



Discuss the intersection of monstrous appearance, moral action and pride in *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* and *Let The Right One In*.

Harry Mycroft

Lisa Butler divides critics of *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* into two camps: those who consider it to be a “timeless” allegory dramatising the conflict between the “good” and “evil” elements of human nature’ and those who ‘put forth historicized interpretations of the text emphasizing its engagements with the cultural developments of late nineteenth-century’.¹ Butler herself insists the latter, that the novella corresponds to and satirises a ‘particular cultural matrix of fear and concern’ over specific contemporary scientific and political questions, something very much of its time.² It is certainly true that the novella touches upon concerns of moral and physical degeneration in light of contemporary understandings of psychology, evolution and the pseudo-science of physiognomy, alongside other fears concerning massive changes in the fundamental nature of society. As such, according to an exclusively historicised reading of the text, certain nuances of meaning are surely lost without an understanding of the historical and cultural contexts surrounding the text. Yet in spite of this *Jekyll and Hyde* has become a central motif to the modern imagination which has been adapted and reproduced in countless forms in times when this specific ‘matrix’ has become meaningless, the idea of a seemingly upstanding person having a darker immoral side that physically transforms them when indulged has proven remarkably fluid. Whilst Lindqvist’s *Let the Right One In* is not a *direct* adaption of Stevenson’s novella this central idea appears and its allegorical implications prove to be incredibly similar. Even its setting and style reflect *Jekyll and Hyde*, a dark urban cityscape where a similar matrix of specific cultural fears are examined and played out for the reader. At the root of both of these historicised matrices is a timeless fear that in each case is addressed in contemporary terms.

This timeless fear is that what is immoral or evil will reveal itself physically in those who indulge in such activities. However, due to the changing nature of society and morality over time the definition of what it means to be immoral or evil will change, as will the apparatus that defines it and its physical manifestations: simply put ‘*what*’ is immoral depends on ‘*who*’ defines immorality and ‘*how*’ they say it can be perceived. Thus criticism of *Jekyll and Hyde* tends to discuss degeneration, physiognomy, male sexual repression and a threat to the figure of the bourgeoisie professional man itself, whilst criticism of *Let the Right One In* will be concerned with sexual perversion and the action and effects of mass media on a doomed society. In both cases historicised readings could be produced of the specific issues that are being addressed but the root fear is the same, that of the failure society and degeneration of humanity: Butler’s distinction of the timeless versus the particular seems to be a false one. William Veeder notes that ‘Anglo-American culture produced [the Gothic] at

¹ L. Butler, ‘“that damned old business of the war in the members”’: The discourse of (In)Temperance in Robert Louis Stevenson’s *The Strange case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* in *Romanticism on the Net*. 4 (November 2006). <http://id.erudit.org/iderudit/014000ar>

² Butler, *Romanticism on the Net*, (November 2006).

a moment of specific needs' and in Stevenson and Lindqvist's works we see two moments where the specific needs of a society are being assessed critically through literature. Through these authors these societies, are as Veeder has it, 'inflict[ing] terrible wounds upon themselves and at the same time develop[ing] mechanisms that can help heal these wounds'.³

To illustrate this analogy a practical application is necessary. Dr Jekyll is usually read as a character trying to reconcile his ambiguous but surely sinful indiscretions with his outward appearance as a respectable professional man, with the two aspects of his character being considered mutually exclusive and utterly opposed. This immediately provides us with the source of the 'who' in the morality equation outlined above, the decision of what is immoral being filled by, as Stephen D Arata notes, the population of 'almost exclusively... middle class professional men' in Stevenson's novella.⁴ The matrix of concerns that Butler identifies is one that was defined by the real-world counterparts of lawyers like Utterson and doctors such as Jekyll and Lanyon, the authors of what Veeder calls 'the taxonomic regimes of medicine, law, anthropology, ethics, criminology, demography, pedagogy and psychology'.⁵ As the creators of such systems bourgeoisie men were able to create 'binaries' of 'functional and dysfunctional, healthy and unhealthy; ultimately, good and bad'.⁶ The 'what' in the equation of morality often seems to have been whatever is different from their own accepted lifestyles: sexually or socially empowered women, the degenerate men amongst the sub-human working-class or worse yet the degenerate men *not* of the working class - all could be conveniently recognised, diagnosed and dismissed by men appealing to their professional authority as the ultimate trump-card. For example Hyde's appearance as a physically repulsive 'troglodyte' is a curiously fantastical term applied as a technical judgement, defining him in the then respected pseudo-scientific terms of physiognomy.⁷ Stevenson satirises this pseudo-science by taking it, rather ironically, at face value and throughout the novella constantly scrutinises preconceived ideas of appearance, especially presented appearance. Stevenson hammers the point home to the reader by providing immediately a brief but revealing facial description of almost every character he introduces, such as Utterson's 'rugged countenance' and the at once 'well made' yet 'slyish cast' of Jekyll's features.⁸

