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Being and Seeing the Anomalous Body: A Study on *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*

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Abstract

The Victorian Period witnessed a multitude of changes in its social, religious and moral milieus after the publication of Charles Darwin's *On the Origin of Species* in 1859. Despite scepticism in religion, God and scriptural doctrines about morality, most of the Victorians did not publicly challenge them. They pressed on maintaining prudishness in their social life and hypocrisy in their personal life. Robert Louis Stevenson's novel *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* exposes the duplicity of Victorians. The novelist chose the normative human body and the nonnormative human body to represent duplicity in the character Dr Jekyll. This paper explores the range of significations of being and seeing the nonnormative body, which is the anomalous ugly body, in relation to normative body in Robert Louis Stevenson's novel *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*. The dual selves or natures of Dr Henry Jekyll, the protagonist in the novel, are manifested in two bodies—the well-formed handsome normative body and the anomalous ugly nonnormative body. In the novel, the anomalous ugly body of Mr Hyde represents the repressed evil self of Dr Jekyll whereas the normative body of Dr Jekyll represents the good self which is socially accepted. Dr Jekyll performs the role of doctor and Mr Hyde performs the role of a libertine and criminal in the novel. The paper studies the range of negative significations attributed to the anomalous body. It applies a few concepts from atavism and Cesare Lombroso's theory of crime to show the Victorian construct of the anomalous body. The paper aims to interrogate the rationale of the representational strategy of choosing the anomalous body as an embodiment of evil.

Keywords: normative body, nonnormative body, anomalous body, atavism

'Writing the body' is a trope in literatures across cultures. Literature employs diverse images of the well-formed, the deformed, the anomalous, the abled and the disabled, human body to represent a plethora of ideas and thoughts. The novel *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* employs the body as a metaphor to exhibit the dual natures in a human being. R.L. Stevenson's novel

has become a seminal work in the discourse on dual selves subsequently. The phrase 'Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde' has made its way in English dictionary to denote a person who has two distinct personalities, good and bad.

In the novel, the normative and the nonnormative bodies are represented by the characters Dr Henry Jekyll and Mr Edward Hyde

respectively. The portrait of Dr Henry Jekyll as a tall handsome man, born to wealthy parents, a doctor by profession, complies with the expectations of the society around him. His parentage, educational qualification, profession and his attractive physical appearance hold him in high esteem. He is portrayed as a fifty-year-old reputed doctor who is loved and respected in the society. The portrait of Mr Edward Hyde as a short ugly looking deformed and detestable person defies the expectations of the society.

Mr Edward Hyde is the creation of Dr Henry Jekyll whose existence is solely dependent on the latter. The indulgent self of the sober and reputed doctor is hidden in the body Mr Hyde. The doctor seeks an outlet for all his repressed "undignified" desires by transforming himself to Hyde. He is forced to look grave and respectable in the public when he secretly wishes to indulge. The social and the religious restrictions in the Victorian Period force the Victorians to reckon sober behaviour as respectable and sanguine behaviour as disrespectful. Consequently, Dr Jekyll counts his inclination for merry making and pleasures as a grave mistake- "And indeed the worst of my faults was a certain impatient gaiety of disposition"(110).

The inclination to seek carnal pleasures and the desire to be respected in the society bring conflicts in his mind. He feels torn between the two incompatible desires and inclinations. The pain of being torn between the two selves turns his mind to seek the possibility of finding two separate bodies to arrest the two selves. If two bodies can fully accommodate two different selves, he will be relieved of the pain of the conflict in his mind. He believes that he can be freed from the conflicting emotions and desires if his two selves find two separate abodes to dwell. Dr Jekyll tries to compartmentalise his evil and indulgent nature in the body of Mr Hyde and his socially accepted nature in the body of Dr Jekyll. When Dr Jekyll carries himself in the society in a sober manner, Mr Hyde carries himself in the town in a highly indulgent manner with complete indifference to social and moral codes.

Despite the fact that Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde are embodiments of dual natures in one person, society perceives their identities by their bodies. Dr Jekyll's identity is apprehended in relation to the performance of the social role of a reputed doctor. Being Dr Jekyll is being a person with normative body with good self that conforms to social and moral codes. Hence, being Dr Jekyll is being a respectable doctor who renders valuable services to the society. On the contrary, being Dr Jekyll is being a hypocrite hiding in the mask of a reputed doctor secretly indulging in sensual pleasures. Dr Jekyll is not purely good even before the emergence of Mr Hyde. The presence of evil in him gets intensified and concentrated after the consumption of the drug. As mentioned earlier, Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde are one and the same person with two different physical manifestations. But, society can perceive only the tangible bodies and the external actions. Consequently, his friends Mr Utterson and Dr Lanyon look at them from two different perspectives. Mr Hyde is seen in relation to his ugly and deformed body and villainy whereas Dr Jekyll is seen in relation to his attractive physique and acceptable social behaviour. In fact the friendship of Mr Utterson and Dr Lanyon with Dr Jekyll and enmity with Mr Hyde are directed to the same person, Dr Henry Jekyll.

