



METAMORPHOSED: TRACING MR. HYDE IN JAME GUMB AND FRANCIS DOLARHYDE

Shaoni Dasgupta

(Student, Department of English, Presidency University, Kolkata)

ABSTRACT

Robert Louis Stevenson's 1886 "shilling shocker", *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, has been subjected to various interpretations over the years. While some have assessed the trope of duality in the light of racism, colonization and cultural 'other', others have drawn on psychological references of split personality or 'dissociative identity disorder' (i.e. existence of more than one personality in one body). The popularity of the novella and the idea of binaries existing in one being, has given birth to the phrase 'Jekyll and Hyde' which associates itself to a person whose attitude is vastly different from situation to situation. The respectable Dr. Jekyll, in his attempt to prove the worth of his scientific ambitions and studies, creates a monster much like Frankenstein's monster but at the same time completely different from it. In both the cases, it is a scientific experiment gone wrong but in Stevenson's text, the horror lies in the transformation of the protagonist. Set in fog-bound London, this Gothic masterpiece explores the baser instincts in a human being that necessarily hastens the doom of the same. The complete text of Stevenson can be essentially summarized into one line by Dr. Henry Jekyll in his 'Full Statement of the Case' where he states that "...man is not truly one, but truly two." (58)

In my paper, I have attempted to explore the transformation that takes place in *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* and connect it to the transformations in Thomas Harris' novels *The Silence of the Lambs* and *Red Dragon* and their respective movie adaptations.

Keywords: *Duality, Metamorphosis, Madness.*

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From Euripides to Hitchcock, criminal madness has been a cause of concern and played a central role in shaping up of some of the iconic texts, not only because of its interesting plot device but also because of the fundamental social and psychological issues it upholds. These issues, as Rusell D. Covey in his essay 'Criminal Madness: Cultural Iconography and Insanity' states are central to the "conceptions of justice, proper social organization and self-help." He also goes on to state how it has always been a problem for the law because it is criminal madness that makes one wonder what could possibly be done to the offenders whose mental, intellectual or psychological faculties hinder them from abiding by the laws. While discussing criminal madness, I would like to throw light upon the characters who are to be assessed in my paper- Francis Dolarhyde (from *Red Dragon*), JameGumb (from *The Silence of the Lambs*) and Dr. Hannibal Lecter (from the *Hannibal Series* of books, movies and serial).

Since most people have little exposure to criminality and even less to criminals who are 'insane', media's projection of the same has an indelible impact on the viewer's understanding of such people. Notwithstanding the sincerity with which these characters have been portrayed by the film makers or authors, one hardly traces the physical and psychological transformations they go through before being capable of doing evil deeds. This criminal madness was brilliantly depicted by the portrayals of characters such as Mr. Edward Hyde, Francis Dolarhyde, JameGumb, Dr. Hannibal Lecter and many more and were extremely successful because it claimed a virtual monopoly on the audience/reader's attention. Casare Lombroso, the father of the theory of "born criminal", served as a prison physician and based his theory on his extensive study of thousands of Italian prisoners. Lombroso's theory of the inter-relationship between crime and madness is well-illustrated by Mr. Edward Hyde. The physical description of Mr. Hyde echoed that of Frankenstein's monster but not quite so. Stevenson describes his Mr. Hyde as: "He must be deformed somewhere; he gives a strong feeling of deformity" (6).

Dr. Henry Jekyll underwent a physical and mental metamorphosis when he swallowed the potion he had concocted in his laboratory, thereby affirming the Lombrosian notion that criminality is not merely a state of mind but is also manifest in the physical body. The physical changes that occur in Dr. Jekyll clearly get infused with racial overtones which bring to light the colonizer-colonized aspect of the novel. Dr. Jekyll in his confession letter to his lawyer and friend Mr. Utterson, states that he was aware of the fact that these changes projected his repressed desire which is why the "ugly idol" of Mr. Hyde's reflection generated a "leap of welcome" in him. It is this awareness that hastens his doom as he is incapable of balancing between his radically different selves. It is in this light that I would like to mention the characters from *Hannibal Series*-JameGumb (also nicknamed 'Buffalo Bill') from *The Silence of the Lambs* and Francis Dolarhyde or Mr. D (nicknamed, 'Tooth Fairy') from *Red Dragon*. In Dr. Hannibal Lecter, the psychiatrist and the cannibalistic psych serial killer merge sophisticatedly. However, in the context of the above mentioned films, we turn to look at the antagonists- JameGumb and Francis Dolarhyde, respectively. Though both are psychopathic killers, Jame is quite different from Hannibal. Jame's personal history and behaviour correspond well to Griffin's description of the pornographic mind created by a culture which fears and denies the body. Gumb's mental condition, as Lecter puts it, is a result of childhood trauma, which interestingly links up all the three texts. However, one might notice how nobody was born with it- but trauma made them what they are! While Hannibal Lecter, as a child, is made to watch his sister being killed and cannibalised right in front of his eyes, one might draw a reference to change of name of Jame during birth due to administrative error he refuses to correct. Similarly, in case of *Red Dragon's* antagonist Francis Dolarhyde, childhood trauma takes such a toll that he turns into the "tooth fairy" who kills to "become" the Red Dragon. Here, the oppression of abuse during his childhood days from his grandmother and his foster parents, make him want to 'be' god-like, if not God himself. He wants to "become" the dragon as he, according to Francis, exhibits power in its truest form. He believes, each of



his victims, with their murders, help him “become” the Dragon.

