

## Criticism against the Gentlemen Image in England's Victorian Period in R.L. Stevenson's *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*

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### A B S T R A C T

England's Victorian period is marked as an era of historical, technological, economic, and social change. Although science and technological advancement was very progressive—denoted by the Industrial Revolution which took place in this era—the Victorian society's ideal of moral values, norms, and beliefs was very conservative. Robert Louis Stevenson, a famous Victorian author, wrote *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* which portrays the complexity of Victorian upper class lives in dealing with the development of science yet facing the strict social norms. This research applies a sociological approach to examine the significant relations between the characterization of the three main characters in the novel—Jekyll, Hyde, and Utterson—and the social issues in the Victorian era. A library research as well as a qualitative method is applied in the process of collecting and analyzing the data. It was found that both Henry Jekyll and Edward Hyde symbolize the repressed individuals of Victorian social norms as Jekyll suppresses his inner-self and separates his dual personality apart in the form of Edward Hyde. As the representation of Jekyll's evil side, Hyde performs violent and criminal acts which oppose the ideal of social morality. It can be concluded that Jekyll-Hyde's characterization articulates the social criticism against the firm gentlemen image in the Victorian era. In contrast, Utterson's characterization represents the epitome of Victorian gentleman.

**Keywords:** *criticism, gentlemen, image, moral, victorian.*

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### INTRODUCTION

Characterization is one of the fundamental elements in literary works. Abrams (1976, p. 21) defines characters as the persons, in a dramatic or narrative work, endowed with moral and dispositional qualities that are expressed in what they said—the dialogue and what they do—in action. He states that any literary work is produced in a certain society so that it can never be separated from its social environment. Thus, characters and characterizations in literary works are based on human's experience in the real world. In addition, characters are created by the author and also often influenced by the author's ideology upon social phenomena. Their actions and thoughts in the literary works serve a

significant function in delivering the message of the novel.

The literary work chosen for this research is *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* written by Robert Louis Stevenson—a famous British author in the Victorian era—and was published in 1886 with a tremendous success. Set in the city of London in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, the story tells about a respectable gentleman named Dr. Jekyll who has a dramatic transformation into Mr. Hyde, the evil version of Dr. Jekyll. Jekyll's split personality, which obviously presents the separation between good and evil, becomes the focus of this research. Also, this research looks at another important character in the novel, Mr. Utterson, who narrates the story and plays role as a good friend of Jekyll as well as the investigator

of Jekyll-Hyde's strange case. The characterizations of those characters show the complexity of the Victorian upper class lives.

Reigned by Queen Victoria in the year 1837 until 1901, Victorian era is marked in the history as a time when England underwent sudden changes. It is also the time when science and technology take on great significance in the society. The Victorian era is also known for its major economic growth as the result of the Industrial Revolution. However, the rapid growth of technology and industry does not create a dynamic impact to the society's ideal of moral values, norms, and beliefs. Victorian society is known for its rigid social code of conducts. According to Chrisp (2005), Victorians extremely were concerned about their looks and appearances in the society as a language to show their class, status, and attitudes. In order to be seen as respectable good-looking men, people in the Victorian era deny the truth about their flaws and deepest desires. Not only having zero acceptance in people's emotional expression and desires, Victorian era is also known with its sexual restraint in the society. In short, the idea of Victorian repression is based on the sexual restraint, zero acceptances of immoral acts, and suppression of emotional expressions and behavior. Therefore, to adjust with the Victorian social code of conducts, people repressed their emotional expression and did not acknowledge their true selves.

This research assumes that the characterization of the three main characters—Dr. Jekyll, Mr. Hyde, and Mr. Utterson—symbolizes social criticism against the gentlemen image in the Victorian era. Thus, this research applies sociological approach and it aims at unrevealing the representation of the three main characters in the novel.

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Since this research examines the relation between the Victorian era and the characterization in the novel *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* by Robert Louis Stevenson, sociological approach was adopted for data analysis. Sociological approach develops from

Aristotle's idea of mimetic in literature. In *Poetics*, Aristotle (1996, p. 254) states that "art and literature were essentially mimetic in their aim to give the illusion of a representation of the real world". According to Abrams (1976), mimetic approach defines literature in relation to reality and examines a literary work in terms of imitation. Furthermore, Abrams (1976) explains that in mimetic criticism, a literary work is the reflection of the world; thus, the society in the novel is a representation or an "imitation" of the world and human life. The human life that applied to the work is the "truth of its representation to the subject matter that it represents or should represent" (p. 51). Abrams explains further that literary work could never be separated from the external aspects that affect literature, especially the social condition (p. 18).