Being the body of Mr Hyde is being young, care free, indulgent and indifferent to the social and moral codes. He freely walks in the streets of the city in the late hours of night seeking to satisfy his desires. The intoxication he gets in the body of Mr Hyde makes him indifferent to the emotions of his fellow beings. The thought that Dr Jekyll's reputation is safe and secure in the body of Mr Hyde demeans him to an instinctual being.

Stevenson's portrayal of a primitive, uncivilized being in the character of Mr. Hyde is justified by the wicked actions he performs in the city of London. Those wicked deeds evince Hyde's inhuman behaviour, which support the assumption that he is atavistic. The differences in the responses of Mr Hyde and the small crowd around the little girl intensifies the notion that he is not a human being. All people who crowd around the little girl who is being trampled on feel pity for her. They comfort her

and help her whereas Mr Hyde remains cool and emotionless. However, Mr Richard Enfield who sees the anomalous ugly man trampling on the little girl fails to take proactive steps to prevent the man from doing the cruel deed. The callous murder of Sir Danvers Carew intensifies the thought that he is atavistic. It is not only the absence of motive of murder, but also the nature of committing the crime that makes Mr Edward Hyde's body a horrifying object of gaze. The eye witness of the crime, a maid servant, recognizes the culprit due to the deformed and the ugly appearance of Mr Edward Hyde. The emotion that Mr Hyde evokes in her is aversion. R.L. Stevenson picturesquely describes the scene of Mr Hyde's crime to highlight the traits of savage in him. The maid sees an old handsome gentleman politely addressing Mr Hyde, and he listening to the old man impatiently without uttering a word. She sees Mr Hyde furiously stamping his feet, brandishing his cane, carrying it like a man gone insane. The old man steps back with a shock. But, Mr Hyde crosses the limits and pounces on the poor man like a hound, pinning him to the ground. Mr Hyde furiously beats the old man repeatedly till he breaks his bones. Stevenson says that, "with ape-like fury, he was trampling his victim under foot and hailing down a storm of blows, under which the bones were audibly shattered and the body jumped upon the roadway. At the horror of these sights and sounds, the maid fainted" (69). The words "ape-like fury" refers to the primitive stage of man in the process of evolution, according to Darwin's theory of evolution. Mr Hyde's regression to ape, the primordial ancestors of man, as per Darwinian theory, is hinted at in the words "ape-like fury". The context explicates the beast lurking within Mr Hyde. Masao Miyoshi in "Dr Jekyll and the Emergence of Mr Hyde" calls the animal in Dr Jekyll "je". According to him, in most societies, human beings do not have to suppress "je" or the beast within; rather, they curb the "je" within them (473). The above instance shows the inability of Dr Jekyll to curb the beast within him when he gets transformed to Mr Hyde. The repressed beast within Dr Jekyll gets released in the body of Mr Hyde. The nonnormative body, the anomalous ugly body, is a signifier with the signification 'beast'. Being Mr Hyde, is being cruel, wicked, beast-like and

irrational. When all human beings have a blend of good and evil, Mr Hyde does not have the blend. On the contrary he is purely evil. The two incidents which show evil nature in Mr Hyde draw attention to Lombroso's theory of crime and atavism.

Victorian society was influenced by Cesare Lombroso's thought that criminal tendencies arise from a biologically abnormal person. The novel exhibits the influence of Lombroso's theory of crime in the portrayal of Mr Hyde. The callous murder of Sir Danvers Carew degrades Mr Hyde to the position of the most wanted criminal in London. His physical aberration excludes him from the category of a biologically normal person. According to Lombroso, a biologically fit individual cannot become a criminal. His physical aberration and detestability put him in Lombroso's category of criminal. Charles A. Ellwood writes that "Lombroso believed,...that the criminal was essentially an organic anomaly, partly pathological and partly atavistic"(717). Crimes committed in the body of Mr Hyde by the wilful transformation of handsome Dr Jekyll into Mr Hyde interrogate Lombroso's theory of criminal. Hence, atavistic identity is applicable to both Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde. Stephen D. Arata in "The Sedulous Ape: Atavism, Professionalism and Stevenson's 'Jekyll and Hyde'" says that "a prime source of horror in the tale is not that the professional man is transformed into an atavistic criminal, but that the atavist learns to pass as a gentleman" (240).