Dr. Jekyll gradually lost all his capabilities to prevent the emergence of his baser “other” self. It was his ultimate desire to turn to the baser, more instinctive self and he realized how the drug only transformed from one form to the other but to retain the good self or the evil self, is entirely upon the consciousness of the particular subject. Dr. Jekyll states in his confession:

The drug had no discriminating action; it was neither diabolical nor divine; it but shook the doors of the prison house of my disposition; and like the captives of Philippi, that which stood within ran forth. At that time my virtue slumbered; my evil, kept awake by ambition, was alert and swift to seize the occasion; and the thing that was projected was Edward Hyde. (61)

Dr. Jekyll lost his ability to prevent the emergence of this baser self of his and took pleasure in how he could, “...plod in the public eye with a load of genial respectability, and in a moment, like a schoolboy, strip off these lendings and spring headlong into the sea of liberty.” (Stevenson 62). The author, his novella illustrates the basic Lombrosian claim that “the most horrendous and inhuman crimes have a biological, atavistic origin in those animalistic instincts that, although smoothed over by education, the family, and fear of punishment, resurface instantly under given circumstances”. The notion of de-evolution or degeneracy is illustrated in Stevenson’s Gothic masterpiece and as Russell D. Covey puts it, it was a concept that “tremendously influenced turn-of-the-century thinking about the nature of social problems” and was conceived as a biological degradation of the “germ plasm” or “blood”. This was manifested in the tendency to develop to a lower, simpler, and less civilized state. Since Lombroso’s theory discovered how criminals were, as further stated by Stephen D. Arata in his ‘The Sedulous Ape: Atavism, Professionalism, and Stevenson’s “Jekyll and Hyde”’, “throwbacks to humanity’s savage past”, one might easily trace Hyde’s much-discussed “deformity” to his exceptional atavism and projection of everything the civilized doctor does not stand for. The above mentioned critic also goes on to elaborate on how

Hyde can be read as a figure of “leisured dissipation”. His appearance, impulsiveness, savagery and violent temper surely mark him as atavistic but it is interesting to note how his vices are clearly those of a monied and upper class gentleman.

One might notice how in the three cases of Mr. Hyde, Frances Dolarhyde and JameGumb, the transformed monster being beyond cure, is annihilated. In *The Silence of the Lambs*, Gumb’s initial rage stems from his ultimate inability to be accepted for the sex- change operation. It is only then that he decides to tailor a woman’s suit for himself so that he can transform into one. It is his ultimate interest to betray the forces of nature and natural law that brings him closer to his crime. He wants to defy the natural course of being a woman. Gumb’s desire to transform into a woman turns into his obsession and he goes on a killing spree where he kills overweight women, starves them to loosen their skin, kills and skins them- this skinning of his victims earning him the nickname of Mr. Hide. The quintessential part in the way he murders the women is what he does to the bodies of his victims. After he skins them, he inserts a moth inside their throat that metaphorically chokes the voices of his victims and hence silences any opposition whatsoever from anyone who hinders in his project of transformation. Gumb believes that the moth represents the transformed body he could possess as the moth always transforms into a beautiful butterfly. As Karen B. Mann discusses in ‘The Matter with Mind: Violence and “The Silence of the Lambs”’:

Embedded in the throat, cocooned by threads spun from its mouth, the surface of its thorax offers an image as undecidable as Lecter himself- is death the meaning of bodies, or does the desire to transcend bodies mean only death? Stuck at the very place between in and out, standing for life and for death, the moth reinforces the paradox of being in a body.

Hannibal Lecter affirms how we cannot reduce Gumb to a mere transsexual. He is surely furious because he cannot pass the test for sex operation and this interestingly becomes a very important clue in the investigation as they start looking for a male who will, in all probability test with different results as compared to a true transsexual.



Sonia BaeloAllue states in the essay, 'The Aesthetics of Serial Killing: Working Against Ethics in "The Silence of the Lambs" (1988) and "American Psycho" (1991), how Gumb is a 'classical monster'. In his analysis of horror, Robin Wood states how monsters of this genre are the "actual dramatization of the dual concept of the repressed or the 'other' ". She goes on to state how the oppression of our civilization resurfaces as an object of horror and how order is restored only by annihilating the repressed object. In his usage of 'otherness', Wood constantly refers to sexual otherness through deviation of apparently normal sexual norms. Gumb blurs the line between sexual binaries, more so because he is not a transsexual and hence caters to no sexual norm and represents no clear sexual identity and it is his lack of 'normality' that turns him into a monster. Caroline McCracken, in her 'Multiplying Doubles', mentions how any text is impure in the sense that it is never a perfect representation of what it goes out to represent and hence takes a life of its own. She also mentions how:

Jekyll's hidden self cannot be contained in any text without something being lost and something else being found- or unleashed. Stevenson responded ambivalently to Jekyll and Hyde, at times referring to it as if it were a despised double, or at least the unwanted spawn of the weaker, Hyde-like side of himself.