Besides, Swingewood and Laurenson (1972) state that "literature is a direct reflection of various facets of social structure, family relationships, class conflict, and possibly divorce trends and population composition" (p. 13). In other words, they believe that several external aspects such as culture, author, and also the social phenomena influence the literary work.

Literary work has the capability to capture the truth of the real life's issues of human being. In the context of this research, Stevenson's novel captures the inner conflicts experienced by the Victorian individuals in their struggle to fit in with the society's expectation. This kind of truth may only be narrated in the literary work since Victorian people tend to hide their emotional expression in their real life. Furthermore, sociological approach is chosen because it indicates that literature and society is related to each other because literature expresses the situations and problems existing in society.

## METHODS

The method used in this study is the library research. This research involves offline and online browsing through some books, journal articles, and websites that are related to the topic of this paper. The primary data of this research is the literary work itself, a novel entitled *The Strange Case Of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* by Robert Louis

Stevenson (2003). The secondary data are all the references regarding the social historical background of Victorian era and the theoretical references of sociological approach.

This paper uses a qualitative method to examine the data based on the chosen approach. In the process of analyzing the data, a deep reading of the novel's intrinsic elements is conducted, focusing on the three characters—Dr. Jekyll, Mr. Hyde, and Mr. Utterson. The sociological approach adopted in this study is capable of uncovering the criticism of the Victorian gentlemen image through the characterization of the characters in the novel.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Characterization of Dr. Henry Jekyll and Mr. Edward Hyde: Repressed Individuals of Victorian Social Norms

In *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, Dr. Jekyll realizes that his reputation of being a good member of society is not enough to make him a content individual. He feels trapped in his current, normal life and thus decided to exploit his science knowledge to make an experiment on separating his good and bad side within himself. Jekyll's success in splitting his personality creates a figure, Hyde, which represents Jekyll's evil side. The transformation of Dr. Jekyll into Hyde can be seen as a way to seek freedom from the strict Victorian social norms. In other words, Jekyll and Hyde represent the repressed individuals as a result of the conservative society where the individual expressions are suppressed.

### *Accentuation of the Dualism of Human Nature: The Impossible Separation of Good and Evil*

The idea of human nature itself is emphasized by Stevenson (2003) in the novel, in which he mentions that "Man is not truly one but two" (p. 74). It is normal for people to have a bad and good side within, as they are coexistent in creating a balance of life. Later on, as Singh and Chakrabarti (2008) explain, Stevenson does not only portray the concept of duality through his characters but also through the creation of the

novel's setting of place—Victorian London—where "the aristocracy superficially was genteel and refined, had dark secrets to hide behind the high walls of the mansions in which the lived" (p. 2). The idea of dualism can be seen as the central theme of this novel. In fact, the Victorian set of norms denies this nature of human being. It pays more attention to the superficial social facade.

In the novel, Dr. Henry Jekyll is described as an upper class gentleman who is widely respected, successful, and has a brilliant intellect in the society. Even though the society considers him as a respectable doctor, Jekyll feels trapped and unhappy with the portrait that he presents. Later on in the story, he decides to seek for freedom and acts according to his desires, which are totally different from the society's moral values, norms, and beliefs. At this point, Jekyll's desire for freedom makes him go against the existing norms.

Despite the wealth and social status that he possesses, Jekyll realizes that his fundamental issue is actually the conflicting idea between what he wants to do and what the society expects him to do. However, he believes that his ill deed is as real as the good one and he thinks he should experience it as well. To experience his ill side, he decides to live up within both society's expectation and his own desire. Thus, he seeks the solution by conducting an experiment that could transform him into Mr. Edward Hyde—his other self whom he can exercise his freedom by committing crimes and other misconducts. The experiment results in the separation between good and evil: a Jekyll-Hyde split personality. In the story, Jekyll can still maintain his reputable position in the society at the same time make peace with his ill desires by secretly transforming himself to Hyde. Separates himself in two different identities, Jekyll feels "relieved" and finally has found his "pleasure" (Stevenson, 2003, p. 73).