Seeing the anomalous ugly body of Mr Hyde is disgusting, horrifying and detestable. He is short in stature, but well-formed. However, his body gives an impression of deformity. It cannot be clearly stated that he is deformed, for, the exact part of deformity cannot be pointed. His physical appearance is repulsive not only to Mr Enfield, but also to all other onlookers. When Mr Utterson sees Mr Hyde, he also feels repulsion to his appearance. No malformation that is noteworthy can be seen on his body. Mr Hyde is pale and dwarfish. His smile is displeasing and he seems to carry himself with a mixture of timidity and boldness. His voice is husky, whispering and partially broken. Mr Utterson, the lawyer friend of Dr Jekyll, counts all these bodily attributes against him. Yet, the reasons of his displeasure are not merely the physical attributes

and behavioural attributes of Mr Hyde. He feels “unknown disgust, loathing and fear”(66). Mr Hyde’s physical appearance is loathsome, disgusting and nightmarish. He looks devilish to Mr Utterson. He thinks:

There must be something else....There is something more, if I could find a name for it. God, bless me, the man seems hardly human! Something troglodytic, shall we say? Or can be the old story of Dr Fell? or is it the mere radiance of a foul soul that thus transpires through, and transfigures its clay continent? The last, I think; for, O my poor old Harry Jekyll, if ever I read Satan’s signature upon a face, it is on that of your new friend. (61-62)

Mr Utterson is not able to clearly identify any kind of physical anomaly. Mr Hyde’s body is like any other human body. But, Mr Utterson is reluctant to consider him as a human being. Though he is normal according to norms of normal human body, ugliness and the impression of deformity Mr Utterson gets at the sight of Mr Hyde makes him think that he is not a human being. As Stevenson attributes ugliness and deformity to both the mind and the body of Mr Hyde, the picture of a being which cannot be a human being comes to the fore. Mr Utterson thinks of him as someone who is not a human being. His immediate response and supposition necessitates a rethinking of Mr Hyde’s physical ugliness and deformity. The contextual response of Mr Utterson leads to the inference that the doubt about the identity of Mr Hyde as a non-human springs from the disgusting physical appearance of the character. Besides, the aforementioned wicked deed of Mr Hyde supports his supposition. Mr Utterson who has a clear definition of the physical and mental attributes of a human being in mind will not admit that Mr Hyde is his fellow being. His physique resembles the physique of troglodytes. Troglodytes are people who lived in caves or holes in prehistoric period. In the wake of the publication of Charles Darwin’s *On the Origin of Species*, people began to doubt the static nature of the body of all creatures. As Darwin expostulated his theory of evolution which held that all creatures were in the process of evolution, the writings in the Victorian period projected the impact of Darwin’s theory on the

thinking of the people. He traced the origin of human beings in apes. Darwin put forward the theory that human beings were evolved from lower creatures. Along with the progressive aspect of evolution, the regressive aspect also prevailed in the Victorian period. People feared the possibility of regression to primitive men in the prehistoric period. People in the prehistoric period were uncouth savages who were not civilized. R.L. Stevenson shows fear of regression in the period through the portrayal of the character Mr Hyde. Carolyn Burdett in the article “Post Darwin: Social Darwinism, Degeneration, Eugenics” states:

Some of the most popular fiction of this period—including Robert Louis Stevenson’s *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (1886), Henry Rider Haggard’s *She* (1887) and H. G. Well’s *The Time Machine* (1895)—explored scenarios of frightening devolution. Stevenson’s erudite, gentlemanly and rather bored Jekyll turns into the beastly Hyde, who is cruel, lustful and murderous. Hyde’s squat, ape-like body, his dark hairy hands, and his energy and appetite all signal his ‘primitive’ state.

In a period torn with the conflict between religion and science, people were confused, not knowing what was right. From the very beginning of the 19th century, man’s quest to create new life can be traced in the work of Mary Shelley. Later other philosophical and scientific works filled the minds of the people in the period with spiritual darkness. It was not easy to be complacent with religious doctrines in the post Darwinian era. R.L. Stevenson also presents the repercussions of Darwinian discourse in the novel. The two doctors, Dr Hastie Lanyon and Dr Henry Jekyll represent the quest for scientific knowledge, to reach metaphysical realm. When Dr Lanyon decides not to cross the limits set by God in the name of metaphysics, Dr Jekyll dares to cross all the limits. His experiments on the human body to reach the metaphysical realm, result in the transformation of his body and mind. The transformation of Dr Jekyll’s well-formed handsome body into an ugly anomalous body seems to indicate the disastrous effect of violation of divine laws of creation that leads to the inference that the ugly

anomalous body is a punishment for transgression of divine laws of creation.

