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Bachelor's thesis in English for teacher training students

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Sammendrag

Denne bacheloroppgaven er en skeiv lesning av Robert Louis Stevensons novelle fra 1886 *Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*. Oppgavens diskusjon utforsker motivet av «den doble» i kontekst av Michel Foucaults begrep disiplin og Labouchère lovendringen fra 1885. Denne utforskningen tar form gjennom analyser av de tre følgende karakter-dyadene: Dr Lanyon og Mr Utterson, Mr Utterson og Dr Jekyll, og Dr Jekyll og Mr Hyde. Analysene maler et holistisk bilde av disiplinenes effekter, som avdekker vesentlige sammenhenger mellom Dr Jekylls dobbeltliv og dobbeltlivet til homoseksuelle menn i det sene nittenhundretallets London.

Abstract

This bachelor's thesis is a queer reading of Robert Louis Stevenson's 1886 novella *Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*. The discussion explores the motif of the double in context of Michel Foucault's concept of discipline and the Labouchère Amendment of 1885. This exploration is carried out through analyses of the three following character dyads: Dr Lanyon and Mr Utterson, Mr Utterson and Dr Jekyll, and Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde. The analyses paint a holistic picture of the effects of discipline, which reveals substantial connections between the double life conducted by Dr Jekyll and the double life conducted by homosexuals in late 19th century London.

The publication of Robert Louis Stevenson's novella *Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* in 1886 shortly follows the passing of the 1885 Labouchère amendment, which is notorious for its role in persecution and prosecution of homosexuals in England at the turn of the 19th century. This criminalisation of queer sexualities resulted in the topic of same-sex attraction being absent from most literature of the time. However, an exception is provided in the Gothic genre, in which taboo subjects including queer sexualities could find indirect articulation. *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* deploys the motif of the double, alongside a selection of Gothic conventions, to dramatize the repression of same-sex desire and the consequent fear of transgression caused by late-Victorian ideology and disciplines. The idea of the double runs through the entirety of novel, as all perspectives to the strange case are presented through pairs of characters, or what I will refer to as character dyads. In this essay I will explore three character dyads who all represent different perspectives to the events in Jekyll and Hyde and the topic of male homosexuality in the late Victorian age. Firstly, the dyad of Dr Lanyon and Mr Utterson personifies and represents the medico-legal discipline, painting a picture of how the need for the double life came to be. I will then connect this picture to the dyad of Mr Utterson and Dr Jekyll, which exemplifies the discriminatory effects of disciplined society and the privileges of its beneficiaries. The discussion of these initial dyads will contextualise the crucial question of agency in the eponymous dyad of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde. Thus, revealing the true nature and scale of the double life which Dr Jekyll, in kin with homosexuals of his time, had to conduct to escape social ruin – running a high risk of tragic transgression.

In 1885, the term “gross indecency” was introduced into British legislation by the infamous Labouchère Amendment, which was used to criminalise acts of male homosexuality that fell short of sodomy (Sanna, 2012, p. 23). The term was never officially defined, which “left the courts free to determine its scope” (Fize, 2020, p. 5). The amendment's extended criminalisation of homosexual activity, in combination with its vague phrasing, opened for an array of interpretations and largely facilitated the prosecution of homosexuals (Fize, 2020, p. 8). This resulted in a systematic silencing, in which homosexual men in nineteenth-century England were forced to hide their true identities from the public and conduct double lives to avoid being accused in line with the amendment's broad spectrum of potential definitions.

This silencing of homosexuals is closely tied to Michel Foucault's concept of discipline. Foucault defines discipline as “a mechanism of power which regulates the behaviour of individuals in the social body” (O'Farrell, 2007-2021, *discipline*). Foucault also argues in the first volume *The History of Sexuality* that the 19th century marks the point in which sexuality truly becomes subject to such social discipline (O'Farrell, 2007-2021,

sexuality). The concept of discipline and the concept of sexuality in the 19th century are closely intertwined, and thus literature which discusses the perceptions and effects of disciplined society also provides an important lens on the social reality of homosexuals in the same time period.

Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde's year of publication in 1886 makes it a good candidate for a queer reading as it offers a unique documentation of the stories silenced by the Labouchère amendment. The same medico-legal disciplinary discourses which shaped the definitions of and social attitudes towards homosexuality in the novella's immediate social reality, are also highly present and plot driving elements in Stevenson's story. Additionally, the undefined, secretive nature of Dr Jekyll's urges carries strong similarities to the unspeakable status of same-sex desire. *Strange Case* also captures how this silencing ultimately leads to compulsory conformity through the means of a double life, which is a central element both in the novella's theme and structure.

It is important to note that this reading is dependent on an acknowledgement of Dr Jekyll's agency, rejecting the common reading of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde as separate characters. To capture the true richness and complexity of Stevenson's urban horror, it is crucial to recognise the common body in which the double forms. Reading the novella with this interpretation will reveal how Dr Jekyll's creation of Mr Hyde is a conscious denial of liability for his own socially condemned urges, in attempt to avoid a seemingly unavoidable transgression tied to his very being.

Dr Lanyon and Mr Utterson: The Dyad of Discipline

As the two detective-figures who prosecute the titular "strange case", Dr Lanyon and Mr Utterson represent medicine and the law. This dyad showcases the importance of disciplinary discourses, particularly the medico-legal, both in the story and in the social world that it reflects. Both characters use their professional knowledge in attempt to solve the case, however their expertise proves inadequate for explaining their friend Dr Jekyll's strange behaviour and his relationship with the mysterious Mr Hyde. As Robert Mighall notes (1999, p. 188), the pair's inability to solve the case shows that the titular case "demands an epistemological model other than that provided by either medicine or law." This could therefore serve as a commentary on the shortcomings of the absolute medico-legal social definitions and judgements which largely defined late Victorian society.

The medico-legal characteristics of Stevenson's *Strange Case* have noticeable ties to

the contemporary debate surrounding the definition of homosexuality, which was largely dominated by the juridical and medical field. The definition of homosexuality in the late nineteenth century was changing from being a simple act of sodomy to a more complex medical category. According to Michel Foucault (1984, p. 43) homosexuality was coming to be understood as “consubstantial” with the homosexual, “less as a habitual sin than as a singular nature [...] The sodomite had been a temporary aberration; the homosexual was now a species.” This categorisation of queer sexualities, and separation between sodomy and sexuality, was also incorporated into late Victorian legislation targeted against male homosexuality. Most notable is the Labouchère amendment to the 1885 Criminal Law Amendment Act which “severely punished [...] the practice of acts of “gross indecency” between men both in public and private” (Sanna, 2012, p. 23). Stevenson’s novel, published only a year after the Labouchère amendment, indirectly reflects the medico-legal discussions surrounding male homosexuality in late-nineteenth-century England, as well as their effects in general society.

The disciplinary dyad of Dr Lanyon and Mr Utterson helps to frame transgression as one of the story’s motivating themes. Dr Jekyll’s narrative is not told by himself, but rather the reader is only informed of his state through representatives of established disciplines. It is through the narrative lens given by the disciplined Mr Utterson and Dr Lanyon, that the reader is provided with the context which colours Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde’s behaviours as acts of transgression. The case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde is, through the disciplined detective dyad, presented as strange before the reader can make up any other opinion. In fact, Mr Utterson is the first to identify a peculiar relationship between the eponymous dyad. This identification comes as a result of him making the connection between Mr Enfield’s “Story of the Door” and “the startling clause of [Dr. Jekyll’s] will” which stated that Mr Hyde were to step into Dr Jekyll’s shoes in the case of his disappearance, calling it a “strange preference or bondage” (Stevenson, 1886/2013, pp. 8-11).

Stevenson’s novel reveals how the absolute medico-legal disciplines of the late Victorian era, and its consequential persecution, actively contributes to Dr Jekyll’s tragedy. The character dyad of Dr Lanyon and Mr Utterson’s inability to solve the case ultimately stems from their blindness to the damage their discipline does upon the individual, only seeing the issue at a society level. As the disciplined dyad discover Dr Jekyll’s double life, they become witnesses to their “scientific and professional prejudices abused” (Mighall, 1999, p. 192), and thus the death of Dr Jekyll also becomes the death of the disciplines as they know it. This conclusive revelation establishes that further, unaltered enactment of punishment

based in the absolutes of medico-legal discipline, would be carried out with the knowledge and acceptance of its damages. A conclusion that was perhaps foreshadowed by Mr Enfield in the novel's introductory pages, speaking of Mr Hyde's fate: "[...] killing being out of the question, we did the next best" (Stevenson, 1886/2013, p. 4).