Furthermore, Jekyll's unspeakable pleasure leads him to his joy, as he admits, "...sold a slave to my original evil" (Stevenson, 2003, 44). It shows that Jekyll considers himself as a slave of the society and therefore he give up his life in the form of Mr. Hyde. Moreover, Jekyll cannot deny

that he is addicted of being Hyde, “the thought, in that moment, braced and delighted me like wine” (p. 44). Jekyll’s new freedom in performing his desire has become intoxicating. This idea represents how Victorian set of norms strongly represses the individual expressions. As a consequence, the quest for freedom is irresistible.

When Jekyll becomes Hyde, Jekyll’s identity of being a good individual is left behind. This leads to a conflict within Jekyll because even when he turns to Hyde, he is actually aware of the social and moral restrains he should obey. “I will tell you one thing: the moment I choose, I can be rid of Mr. Hyde” (p. 25), this confession to Mr. Utterson shows that he is actually conscious about his responsibilities to the society by posing the statement as if he can fully control his pleasure of being Mr. Hyde. Nevertheless, he believes that he should also have the freedom in expressing his deep pleasure and therefore he keeps maintaining the duality within himself.

In the form of Mr. Hyde, Jekyll feels the freedom that he cannot feel as Jekyll. He feels “livelier” and can easily express his true self without considering the society’s moral. At first, Hyde only lives in Jekyll’s dream about freedom. When Hyde really comes into Jekyll’s life, it is like he finally finds a channel to release what he has hidden all his life.

Expressing the evil side of Dr. Jekyll, Mr. Hyde explores Jekyll’s desire of being violent to the society by hurting a child. It gives him a lot of joy realizing that he can overstep his boundary and break the social code of conducts. Moreover, Mr. Enfield, one of the characters in the novel, compares Hyde with “Juggernaut” which actually refers to a Hindu God whose worshippers usually commit suicide to show their devotion, and therefore it indicates the violent and uncontrollable nature of Hyde.

Although Hyde is full of evil, he is described as a small “dwarfish” figure (p. 19). As someone who is hidden by Jekyll from the society, Hyde is not only portrayed as the result of society’s strict norms but also as a representation of one of the repressions in the Victorian era, which is the sexual inferiority of women. Doane and Hodges (1989) state that a few of Hyde's most prominent

traits are “congruent with cultural descriptions of femininity” (p. 69). Additionally, they note that Hyde is “small in stature, has a quick light step with a swing, and weeps like a woman” (p. 69). Hyde behaves with a “mixture of timidity and boldness” (p. 19), and his voice is somehow “husky, whispering and somewhat broken” (p. 19). Thus, Hyde is the evil one who is described with feminine characteristics as the society’s morals deny his existence.

As it is previously mentioned, the realization of dualism of human nature in the novel is not only represented from the character but also from the setting of place. The accentuation of dualism of nature be seen in the contrast of Dr. Jekyll’s house and the lab which are connected in one building. The lab, and therefore the science, described as a dark, terrible place and has become Hyde’s place. As people around mostly ignore the lab, it represents how people in the society disdain Hyde’s traits because they stand against the social norms and beliefs. Distinct from the lab, the house is truly an embodiment of Dr. Jekyll. As the lab and Hyde repulse people, Jekyll and his house creates a warm feeling that draws people in. At this point, Hyde can also be the representation of the result of science and technology, which may cause danger to the society.

Jekyll mostly spends his time in the lab and it reflects the criticism to the irony of Victorian society. As Mack (2012) argues, “Stevenson critiques the Victorian practice of selecting only those qualities in people and places that are deemed respectable and repressing all others, because it divides one person into two separate personalities” (p. 9).

As time goes by, Hyde grows uncontrollably within Jekyll’s body and acts evil according to his will. Jekyll realizes that he is slowly losing his “original and better self” and becoming incorporated with his “second and worse” (p. 84). Thus, Jekyll’s good virtues started to fade away as Hyde takes control over Jekyll’s body and also his good identity.