McCracken clearly mentions how the very act by which Jekyll strives for self-assertion ensures his failure. A similar fate is encountered by Francis and Jame when they go out to establish their identities against oppression.

When Francis Dolarhyde, in *Red Dragon*, gains access to the archives of the Brooklyn Museum, where, after rendering the librarian unconscious, he proceeds to consume the painting that has long been his fascination. This consumption of the painting captures the nature of his obsessive misogyny resulting from his childhood memories of abuse and domination. He clearly sees himself as the Red Dragon of Blake's painting, *The Great Red Dragon and the Woman Clothed with the Sun*, and his female victims as the avatars of the woman. On one of his army trips to London, Dolarhyde gets the Red Dragon tattooed on his back and gets a false pair of teeth for

his murders which are based on the mould of his grandmother's teeth. It is his memories of his childhood days of abuse, initially from his grandmother and later from his estranged mother and her husband that provokes his misogyny. He was made to believe that he was not wanted and this led to his wanting to "become" the Dragon who, he believed, was a hub of power. It is his ultimate obsession with wanting to control the world in his way that hastens his doom. He, like JameGumb, in the process of proving his worth, gets transformed into a monster. We can trace the reason for their transformations on their desire to prove themselves to the world and it is this transformed self that empowers them to do so. Dr. Henry Jekyll conducts a scientific experiment to prove to the world and his fellow scientist his faith in transcendental studies. It is this fatal experiment which, though partly proves him right, takes his sanity and finally his life. Gumb's desire to remove all hurdles in his way to get transformed into a woman, surfaces as his obsessive murders in order to fashion a woman's suit for himself. His desire to change is pathetically recorded in his insertion of a rare breed of moth in the throat of his victims as he ardently believed that it would project the transformed beauty he longed to be.

Near the end of the novel and the movie, Gumb's seen ritualistically dressing up as woman and is seen completing the process by tucking his penis in between his legs to prove it non-existent. Dolarhyde, or the "tooth-fairy", clearly believed in his transformations and he ardently believed that his act of murder helped him "become" the Red Dragon. Nina Auerbach has brilliantly argued in *Woman and the Demon*, how in Victorian cultural myth, a woman is imagined as a source of powerful and threatening metamorphic energies. She further goes on to contrast these heroic female demons and puts them against the diminished male counterparts as in Stevenson's Gothic novella where Mr. Hyde is rather dwarfish and described as:

Mr. Hyde was pale and dwarfish, he gave an impression of deformity without any nameable malformation, he had a displeasing smile, he had borne himself to the lawyer with a sort of murderous mixture of timidity and boldness, and he spoke with a husky, whispering and somewhat broken voice; all



these were points against him, but not all of these together could explain the hitherto unknown disgust, loathing and fear with which Mr. Utterson regarded him. (13)

To ensure his domination and victory over his female victims, his criminal madness led him on to breaking glass and inserting them in the sockets of his victims' eyes where he could see himself in the act of violation and eventually see himself "becoming" the Dragon. Nicholas M. Williams, in his essay, 'Eating Blake, or an Essay on Taste: The Case of Thomas Harris's "Red Dragon"', mentions how Dolarhyde's consumption of Blake's art is not to be seen as "becoming similar to Blake" or even an attempt to do so. Instead, it must be read as a transgressive act, a "despoiling" of the high-art text for the purposes of creating a new art. This consumption of art can be equated with Hannibal Lecter's cannibalism where he consumes the rude or the offender in his own sophisticated manner and feeds on them with aromatic herbs. The cannibalistic trait can be traced in Stevenson's text where Dr. Jekyll allows his civilized self to be consumed by the "spirit of hell" in him, so much so that, "That child of Hell had nothing human; nothing lived in him but fear and hatred" (71). Williams, in his essay, further goes on to explore how the background of Dolarhyde's murders is not irrelevant in this regard because in the crosscutting between the FBI investigation and everyday circumstances of him, we come across a picture of an unexceptional individual, whose only abnormality is his oral irregularities that merely mark him as physically flawed. Nicholas mentions how "Thomas Harris makes film and film developing central to the progress of the plot" and how Dolarhyde chooses his victims from the home videos that he is supposed to make on his company's behalf as he looks for "anything extraordinary that separates their entries from the standard fare". This paper, focussing on the transformations of these literary characters and what they achieve through their transformed self, links up the three texts of *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* by Stevenson, and the two texts of *The Silence of the Lambs* and *Red Dragon* by Thomas Harris through their antagonists and emphasize on how, while attempting to demolish their apparent non-existence, these

antagonists plunge into a deeper abyss of not belonging anywhere. As Stevenson puts it in his novella, these transformed selves were the "expression, and bore the stamp, of lower elements" (59) in each soul.

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