Mr Utterson and Dr Jekyll: Discipline as Discriminatory Device

The character dyad of Mr Utterson and Dr Jekyll is representative for the discriminating effects of discipline and how the social system it creates is maintained by its beneficiaries. Mr Utterson also experiences repressing his urges to comply with the social standard set by dominating disciplines, but in contrast to Dr Jekyll, he is able to regulate his desires in a comfortable and controlled manner. As a result of his austerity, in addition to his position within juridical discipline, Mr Utterson holds a privilege in society, which also transfers to the novel's narrative structure. It is through Mr Utterson's role as both a point of focalisation and of reference, that Dr Jekyll's fall into the double life is revealed.

Mr Utterson and Dr Jekyll, as Comitini (2012) argues, form the novel's "most significant dyad." They show us "how addiction functions as the inexplicable centre of Victorian ideology". While Utterson is "the unaddictable subject of Victorian society; Jekyll is the other Victorian, who is inherently addictable. The dissymmetry produces Hyde" (Comitini, 2012, p. 115). Comitini's identification of Mr Utterson as an unaddictable subject, and this identification's importance to the reader's interpretation, is strengthened by the novel's opening, which is dedicated to the introduction of Mr Utterson's character. "Mr Utterson the lawyer" is described as an "austere" man who, in line with the Victorian ideal, disciplines his rare desires (Stevenson, 1886/2013, p. 1). As previously mentioned, this initial point of view establishes the context which defines Dr Jekyll's case as strange, as Mr Utterson's values is set as the standard of which Dr Jekyll is compared.

In the context of sexuality, one may consider Mr Utterson as representative for the heterosexual man and Dr Jekyll as representative for the queer. While they both may have sexual urges that are forbidden by discipline, one is subject to greater repression than the other as a result of innate predisposition, as established by the new medical category of homosexuality. According to this interpretation, one could argue that Dr Jekyll's inability of regulation is tied to the medico-legal discipline's absolute oppression of his identity, making little to no room for the same austerity which Mr Utterson is allowed to show.

Additionally, Mr Utterson's narrative privilege, and Dr Jekyll's lack of it, is

representative for homosexuality as an “unspeakable” topic. The “aggressive enactment of heteronormative legislative power”, such as the previously mentioned 1885 Labouchère amendment, caused the “systematic silencing of late-nineteenth-century homosexuals” (Sanna, 2012, p. 24). As a result, the topic of homosexuality was often labelled as “the unspeakable”, as it was seen as “both immoral and unlawful”, in addition to growing concerns of “being publicly exposed and ruined” (Sanna, 2012, pp. 24, 28). Fincher (2007, p. 22) points out how this silencing transfers to Gothic writing, which “often centres on narratives of illicit sexual desire which are posited as terrifying and unspeakable and need to be *translated* [my italics]”. Mr Utterson is paradoxically the only available voicing of Dr Jekyll’s unspeakable narrative simultaneously as he is representative of the source of the initial silencing. Even as “Henry Jekyll’s full statement of the case” is conclusively revealed to the reader, it only exists in the narrative as it is addressed to Mr Utterson – the disciplined translator.

Mr Utterson’s disciplined, but socially aware mindset is a crucial agent in the plot-driving misrecognition of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde as two rather than one. Mr Utterson is an “austere” lawyer, but he also has “an approved tolerance for others; sometimes wondering, almost with envy, at the high pressure of spirits involved in their misdeeds; and in any extremity inclined to help rather than to reprove” (Stevenson, 1886/2013, p. 1). Even though he himself adheres to, and feels comfortable within, the boundaries of social disciplines, he is still openminded enough to try understanding and helping those who fall outside them. In contrast, Dr Lanyon point of view is so narrowed by his loyalty to his disciplines and the entailing expectations, that the final reveal of Dr Jekyll’s transgressions becomes a life-ending shock. Mr Utterson’s slight openness again makes the titular transgression more than a simple horror, as it is in the eyes of Dr Lanyon, but also a lasting commentary on contemporary society.