As *Mr Hyde* is not of the professional gentlemanly establishment like *Dr Jekyll* his description is defined by them and their consensus is put in aptly professional terms that highlight his deviancy from a norm, that he radiates an 'impression of deformity', the diagnosis representing attempt to separate themselves from a monstrous figure.⁹ Similarly when Hyde kills Carew this establishment plays on fears arising from the infant stages of evolutionary theory, Hyde succumbs to 'ape-like fury' in contrast to his helplessly polite and reserved gentleman victim.¹⁰ Meanwhile Arata notes that Enfield's first reaction upon seeing Hyde running down a young girl and ruling out the possibility of physical violence, 'the next best' is to threaten him with making his name 'stink from one end of London to the other'¹¹, implying that damage to his reputation which is, ultimately, his ability to project a less monstrous appearance to world in general is the ultimate wound. Tellingly, the power to make Hyde into a monster in the eyes of others lies in the judgement of respectable

³ W. Veeder, 'The nurture of the Gothic, or, how can a text be both popular and subversive?' in *Spectral Readings: Towards a Gothic Geography*. ed. Byron, G and Punter, D. (MacMillan Press, 1999) p.56; p.54.

⁴ S. Arata, 'The sedulous ape: Atavism, professionalism, and Stevenson's Jekyll and Hyde' in *Criticism* (Spring 1995. Vol. 37, Issue 2) p.238.

⁵ Veeder, p.58.

⁶ Veeder, p.58.

⁷ R. L. Stevenson, *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde and Other Stories* (Collector's Library, 2004), p.26.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p.11; p.29.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p.25.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p.33.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p.14.

professional men. Crucially, Hyde is conspicuous as being the only major male character that Stevenson does not allow to contribute a narrative of some sort to the reader directly. His appearances, words and actions are always mediated and presented through another character such as Utterson or Enfield. Whilst this has a narrative purpose of creating a sense of mystery and foreboding about the character it also has meta-textual implications. Arata highlights that the male characters in *Jekyll and Hyde* unwittingly ‘close ranks around [Hyde]... recognising him as one of their own’, citing as an example Enfield’s decision in spite of taking an instant dislike to Hyde to protect him from the mob of women eager to hurt him.¹² However, the same unspoken solidarity amongst men is the root of Utterson’s desire to protect Jekyll’s reputation from scandal or of Lanyon’s commitment to secrecy over the affair by keeping his account in sealed letter to be opened after his death and intended only for the eyes of Utterson. In all cases the men want to silence talk of the transgressive Hyde because he is, by class, a gentleman. By his sins and indeed his very existence he draws attention to the flaws in their hegemonic assertion that bourgeoisie men do not act in a certain way or associate with men who do. In trying to deal with Hyde quietly they attempt to form a conspiracy of silence, but one that is inherently flawed as Stevenson ensures the reader is parley to every detail of the case via the omniscient narrator. As such the reader is able to see the self-interest of such respectable men and their systems of control and repression, and as the details of the case emerge and the conspirators discover that Hyde truly is one of their own the reader is given insight from the most intimate viewpoint to the fallacious hypocrisies of these men. Stevenson reveals that their closely-guarded medical and social opinions simply represent an attempt to project their own social and moral insecurities onto a monster-figure, quite literally in the case of Jekyll, by allowing the reader a view of one of their case studies in action.

Similarly, in *Let the Right One In* Lindqvist assesses power of those who have the power to define a monster by letting the reader view their system of power in action. Tracing the story of the media response to Håkan’s crimes as it develops, Lindqvist satirises the authors of our own contemporary hegemony: not the bourgeoisie professionals of Victorian London but the forces of the mass media. Crucially Lindqvist highlights that this force is even more fallible than the bourgeoisie professionals of Stevenson’s era whose judgements, if self-interested and inherently flawed, at least presented a veneer of internal consistency. In contrast the unlearned media in *Let the Right One In* are revealed from the outset as confused sources of misinformation: Lindqvist intersperses the novel with sensationalist news reports that the reader knows as they read them to be wildly inaccurate because the correct details have consistently been revealed to them already, before further twisting the knife by tracing their effect in the spread of mass hysteria by having characters excitedly repeat ad verbatim what they have read in later dialogue. In an uncomfortable echo of real-world tabloids a comic-relief article about police fumbling with a sheep is directly juxtaposed with the grimness of the ongoing man-hunt for Håkan, which unfolds in the familiar sensationalist style of the real-world gutter-press. Håkan is described in sensationalist terms that would not stand out amongst real-world accounts of real serial killers, dubbed with instantly memorable titles such as ‘The Ritual Killer’. This title represents a reduction of a serial child-killer to a meme that can be inserted into headlines as a saleable commodity into which the media can project, like the bourgeoisie professionals of Stevenson’s day, all of the darkness and fear of modern society into one monstrous figure separate from the rest of humanity. In doing so Lindqvist highlights a modern binary distinction of exactly the same kind that Veeder identifies in the worst excesses of Victorian pseudo-science. Håkan is even described as an ‘archetypal Monster’¹³ during a press-conference, reducing to two words the binary juxtaposition of technical academic language with the opposing, evocative language of

