

CONCLUSION

CHAPTER TWELVE

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Stevenson's copious supper of bread and jam proved to be a nourishing meal indeed, fuelling as it did his sleeping imagination, and giving him the germ of his most famous story. The publication of *Jekyll and Hyde* brought him popular success, critical acclaim, and enough money to liberate himself from his father's oppressive benevolence. The success of *Jekyll and Hyde* has led to stage productions; films; radio and television adaptations; retellings and variations on the theme; and it has led to 'Jekyll and Hyde' becoming a proverbial expression throughout the world. It has also, of course, provided fruitful soil for scholars.

In producing a tale which explores the duality of the human condition, Stevenson has left popular culture with a great "shilling shocker", and left scholars in many fields with a text whose depths reward serious analysis.

But in the popular imagination what remains of Stevenson's original conception, beyond the smoking potion and the evil self? Each new adaptation, each new retelling serves merely to dilute the original – to distort it somewhat, in much the same way that in the parlour game the message, 'The General is going to advance, send reinforcements', becomes, 'The General is going to a dance, send three-and-fourpence.' Hyde, disconnected from the signifiers which Stevenson attached to him, can now be represented in any way, and given any meaning that the latest adaptation requires. He has, for example, emerged as "a flamboyant ladykiller", "a sexy, self-possessed knockout of a woman, with dark hair and high cheekbones", and "a towering, bald-headed ghoul".¹ He has also – in a "characterization based on Dean Martin" – appeared as "handsome but vulgar".²

One could argue that the meaning of the story – no matter how corrupted a new version may be – always remains essentially the same, namely, that we have an evil self within us, and if we allow it licence it will become uncontrollable. This is true

¹ Linehan, *Jekyll*, pp.172; 173; 174. See *Robert Louis Stevenson's The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*, dir. by Charles Jarrott (USA/Canada, 1968); *Dr Jekyll and Sister Hyde*, dir. by Roy Ward Baker (UK, 1971); *Jekyll and Hyde*, dir. by David Wickes (UK, 1990).

² Dury, *Annotated*, p.199. See *The Nutty Professor*, dir. by Jerry Lewis (USA, 1963).

enough; but it is hardly an original insight, and its impact has been somewhat dampened for the modern reader by the events of the twentieth century.

The history of scholarship on *Jekyll and Hyde* has been extensive, far-ranging, and formidable, and shows no signs of either flagging, or declining in insight or originality of thought. Stevenson's contemporaries analysed it from within their own cultural milieu, using the resources available at the time. The modern scholar may legitimately and fruitfully analyse it as a text which reveals Stevenson's personality, or the society of his day, using scientific, sociological, psychological, political, and theoretical frameworks which were not available to him. In so doing, the scholar not only interprets Stevenson's text, but is able also to employ the text as a resource to illuminate concerns relative to it, rather than central to it.

The aim of this dissertation, however, has been to return to an understanding of the figure of Edward Hyde as he would have appeared to the readers of Stevenson's time—a figure of evil, certainly, but a figure of evil whose apelike appearance invoked Darwin's theory of natural selection; whose deformity drew ultimately on the Platonic tradition; and whose evil was contextualized by the use of biblical language.

Those scholars who address such matters (apart from the exceptions noted previously) tend to approach Hyde from either a Darwinian or a biblical viewpoint, arguing that Darwinism is antagonistic to religious belief, therefore Hyde belongs to either one or the other camp. Meanwhile the Platonism underlying Stevenson's conception has remained largely unexamined. We should not forget that Darwinism is also antagonistic to the Platonic science which dominated evolutionary debate in the nineteenth century; therefore, again, Hyde should be either Darwinian or Platonic. Nor should we forget that, although Christianity has absorbed some key Platonic concepts regarding the soul, it has also rejected others of equal importance—one being the belief in reincarnation. Yet a clergyman like Donne happily employs this concept in a poem which begins in the Garden of Eden. A compartmentalized approach cannot comprehend either the origin or the meaning of Hyde, because Stevenson, like Kingsley before him, ignores any perceived contradictions, and creatively blends these themes to arrive at a conception which incorporates all three.

Hyde is hairy: but is it because he represents Probably Arboreal; or because he represents Esau? Hyde is amorphous dust: but is it because he is as old as inorganic matter; or because he is as old as Adam? Hyde is deformed: but is it because he has departed from the image of God; or because he is the Platonic reflection of a foul

soul; or because he is simply shaped more like an ape than a human? The answer of course is that he is at once Probably Arboreal and Esau; he is inorganic matter and Adam (and, for that matter, Eve); and his deformity can be explained in all the ways just mentioned. Thus Hyde appears as a baffling and unsettling figure, whose origins remain mysterious and conjectural precisely because they embrace so many possibilities — possibilities which are at once both cumulative and oppositional. He is greater than the sum of his parts precisely because those parts, like Jacob and Esau, were continually struggling in the agonized womb of Stevenson's consciousness,³ and that of the readers of his day.

Stevenson was neither a scientist, a philosopher, nor a theologian. He read science, philosophy, and the Bible; but he used them to feed his writing. This dissertation also has been neither scientific, philosophical, nor theological; it has proceeded from an examination of some of the literature which precedes and throws light on *Jekyll and Hyde*.

The greatest light which must be shed, however, is Stevenson's use of Platonism to explain Hyde. Jekyll's science is Platonic; Hyde's presence in Jekyll is Platonic; his deformity is Platonic; his effect on other people is Platonic; his physical growth over time is Platonic; and the eventual dominance of his form is Platonic. Platonism therefore not only lies at the heart of *Jekyll and Hyde*, but it determines the narrative as well.

Hyde is a violent Wild Man. He is primitive and apelike, yet sophisticated in his tastes and behaves like a gentleman when the need arises. He is thoroughly evil, yet possesses the discretion to curb his malice in public (most of the time). All of his impulses are towards self-gratification at the expense of others; yet on most occasions he must keep them under control. In his own way he is as divided as Henry Jekyll. In his Statement Jekyll writes that "man is not truly one, but truly two" (82). But he immediately qualifies that proposition: "I hazard the guess that man will be ultimately known for a mere polity of multifarious, incongruous and independent denizens" (82). Hyde is not simply one of these denizens; he is "the expression" of "lower elements" in Jekyll's soul (83). In other words, as Stevenson's other writings – especially 'Olalla' – make clear, he is a compound presence. Hyde is composed of the residue of all of Jekyll's ancestors, going all the way back to the beginnings of life. Not only is

³ See *Jekyll and Hyde*, p.82.

he the biological residue of Jekyll's ancestors, but Stevenson's essays make it clear that he is also their psychological and cultural residue as well, living on and accumulating from generation to generation.

T.H. Huxley begins one of his essays with a quotation which is applicable to the present argument:

It has been well said that "all the thoughts of men, from the beginning of the world until now, are linked together into one great chain".⁴

The image of course relies on the reader's familiarity with the Great Chain of Being. Instead of visualizing a chain in which a succession of discrete thoughts are joined together, Huxley envisages a continuous flow of thoughts which interact and blend with each other, as organisms on the Great Chain share aspects of each other in their upward and downward progression. And so it is with Edward Hyde, whose link in the great chain of Stevenson's thought is not discrete, but related to all the other links which came before it.

⁴ 'On Descartes' "Discourse Touching the Method of Using One's Reason Rightly and of Seeking Scientific Truth", *Method and Results, Collected Essays*, I, 166-98 (p.166). Huxley gives no reference for this quotation. I have been unable to locate his source.