It is, however, crucial to the novel’s themes to recognise that Mr Utterson is not a neutral narrator, and that his narrative role contributes greatly to the negative colouring of Dr Jekyll’s other self, Mr Hyde. This comes to show in the novel’s second chapter, when Mr Utterson seeks out Mr Hyde in hopes that one look at his appearance would solve the mystery of his relationship to Dr Jekyll, and the following description is given:

“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”
(Stevenson, 1886/2013, pp. 13-14).

Essential to Mr Utterson’s negative colouring and the creation of Mr Hyde’s monstrous status, is the contemporary popularity of physiognomy in medical and juridical discipline, a practice which concludes that “disordered minds stemmed from inherited defects in the brain” and that “[s]uch defects manifested themselves on the body” (Ganz, 2015, p. 371). The beliefs from physiognomy stand out prominently in the contemporary definition of homosexuality, which claimed that: “It was everywhere present in him: at the root of all his actions because it was their insidious and indefinitely active principle; *written immodestly on his face and body* [my italics] because it was a secret that always gave itself away” (Foucault, 1984, p. 43). It is exactly this persuasion which mystifies and hides Dr Jekyll’s internal transgression, as his disciplined spectators are not able to identify it without its obligatory external manifestation, further widening the gap between Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde.

Although, Mr Utterson’s description includes physical features often attributed to supernatural monsters, he also points out that these points alone are not enough to explain Mr Hyde’s monstrosity, and that this missing puzzle piece is tied to his own negative feelings towards the mysterious outcast. It could then be argued, based in Mr Utterson’s description, that parts of Mr Hyde’s status as a monster is created by Mr Utterson himself. This socially induced monstrous status created through disciplined characters’ perception mirrors how the ruling disciplines in contemporary, Victorian society created “moral monsters”, such as homosexuals, under the guise of identification.

Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde: Discipline and Destruction

The dyad of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde is a great literary example of Kristeva’s (1980) concept of abjection, a process based in Freud’s (1919) Konzept des Unheimlichen, which is prominent within late-Gothic literature. Both theories focus on the “repressed familiar” appearing in “seemingly external, repellent, and unfamiliar forms”, but Kristeva’s (1980) argumentation is “based on a more fundamental human impulse” that considers the cultural aspects in addition to the psychological (Hogle, 2002, pp. 6-7). In Stevenson’s fin-de-siècle novel, Mr Hyde is the outcast monster in which Dr Jekyll’s repressed familiar expresses itself in physical form. However, Mr Hyde is not only a supernatural horror, but he is also a figure

“condemned and criminalised by people in authority” and the “patterns of social normalcy they enforce” (Hogle, 2002, p. 7). In such ways, Mr Hyde’s monstrosity is based, not only in the repressed familiar of Dr Jekyll, but also in the repressed familiar of the general, disciplined society.

Dr Jekyll’s creation of Mr Hyde, a physical representation of his repressed urges, is a conscious act of separation between the disciplined and the perverse, in a desperate attempt to avoid transgression. As he himself states in his conclusive statement, “[i]f each, I told myself, could but be housed in separate identities, life would be relieved from all that was unbearable” (Stevenson, 1886/2013, p. 59). Thus, by the means of prominent Gothic conventions, Dr Jekyll transforms his repressed familiar into a monster of late-Victorian society and splits his social identity. Through his invention and intake of the draught, he creates a physical separation. Through his establishment of Mr Hyde’s residence in Soho, he creates a topographical separation. Through his design of Mr Hyde’s wardrobe, he creates a theatrical separation. However, it soon becomes clear that repressed urges are not something that can physically be separated from its source, and tragic transgression ultimately ensues.

The draught is the main representation of the novel’s oscillations between earthly laws and intimations of the supernatural, a common feature of the gothic genre, as well as the source of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde’s seemingly split identities. The true nature of the draught’s ingredients is unknown to all, except Dr Jekyll himself. Even Dr Lanyon cannot make out a majority of its contents (Stevenson, 1886/2013, p. 52), which suggests that its ingredients are beyond what is normally accepted in the discipline of medicine. Dr Jekyll’s steady loss of control over his consume of the mysterious substance alludes to the previously mentioned theme of addiction and Jekyll’s status as an addictable subject. As Mr Hyde commits acts of increasingly horrific nature, one is forced to question the character dyad’s separation of identity, the draught’s seemingly supernatural ability, and whether the horror stemming from the draught and its resulting character Mr Hyde truly can be separated from Dr Jekyll himself.

