

# *Jekyll and Hyde*: The monster as a metaphor

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## Abstract:

This essay analyses the key elements associated to the monster metaphor in Robert Louis Stevenson's *Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, namely, menace, impurity, freedom, pleasure, and power, based on Noël Carroll's elaborations. The aim is to study the use of this figure represented by Hyde in the context of a strictly morally oriented Victorian society.

Keywords: Monsters, Morality, Victorianism

Monsters notably re-enter the literary imagery of nineteenth century Britain. Although they have been portrayed numerous times before then, they stand in the limelight of major works such as Robert Louis Stevenson's *Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*. From Greek myths to contemporary stories, monsters keep on reappearing, often in different shapes. They include aberrations, maniacs, vampires, animal-like characters, deformed images of humans, Satan, etc. Their figures not only become recurrent in the Victorian era but also ignite philosophical debates within literature. The monster serves as a tool that brings forth two man issues: morality and identity. Julio Jeha remarks that monsters stand as cultural metaphors and literary artifices. Thus, based on Noël Carroll's elaborations on art-horror, this work starts from the literary artifice to explore the cultural metaphors that Hyde incorporates.

Carroll offers an illuminating view of monsters within this genre. Art-horror encompasses Stevenson's story because the monster revealed in the protagonists is intended to cause horror. According to him, monsters are qualified by the feelings they raise in an individual. These fictional beings are characterized by the emotion they give vent to, namely horror, as their names suggest. "Indeed, the genres of suspense, mystery and horror derive their very names from the affects they are intended to promote [...] the genre of horror takes its title from the emotion it characteristically or rather ideally promotes; this emotion constitutes the identifying mark of horror" (14). He defines art-horror as a genre of monster stories, monsters that uncover nothing but horror, although not every monster in a story is bound to be horrific.

These creatures often appear outside the horror genre. They raise other emotions such as laughter, pity, sadness, empathy, for instance, and are often present in fairy tales, epics, and odysseys. In such context, "the monster is an ordinary creature in an extraordinary world" (Carroll 16). The monster is taken for granted; it is a part of the story that does not attempt to horrify. Horrific monsters must represent two key

elements, namely, menace and impurity simultaneously. They cannot be only threatening because they would simply ignite fear. Likewise, if they are only impure, the emotion is more like disgust (10).

These creatures are a menace when they challenge pre-existing orders. Monsters of the horror genre violate cultural codes of behaviour and, for that reason, are often seen as entities that obliterate morality. This makes it possible to understand why monsters do not belong in our everyday world. They represent a clash of two realities, the monstrous and the normal one. They disturb established ways of thinking and acting, defying common knowledge and symbolizing danger in any social context. Monsters not only constitute a physical threat for the strength they usually have but also a cognitive menace, since they offhandedly break cultural rules.

Monsters are impure because they are impossible to classify. According to Carroll, "an object or being is impure if it is categorically interstitial, categorically contradictory, incomplete, or formless" (32). Assuming that categorization is a way to bring the unknown into an intelligible reality, the author states that monsters do not fit appropriately any categorization. They remain inconceivable and unknown and are often ambiguous in the way they show themselves. Their impurity is also shown in their incompleteness or formlessness indicated by the various disturbing shapes, texture, constitution, and smell they possess.

Monsters show this impurity in two ways. They shock one by mingling characteristics of animate and inanimate things into their figure. Zombies, mummies, and humanoids illustrate this combination of dead and alive. They also startle by mixing animalistic with human traits. Human-beasts, werewolves and the Jekyll-Hyde character foreground this mixture. The Jekyll side symbolizes the human and Hyde symbolizes the animal side, acting without the limits of reason.

Hyde embodies the characteristics associated to monsters. In a conversation with Mr. Utterson, Enfield recalls the encounter of Hyde and a little girl: "I saw two figures, one little man who was stumping along eastward at a good walk, and the other a girl of maybe eight or ten who was running as hard as she was able down a cross street" (9). Gradually leading the imagination to cause some anxiety and agitation, Mr Enfield continues: "the two ran into one another naturally enough at the corner, and then came the horrible part of the thing." The element of fear, required in Carroll's definition of the monster, plays a major role in the report: "he was perfectly cool [...], but gave me one look, so ugly that it brought out the sweat on me like running." The suspense created in the narration heightens the fearful and threatening feelings as the event unfolds.