***Dr. Henry Jekyll and Mr. Edward Hyde’s Downfall: The Distrust of Victorian’s Concept of Gentlemen***

The separation of good and evil personalities that has been done by Jekyll before is seen as a result of duality denial in Victorian beliefs. As Victorian religious beliefs consider human nature is not dualistic but monistic, therefore Jekyll decided to repress his dark side and performing it in the form of Edward Hyde. Jekyll's success in splitting his good and evil identities apart leads him to live in his double lives, as Hyde performs the evil and Jekyll performs the good one. Thus, Jekyll and Hyde's downfall can be seen as a doubt of Victorian beliefs that deny the dualism of human nature. The good and evil personality within human being, as in Jekyll, is eventually coexistent creating the balance in his life. When Jekyll decided to split his dual personality because of the society's denial and eventually dies, it represents the doubt of Victorian beliefs about the duality of human nature.

At the end, Jekyll confesses that he cannot control his evil side and eventually becomes a slave to his demonic creation while he tries to escape from society restrictions. He is shocked by the capacity of his evil side and does not want to accept his relation Mr. Hyde. Mr. Hyde is like a bad mask for Dr. Jekyll. But as time goes by, this becomes reversed and Hyde is using Jekyll as protection, does everything he desires and covers it with Jekyll's respectable appearance.

Jekyll is also frightened when he experiences something about two months before Sir Danvers Carew murder. Jekyll explains, "At the sight that met my eyes, my blood was changed into something exquisitely thin and icy. Yes, I had gone to bed Henry Jekyll, I had awakened Edward Hyde" (p. 83). Jekyll realizes that he turns into Hyde without drinking the formula, therefore he is losing his identity as Dr. Jekyll. He further suggests that "if this were much prolonged, the balance of nature might be permanently overthrown, the power of voluntary change be forfeited, and the character of Hyde become irrevocably" (p. 84). Indeed Jekyll realizes that he might lose his balance in performing the good within himself, and the bad within Hyde.

The transformation of Mr. Hyde frightens Jekyll to lose all his goodness. It is because Hyde is searched by the society for a murder and Jekyll is

unable to hide his evil side as Hyde. Jekyll here becomes a victim of his own repressed desire as he forgets the society's moral and cannot hide his evil side. Therefore, at the end Dr. Jekyll decided to kill Mr. Hyde within himself by commits suicide. Furthermore, Mitchell (2017) argues that "While it is true that toward the end of the novel Mr. Hyde took over Dr. Jekyll, at the time he committed the murder, the choice to induce the persona of Mr. Hyde was still within Dr. Jekyll's power" (p. 64).

As Victorian beliefs left no acceptable aspect for Dr. Jekyll's own desire as Mr. Hyde, Jekyll loses control over his body and dies. As Mack states, "Although he may have been able to safely reveal his full personality in another place or time, living the Victorian age forces him to lead his double life, and causes the destruction of Dr. Jekyll and the creation of Mr. Hyde" (p. 12). At the end, Henry Jekyll is portrayed as a complex example of someone who sadly weighed down by self-deception, and becoming a slave to his society and evil side. He also represents the perpetual doubt of Victorian moralities, with a sense of the difficulty of being good, and the brutishness of being bad.

### **Characterization of Gabriel John Utterson: The Epitome of Victorian Gentleman**

As the narrator in the novel, Utterson plays an important role in investigating Jekyll's case and also as a representation of the ideal Victorian gentleman. As Victorian society concerns to keep up with superficial quality and society's moral values and norms, Utterson is portrayed as a respected lawyer who can utterly fit in with the society. As the lawyer, Utterson has a privilege and duty in his investigation upon Jekyll's strange case. In his daily life, Utterson follows the rigid social norms and values and never strays from it. This shows the contrast between Utterson and Jekyll, as they both are Victorian gentlemen. However, they represent different reactions and behavior toward the moral and behavioral expectation in the era.

The importance of Mr. Utterson throughout the novel is showed by Stevenson's description of Utterson's characteristic in the very beginning of the novel. As Saposnik (1971) observes, Stevenson

presents Utterson as the novel's "moral norm". In the first chapter of the novel, Stevenson describes Mr. Utterson as a mixture of positive and negative image of human being. Despite being an upper-class man and respectable lawyer who has a good public speaking skills, he is "embarrassed in discourse". Furthermore, even though he is "lean, long, dusty, dreary" and with a face that "never lighted by a smile," he is still considered as a "lovable" person as he sticks to social values (p. 3).

