this works to a certain extent in terms of Mr. Hyde, because you can use Mr. Hyde as a symbol to talk about, you know, the physically displeasing figures in society, you can talk about Hyde in terms of the working classes who are not very appealing to look at because of the physical work that they do on a daily basis. Thank you for watching. I will continue in the

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