Interstitiality characterizes Hyde, as he apparently is neither human nor non-human. Categorical difficulties like that hinder speech, making it difficult to find words to describe the interstitial. Enfield has trouble ascribing Hyde to any given category and resorts to the neuter pronoun: "It wasn't like a man, it was like some damned juggernaut" (9). Enfield's unsuccessful attempt to categorize Hyde appears again: "he is not easy to describe. There is something wrong with his appearance." Thus, Enfield's perplexity as to what he sees indicates interstitiality in Hyde.

Enfield also hints at impurity, formlessness, and incompleteness. "Something displeasing, something downright detestable. I never saw a man I so disliked, and yet I scarce know why. He must be deformed somewhere; he gives a strong feeling of

deformity, although I couldn't specify the point" (11). "Displeasing" and "detestable" suggest repulsiveness, which is a reaction to impurity. The repetition of "deformed" and Enfield's inability to locate it or "specify the point" show the uncertainty about shape, size, or form: "He is an extraordinary looking man, and yet I really can name nothing out of the way. No, Sir; I can make no hand of it; I can't describe him. And it's not want of memory, for I declare I can see him this moment" (12). Enfield's insistence on trying to identify Hyde accurately shows how unknown and inconceivable Hyde seems to him.

Utterson's reactions also show the elements aforementioned, namely impurity and threat. Impurity is evinced by the difficulty to conceive of Hyde's figure and a strong physical response from Utterson. He says, "there must be something else [...] there is something more if I could find a name for it [...] the man seems hardy human! Something troglodytic [...] if I ever read Satan's signature upon a face, it is on that of your new friend" (17). The repetition of "something" reveals this doubt regarding the looks of Hyde. The narrator says: "Mr. Hyde was pale and dwarfish, he gave an impression of deformity without any nameable malformation, [...] but not all of these together could explain the hitherto unknown disgust, loathing and fear with which Mr. Utterson regarded him" (17). A sense of repulsiveness and disgust comes from Hyde's impressions. Threat is signalled by the fear Utterson feels in the room while he waits for Poole to fetch Jekyll: "he seemed to read a menace in the flickering of the firelight on the polished cabinets and the uneasy starting of the shadow on the roof" (18). The elements of impurity and threat follow one another in the reactions of characters almost unavoidably.

The settings associated with Hyde also translate impurity and threat. The space monsters occupy resembles the impact they cause. In one of Utterson's searches for Hyde, the narrator points out the mystery and fear the scenery invokes, "a great chocolate-coloured pall lowered over heaven, but the wind was continually charging and routing these embattled vapours [...] for a moment, the fog would be quite broken up, and a haggard shaft of daylight would glance in between the swirling wreaths" (23). The dark and misty environment elicits the sense of danger and unfamiliarity. Further, "the dismal quarter of Soho seen under these changing glimpses, with its muddy ways, and slatternly passengers, and its lamps [...] seemed in the lawyer's eyes, like the district of some city in a nightmare" (23). Besides the impression of filth indicated by "muddy" and "slatternly," the setting is described as nightmarish, scary, and unreal to some extent. It is as if the place looked too frightening and strange to be real. In this sense, the impurity associated to the monster contaminates his surroundings.

Monsters are created or defined as such with a purpose. Leslie Fiedler claims that the purposes monsters serve vary. However, three main ideas stand out: freedom, pleasure, and power. The idea of freedom is based on acting naturally or following one's own nature, unafraid of remorse or punishment. Indeed, they usually behave indifferently to such feelings since they show no concern for others. Pity or the law does not restrain them. Jeffrey Jerome Cohen says, "The monster is continually linked to forbidden practices" (16). Any action limited by morality the monsters breaks: "Through the body of the monster fantasies of aggression, domination, and inversion

are allowed safe expression" (17). He remarks that monsters act as they please, regardless of rules. In this sense, the monster is free and often represents pleasure.

Pleasure arises from the lack of limitations. There is no sense of denial when it comes to bodily satisfaction. The monster is above the rules, willing to fulfil its needs. It evokes "potent escapist fantasies" because they serve as an "egress from constraint" (Cohen 17). Through the monster, one is able to forget morality or any other cultural inhibitor. Cohen believes that the monster unravels the pleasure of the body.