Utterson is characterized to be someone who is loyal to his friends. His "good-nature" of friendship makes him less judgmental towards Jekyll's case because he is willing to be friends with those whose reputations have suffered. He is reliable, trustworthy, and surprisingly not judgmental. Furthermore, in Victorian London society, the loss of friendship is a serious threat as described, "We told the man we could make such a scandal out of this as should make his name stink from one end of London to the other. If he had any friends or any credit, we undertook that he should lose them" (p. 7). Utterson's choice to follow the norms in the society he lives in is considered as an important of being an upstanding and moral person in the society. Moreover, in the beginning when Richard Enfield tells Utterson about a man named Hyde, at the end they both decide not to talk about it anymore in order to maintain their social status and reputation.

Although at first Utterson does not want to involve himself in Hyde's existence, however once he knows that Hyde has a relation with his good friend, Dr. Jekyll, Utterson's curiosity increases. He then considers his curiosity in the name of his friendship with Jekyll. Thus, not only as a good friend of Dr. Henry Jekyll, Mr. Utterson also acts as an investigator in his friend's strange case. Moreover, he acts as a detective in the novel to find more information about it by saying, "If he be Mr. Hyde,' he had thought, 'I shall be Mr. Seek'" (p. 16).

Utterson is concerned about his friend's reputation from "the cancer of some concealed disgraced" (p. 21). He is concerned that his good friend, Jekyll, might lose his reputation as a respected doctor in the society. In this context, he also represents the Victorian society's obsession

with reputation. Until the death of his dear friend, Jekyll, Utterson still considers Jekyll as his friend and he is concerned with his friends' reputation as he "may at least save his credit" (p. 62). His statement proves that Utterson's loyalty to Jekyll as a friend until the very end.

From the very beginning until the end of the story, Utterson's actions and thoughts clearly show that he is the ideal example of Victorian gentleman. Dr. Jekyll is also considered as Victorian gentleman, however at the end he strays away from the social norms and beliefs, unlike Mr. Utterson. Through the story, he succeeds to maintain his reputation and respectability to live and fit in the society until the very end.

## CONCLUSION

As *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* by Robert Louis Stevenson is analyzed in relation to its sociological background, which is Victorian society, it can be seen that the three main characters in the novel—Dr. Jekyll, Mr. Hyde, and Mr. Utterson—represent different characters as they respond to live and fit in the Victorian repressive society. When these characters are analyzed carefully, they envisage different reactions toward the norms, values, and beliefs in the society they live in.

Realizing that he cannot simply be a happy man by just being someone respected in the society, Dr. Jekyll decides to seek his own freedom and splits his different identity, good and evil side, apart. Eventually his first success in creating Mr. Hyde leads Jekyll to his own catastrophe. As time goes by, he loses control over Hyde and cannot hide his evil side, Hyde.

As a creation of Henry Jekyll, Edward Hyde demonstrates all the wicked and evilness within him. He murders innocent people and uses Jekyll's good virtues as his protection to the society. As Hyde's evil acts become greater day by day, it slowly kills Jekyll's good identity. However, Hyde still needs Jekyll for a shelter. Therefore, when Hyde can no longer hide himself within Jekyll's good reputation, he decides to end his life and commit suicide. The separation of Jekyll and Hyde represents a social criticism of Victorian's image of gentlemen that denies the duality of human

nature. They are the representation of repressed individuals that cannot fit in with the Victorian upper class' concept of gentlemen.

Lastly, Gabriel John Utterson is portrayed as a significant character who plays an important role as a representation of Victorian society's ideal gentleman and also an investigator for Jekyll and Hyde's case. In investigating his friend's strange case, Utterson sticks to the values and norms in the Victorian society which are based on the idea of respectability and reputation. In the name of his friendship with Jekyll, Utterson grows his curiosity through the novel. Until the very end Utterson still thinks about his friend's reputation and remains loyal to his dead friend, Henry Jekyll. Utterson's characterization becomes an important aspect to look up in this research since it portrays the contrast to the conflicted personality of Jekyll and Hyde.

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