¹² Arata, p.238.

¹³ J. Lindqvist and E. Sergerberg (trans) *Let the Right One In* (Quercus, 2009) p.376.

emotional response used to separate men from monsters, recalling the sober professional judgement of Hyde as a sub-human ‘troglodyte’. With Håkan as with the ‘monsters’ presented on the wrong side of the binary divide in the real-world press it is acceptable for a reader to take ‘ghoulish delight’ in reading a ‘separate fact box [included in an article] about hydrochloric acid and what it could do to the body, so you could really revel in how much it hurt’.¹⁴

Clearly Lindqvist and Stevenson are commenting on contemporary manifestations of the same phenomenon, that of the artificial separation of humans into men and monsters by respected sources of influence in contemporary culture, and that by including the reader in the very action of this phenomenon they are both criticising it in the same way. However, Lindqvist ignores Stevenson’s precedent with Hyde and allows the reader to see his monster closely, examining Håkan’s character and history in considerable detail, frequently giving direct insight into Håkan’s thoughts and actions. Nevertheless in spite of this closeness and in spite of themselves the reader finds themselves agreeing with the judgement of the media, instead of inspiring empathy these revelations force the reader to come to terms with the fact that in spite of his pathetic history Håkan is still not only a paedophile and child-killer but an arrogant, deluded and self-righteous man who makes conscious choices to commit the crimes that he does. This arrogance, self-righteousness and delusion mark a character in Stevenson’s novella: not Mr Hyde but the good Dr Jekyll himself.

By virtue of working in a fictional context Lindqvist and Stevenson have the best of both worlds. Whilst they can draw attention to the absurdity of expecting moral depravity to show result in a monstrous appearance in the real world, within their own fictions they can also use the idea of a monstrous appearance as an allegory to explore exactly what people are afraid of when they think of a monster. To Jekyll, Hyde represents an opportunity to live out vicariously the forbidden desires that he cannot do as himself, as Samuel Johnson has it he ‘makes a beast of himself [to get] rid of the pain of being a man’.¹⁵ Jekyll displays the tragic sin of hubris: arrogantly assuming by his ‘nine-tenths a life of effort, virtue and control’ that he is the very antithesis of a monster and it is safe to become one on a temporary basis, secure in the knowledge that he can return to his former self given ‘a second or two to mix and swallow the draft... [then] Edward Hyde would pass away like the stain of breath upon a mirror’.¹⁶ Jekyll appreciates that Hyde is an immoral creature and assures himself that as long as he can repress and resist temptation this immorality will not touch his own essence, without appreciating the irony that by the very action of creating an alter-ego like Hyde to sin with he has shown that his ability to cope with repression and temptation is sorely lacking. When Jekyll assures Utterson that ‘the moment I choose, I can be rid of Mr Hyde’ it is immediately clear that Jekyll does not have the control that he thinks that he does, and when Hyde’s true nature is revealed this stands out as a clear sign that Jekyll is becoming addicted to Hyde.¹⁷ Jekyll fears to become a monster but he is blind to the truth that he is trying to resolve this fear by deliberately succumbing to it, until the point where the transformation starts to occur without the use of the potion and his loss of both mental and physical control over Hyde, is made obviously apparent. Stevenson chillingly equates Jekyll’s growing obsession with his Hyde form with undertones of religious devotion by having Jekyll refer to Hyde as ‘that ugly idol in the glass’ and having Hyde scrawl blasphemies in a religious book that Jekyll possesses.¹⁸ Although Jekyll begins to hate losing control to the monster he sees in the mirror he ends up hopelessly devoted to him. By the end of *Jekyll and Hyde* Jekyll ends up facing his own worst fear, facing the judgement of his peers with the revelation that he and

¹⁴ Lindqvist, *Let the Right One In* p.341.

¹⁵ Hill, G. *Johnsonian Miscellanies- Vol. II* (James Press, 2007) p.333.