It is therefore also natural to question the actual mental power of the draught, and if Jekyll’s true addiction is to the substance itself or to the protection of his character that it offers. After all, the seemingly most important function of Mr Hyde’s existence is freeing Dr Jekyll’s conscience from his immoral actions and saving his social reputation from ruin. Dr Jekyll himself states that “[i]t was Hyde, after all, and Hyde alone, that was guilty” and that “Jekyll was no worse; he woke again to his good qualities seemingly unimpaired [...] And thus his conscience slumbered” (Stevenson, 1886/2013, p. 64). By underlining an absolute border between his two identities, Dr Jekyll uses the draught to claim a form of immoral

insanity and deny criminal responsibility, both from his own conscience and potential juridical and social punishment.

However, to claim that Dr Jekyll's double life and the character of Mr Hyde is a product of the draught alone is inaccurate, as Dr Jekyll goes to great lengths to create and protect his social character as the novel progresses, playing on urban gothic conventions related to topography. Mr Hyde is, as his name suggests, a character which Dr Jekyll must hide in matching surroundings, to ensure that the transgression of their shared body is not perceived. While the lower district of Soho effectively matches and covers Mr Hyde's lowly nature, it's placement between the higher districts of May Fair and Pall Mall also serves as a "topographical representation of the Hyde within the Jekyll" (Mighall, 1999, p. 151), revealing their inevitable correlation. It is also worth mentioning that Soho at this time was considered to be the heart of London's sex industry and would develop to become a queer centre of the capital (Sanders-McDonagh & Peyrefitte, 2018), tying Mr Hyde to the world of sexual immorality and setting the scene for Dr Jekyll's immoral character.

Lastly, the motif of role-play is prominent to the characterisation of Dr Jekyll and his feelings towards Mr Hyde, strongly suggesting that "Jekyll's behavior is the effect of design rather than disease" (Ganz, 2015, p. 393). Throughout his statement, Dr Jekyll on multiple occasions refers to his relationship to Mr Hyde using theatrical terminology, likening his transformations to that of an actor in costume. For instance, Dr Jekyll states that he "wore the semblance of Edward Hyde" and acting "in [his] second character" (Stevenson, 1886/2013, p. 63). In addition, the scene for Dr Jekyll's transformations all takes place in a "cabinet" above an old "anatomical theatre" (Stevenson, 1886/2013, p. 46), further strengthening the theatrical imagery. The motif of role-play underlines Dr Jekyll's agency in his transformations and reduces the character of Mr Hyde to a mere costume.

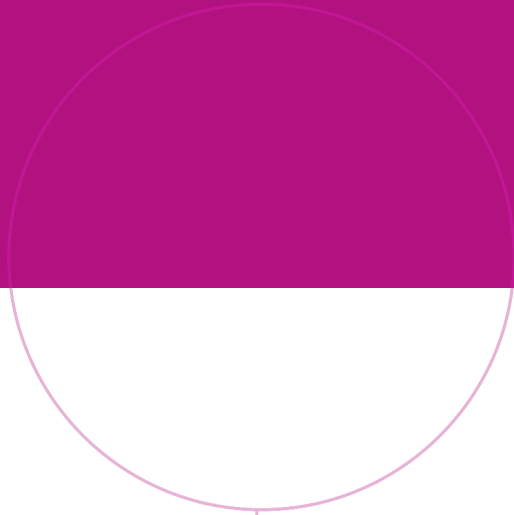
The duality of every element of Stevenson's gothic tale reveals that story's central horror is not in the elements themselves, but in the uncertainty of their horrific nature. This uncertainty is horrific as it shows the failings of established disciplines and the loss of safety given by absolute definitions of right and wrong. *Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* illustrates how individual transgression is rooted in social oppression and that ignoring this correlation has eventual fatal consequences for both parties. In the case of homosexuals in late 19th century England, the medico-legal discipline ignored the duality within their own body of discipline as the juridical side demanded that they repress their queer sexual urges, even though the medical side had defined it as an innate identity. Although they may have had agency in their double lives, the double life was never a choice.

In the end, there lies one body dead. If the body is Mr Hyde, the Victorian ideology of the moral monster lives. If the body is Dr Jekyll, the Victorian ideology of the moral monster is dead. If the body is both, that is horrific.

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