Mr Hyde is a necessity to Dr Jekyll when he yearns to fulfil his repressed need for 'undignified pleasures'. The meaning and nature of 'undignified pleasures' is obscure, however, it opens up the inference that his 'undignified pleasures' are repressed sexual desires. Dr Jekyll's bachelorship adds to the assumption. Prudish Victorians did not allow the mention of the word sex. But Michel Foucault pointed out that sex was spoken everywhere in the Victorian period in the contexts of law, medicine, religion and education. R.L. Stevenson might have used the phrase 'undignified pleasures' in tune with the prudishness of the age. In the article "Gender Roles in the 19th Century" Kathryn Hughes says about unmarried men frequenting certain streets for gratifying sexual desires. She says: "If a young man was particularly pious he might manage to stay chaste until he married. Many respectable young men resorted to using prostitutes. All the major cities had red light districts where it was easy to find a woman whom you could pay for sex". The novel subtly shows men frequenting some streets at night. It is written that Mr Richard Enfield sees Mr Hyde trampling on a little girl at 3 'o' clock in the morning in a quarter of a street in London. Sir Danvers Carew is also seen at odd hours in the city. Their nocturnal visits also raise doubts about their moral behaviour. When Mr Utterson is bewildered with the clause that empowers Mr Hyde to inherit all the possessions of Dr Jekyll in case of his death or disappearance, he doubts the relation between his friend and Mr Hyde. He remembers the wild days of Dr Jekyll during his youth and doubts whether Mr Hyde is Dr Jekyll's progeny. He examines himself and recalls a few moral failures. The fact that Dr Jekyll has gone wild in his youth even before the birth of Mr Hyde raises doubts about his purity. The assumption that evil prevails in well-formed handsome persons also can be deduced from the above instances. It points out loophole in the rationale of representational strategy of viewing the anomalous and ugly body as the abode of evil.

It is Dr Jekyll who cleverly makes all preparations for Mr Hyde to exist. He decides to give

up Mr Hyde only when he realizes that Dr Jekyll will be destroyed completely if he allows Mr Hyde to thrive. When he decides to abandon Mr Hyde for his safety, he does not give up his abode at Soho. When Mr Hyde's body is set apart as the embodiment of purely evil, it raises a question about the master brain behind all the preparations done for the existence of Mr Hyde. Dr Jekyll opens another account in a bank, devises a different style of handwriting, prepares a clause in the Will to bequeath Dr Jekyll's property to Mr Hyde, orders the servants to obey Mr Hyde and requests Mr Utterson to give justice to him to ensure that Mr Hyde can live his indulgent and sinful life freely. As Dr Jekyll cleverly and skilfully sets everything ready for Mr Hyde, it is wrong to assume that the doctor is pure and good at heart. As stated earlier, the body of Mr Hyde is a mask for Dr Jekyll to protect his name in the society. Moreover, Dr Jekyll is more cunning to protect himself from punishment. Though he is horrified at his latent self's cruelty done by the body of Mr Hyde, he is more bothered about protecting himself from legal punishment. When Dr Jekyll's body gets transformed into Mr Hyde in the park without consuming the drug, he gets panicky. But, he devises a plan to get the drug from his cabinet at his home with the help of his friend Dr Lanyon, to change himself to Dr Jekyll. He is selfish and egotistic to meet his needs in a clever way. Dr Jekyll's selfishness, egotism, cunningness and hypocrisy again point out the fact that the well-formed handsome body is also an abode of evil and thereby the rationale of representational strategy of looking at the anomalous ugly body as evil is interrogated

In short, when Mr Hyde represents a primitive brute, Dr Jekyll represents a sophisticated hypocrite. Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde differ merely in their social behaviours. Both are vicious at heart, but the degrees of vice vary in their social life. As virtue and vice emanate from the same person in two different bodies, the thought that an evil soul dwells in an anomalous ugly body and vice versa loses ground. Cesare Lombroso's theoretical postulate that a biologically fit individual cannot be a criminal is interrogated. Thus, the rationale in the strategy of representing only the anomalous ugly body as an abode of evil is subverted.

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