¹⁶ Stevenson, p.79; p.82.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p.30.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p.79.

Hyde are one and the same and that his virtuous appearance conceals a monster within. With Utterson and Poole battering his door down Jekyll's courage fails him, with his pride still evident to the very last he projects his own fears about judgement onto his alter-ego, asking if Hyde will do what he has not the strength to do himself and 'find courage to release himself at the last moment'.¹⁹

If Jekyll begins his journey to monstrosity as a man trying to become a beast Håkan is quite the opposite, a beast trying to become a man. Unlike Jekyll Håkan is introduced as a character who already bears slight physical signs of monstrosity, from his first appearance Lindqvist introduces him as having 'an incipient beer-belly [and] receding hairline', indicators of his alcoholism that he uses to blot out his guilt about being a paedophile, and Oskar's immediately assumes from his appearance that he is a drug addict.²⁰ Like Jekyll, Håkan seems to have an ambiguous idea of what it means to be a monster initially equating it with appearance, becoming angry when propositioned for sex with a young boy ('Did he really look like such a fucking pervert?')²¹ and projecting his own fears about this onto a more experienced child-molester who 'After multiple international trips had acquired a truly appalling appearance. A flaccid mouth, glazed eyes.' In spite of this, when trying to drink himself to death before he meets Eli he utilises his monstrous appearance when it suits him in a passive-aggressive gesture simultaneously pleading for sympathy and spitefully letting 'the people' see him die, day by day'.²² When Eli stops him from drinking and gives his life a purpose she provides him with an opportunity to be more than a monster and displaying a similar blind pride to Jekyll, Håkan comes to the mistaken idea that he can avoid being a monster by indulging his desire through a 'safe' route; in this case Eli whom he can lust after guiltlessly because he is older than him in years but still appears as a child. Håkan channels into this relationship his opinion of himself as a cultured intellectual in a world devoid of culture and intellect, elevating his relationship with his 'angel' Eli to a level of purity with undertones of religious devotion that reflect Jekyll's devotion to Hyde. Håkan vainly hopes that through this devotion he will become more than what he unconsciously acknowledges he is: an alcoholic child-murdering pervert. Eli represents to Håkan absolution for his sins: when pondering the circle of hell Dante would put him in for the crimes of his life. He initially imagines, notably putting the proposition as a question to highlight his deliberate ambiguity on the subject, 'The circle of child-murderers?' but blots this from his mind instantly, with the more certain rationalisation that he will be spared that because 'sinned for love's sake'.²³ Finally he proudly decides that '*One* thing he was completely sure of. He would never end up in the lowest circle... the circle of traitors.' Ironically and again forming an echo of Jekyll in pursuing his deluded goal Håkan ends up becoming what he fears most, physically monstrous in appearance and robbed of the intellectual capacities that he uses as a shield from his guilt, purely concerned with violently satisfying his supposedly pure sexual attraction to Eli and revealing the self-deception that he has experienced regarding this relationship. Immortality means that he cannot even depend on death to release him, Lindqvist answering Håkan's dishonestly self-serving questions about his eventual fate by giving him a truly Dantean punishment for his crimes.

Thus both *Jekyll and Hyde* and *Let the Right One In* present the same cautionary moral in the same way in spite of over a century of separation between their respective dates publication, between both Stevenson and Lindqvist the following pattern of reasoning is common. Specific to every society there are mechanisms by which people attempt to conclusively separate men from monsters, defining these monsters into existence by

¹⁹ Ibid., p.96.

²⁰ Lindqvist, p.12.

²¹ Ibid., p.46.

²² Ibid., p.236.

²³ Ibid., pp.217-18.

separating prevailing social fears and abhorrent traits into artificial abstract figures because they cannot bear to see these failings in ordinary people. The primary way by which a monster can be identified is their appearance, which will show the mark of their own moral degeneration, whilst virtuous people can be safe in the knowledge that if they do not appear as monsters to their peers they are probably not monsters. However upon close examination from the inside these mechanisms inevitably prove to be unhelpful not only due to the damaging repressive effect that they have on society in general but because this separation of the human experience into polarised extremes lulls people into a false sense of security, suggesting that people can indulge in monstrous behaviour provided they do not appear as monsters, allowing people to rationalise their monstrous behaviour until they cannot control it and become exactly what they feared they would. By including the reader in the exercise of exploring ideas of monstrosity and appearance, Stevenson and Lindqvist challenge the flawed contemporary solutions to a timeless problem and within the safe realm of allegory make readers aware of the danger of expecting monsters to appear monstrous outside of this realm in the real world, 'wounding' through their work the societies when they most need it and at the same time providing a moral that warns the reader of proud delusion that an immoral monster will appear obviously as a monster.

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