Like freedom and pleasure, power is a typical attribute of monsters. Carroll believes that monsters in the horror genre are usually invested with some kind of intimidating power or strength to subjugate or control the other. The political connotation attributed to them is relative to the control they enjoy. "A tettering [sic] zombie or a severed hand would appear incapable of mustering enough force to overpower a co-ordinated six-year-old. Nevertheless, they are presented as unstoppable" (34). This depiction of power is remarkable of horrific creatures and revealed in moments that barely make sense if one does not see them as mysteriously powerful.

Jekyll's maid recounts the murder of Sir Danvers Carew: Hyde suddenly "broke out in a great flame of anger, stamping with his foot, brandishing the cane, and carrying on [...] like a madman [...] Mr. Hyde broke out of all bounds and clubbed him to the earth" (22). Hyde sees no limits to his actions and kills a person despite any moral code that forbids him to do so. He acts freely and apparently with pleasure, the pleasure of doing it for no reason and no bounds. Power is shown in his physical strength to destroy his victim without giving him the slightest chance to fight back: "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" (22). His fury is unmotivated and his violence is gratuitous, as he purges his anger, unlike the proper and honourable Jekyll, who, as pillar of the Victorian community, cannot vent his feelings freely.

Monsters also carry a deeper meaning relative to identity. They identify the other, either negatively or positively, setting the boundaries between *us* and *them*. "[M]onsters symbolize alterity and difference in extremis" (Carroll 19). They are an attempt to define the other and consequently to define oneself, separating both radically. They can be "representations of other cultures, generalized and demonized" (Cohen 15). The monster is a horrific stereotyped image of others. It identifies and stigmatizes them with monstrous characteristics because one of the purposes of the monster figure is to impose differences. Cohen goes further to assert that the act of calling something a monster comes from strong feelings such as fear of contamination, impurity, and loss of identity. Such fear must come from an assumption of purity or from an unconvincing Victorian Puritanism.

Identity is a key issue in *Jekyll and Hyde*. The "Hyde" monster exists only until Jekyll explains who Hyde is. From that moment on it ceases to exist because, according to Carroll, he is no longer a complete stranger. In fact, he is part of someone who is rather well-known. Monsters do not inspire any type of identification from the audience; they lack human characteristics and resist explanation. The moment Jekyll tells the truth about Hyde in the will, the monster is naturalized; it is brought into an

acceptable frame of mind; it is made somewhat familiar and acknowledgeable, and allowed identification from readers.

Victorian morality and notions on identity explain at least partly the reappearance of the monster figure in *Jekyll and Hyde*. The strict rules of behaviour that individuals have to abide by seem too constrictive and oppressive. Consequently, the creation of the Hyde monster can be read as a symptom of the inability to cope with the existing moral codes. Monsters can also be seen as a symbolic way fiction finds to give vent to the anxiety caused by the moral repression at the time, if one bears in mind what they represent, namely freedom, pleasure, power.

The Victorian identity also becomes an issue. The ideal Englishman is supposed to stand out for being lawful. It is as if his Englishness lied on being morally correct and pristine in his conduct; his identity is expected to rest solely on the tenets of reason. The flaws of such a notion on identity are shown in the figure of the monster because, first, it marks the difference between this ideal Englishman and the true Victorian; second, because it shakes traditional views of identity and, finally, because it asks for its reassessment since the monster does not fit into any category. Hence the menace and impurity monsters represent. Therefore, as an expression of this conflict the monster revives.

Overall, monsters reoccur so that questions regarding moral behaviour and rigid concepts of identity are readdressed. Cohen suggests that they “ask us how we perceive the world and how we have misrepresented what we have attempted to place [...] they ask us to re-evaluate our cultural assumptions [...] they ask us why we have created them” (20). He reminds the critical reader the risk of using crystallized concepts to perceive the world. This is one of the reasons the monster comes in to existence in *Jekyll and Hyde*. It points out to the reader the human capacity to misunderstand and misjudge others with this practise of fitting the unknown into fixed categories.

Resumo:

Este ensaio analisa os elementos essenciais associados à metáfora do monstro na obra *O Estranho Caso do Dr. Jekyll e Mr Hyde* — ameaça, impureza, liberdade, prazer e poder — baseado nas noções de Noël Carroll. O objetivo é estudar do uso dessa figura representada por Hyde em um contexto da sociedade vitoriana com rígidos padrões morais.

Palavras-chave: monstros, moralidade, vitorianismo.

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