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ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON PHILOSOPHICALLY:  
DUALISM AND EXISTENTIALISM  
WITHIN THE GOTHIC CONVENTION

Stevenson's *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* is an ambiguous novel. More problematic than one would expect. On the one hand, it depicts the image of the real world represented by the authentic descriptions of London contrasted with the night of crime in the city, and proclaims the positivist cult of reason. The plot allows us to connect Stevenson's 19<sup>th</sup>-century novel with the mid-Victorian ones, based on the moral courage and psychological validity, designed to answer the main questions of the era. The brutal battle for the right to happiness, fulfillment, satisfaction of desires, meandering career and interpersonal conflicts set the circle of social sensitivity of typical realistic novels in England. On the other hand, *The Strange Case* reveals moral confusion, duality of man and the unpleasant consequences of relying on unethical principles in understanding the world and the human nature. For that reason, Stevenson's work seems to be placed closer to modernism than realism. Literature at the turn of the centuries addressed the controversy between the "old" world—representing the ideas of utilitarianism, scientism and attachment to a realistic manner, and the "young" one—advocating individualism, individual rights and the new sensibility (demonic eroticism, hedonism). Stevenson's work is also a sensational story which can be read as an allegory of evil constantly conquering man, which, in turn, makes the work closer to the romantic horror novel.

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An important advantage of the novel is that its author managed to combine a masterful composition of the thriller with the multi-dimensional creation of the main character and excellent descriptions of London:

It chanced on one of these rambles that their way led them down a by-street in a busy quarter of London. The street was small and what is called quiet, but it drove a thriving trade on the week-days. The inhabitants were all doing well, it seemed, and all emulously hoping to do better still, and laying out the surplus of their gains in coquetry; so that the shop fronts stood along that thoroughfare with an air of invitation, like rows of smiling saleswomen. Even on Sunday, when it veiled its more florid charms and lay comparatively empty of passage, the street shone out in contrast to its dingy neighbourhood, like a fire in a forest; and with its freshly painted shutters, well-polished brasses, and general cleanliness and gaiety of note, instantly caught and pleased the eye of the passenger (*SC*, p. 6).<sup>1</sup>

The scenes from colorfully and authentically presented London's streets are among the finest in the novel. Places' accounts are valuable because Stevenson is perceived as a reflector rather than a maker of Victorian period. However, the city's image was not idealized by Stevenson. The descriptions of well-maintained and safe city streets are contrasted with those of dirty, neglected and hostile areas of the city:

Two doors from one corner, on the left hand going east, the line was broken by the entry of a court; and just at that point, a certain sinister block of building thrust forward its gable on the street. It was two stories high; showed no window, nothing but a door on the lower story and a blind forehead of discoloured wall on the upper; and bore in every feature, the marks of prolonged and sordid negligence. The door, which was equipped with neither bell nor knocker, was blistered and distained. Tramps slouched into the recess and struck matches on the panels; children kept shop upon the steps; the schoolboy had tried his knife on the mouldings; and for close on a generation, no one had appeared to drive away these random visitors or to repair their ravages (*SC*, p. 6).

In this aspect, the story differs from the original medieval setting in the Gothic literary forms (e.g. Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto*). And what is more, evil is not ascribed to only one "agent" (a character). It appears also here in a "collective form", or in its social dimension (streets of London), which is a novelty brought in by Stevenson. Apparently, he introduced the motif of duality from the beginning of the story. In the cited passage, obviously, it refers to the two different spheres of the city.

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<sup>1</sup> All quotes refers to: Robert Louis Stevenson, *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008) [1886]. Hereafter abbreviated *SC*.

The author of the story about Dr Jekyll, like the 19<sup>th</sup>-century realists, is an insightful portraitist. His observations are devoid of any evaluative opinions, although many scenes in the novel bring to light the vast areas of poverty and lawlessness (so significant stage in British history of 19<sup>th</sup> century):

(...) as the cab crawled from street to street, Mr Utterson beheld a marvellous number of degrees and hues of twilight (...) The dismal quarter of Soho seen under these changing glimpses, with its muddy ways, and slatternly passengers, and its lamps, which had never been extinguished or had been kindled afresh to combat this mournful re-invasion of darkness, seemed, in the lawyer's eyes (...) As the cab drew up before the address indicated, the fog lifted a little and showed him a dingy street, a gin palace, a low French eating-house, a shop for the retail of penny numbers and two penny salads, many ragged children huddled in the doorways, and many women of different nationalities passing out, key in hand, to have a morning glass; and the next moment the fog settled down again upon that part, as brown as umber, and cut him off from his blackguardly surroundings (*SC*, p. 22).

These elements of naturalism presented in the novel refer to the implementation of the assumption that the aim of literature should be objective and emotionally neutral, reflecting the real world.

It is worth noting that in Stevenson's novel, as it seems, the dark corners of urban descriptions correlate with the equally dark recesses of the human psyche. It is to the latter issue, as the most literary critics admit,<sup>2</sup> that the author devoted his work. Stevenson did not focus entirely on the physical appearance of the characters, but rather on their personalities and mental conditions. A lawyer Utterson (*SC*, p. 5), Richard Enfield (*SC*, p. 5), Dr Hastie Lanyon (*SC*, p. 11–2), and even a butler, Pool (*SC*, p. 16), are figures depicting the British customs, and even more —the values of “Britishness”: hard work, integrity and honesty. Some sort of inconsistency is revealed in the case of characterization of the eponymous figure, or to be more precise, to the forms of existence assigned to him. The description of the physical forms of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde became the first step of the author's contribution to the confrontation of the two protagonists, or antinomian types of personality.<sup>3</sup> Dr Jekyll's description lays within a typical characteristic of the Victorian novel character: “To this rule, Dr Jekyll was no

<sup>2</sup>Nancy K. Gish, “Jekyll and Hyde: The Psychology of Dissociation,” *International Journal of Scottish Literature* 2 (2007): 1–10; Anne Stiles, “Robert Louis Stevenson's Jekyll and Hyde and the Double Brain,” *Studies in English Literature, 1500–1900* 46.4 (2006): 879–900; Han-yu Huang, “Monsters, Perversion, and Enjoyment: Toward a Psychoanalytic Theory of Postmodern Horror,” *Concentric: Literary and Cultural Studies* 33.1 (2007): 87–110.

<sup>3</sup>Ed Cohen, “Hyding the Subject?: The Antinomies of Masculinity in The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde,” *NOVEL: A Forum on Fiction* 37.1/2 (2004): 181–99.

exception; and as he now sat on the opposite side of the fire—large, well-made, smooth-faced man of fifty, with something of a slyish cast perhaps, but every mark of capacity and kindness (...)” (*SC*, p. 18). To underline a contrast between those two figures, the appearance of Mr Hyde is presented in the following way:

He is not easy to describe. There is something wrong with his appearance; 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. He's an extraordinary-looking man, and yet I really can name nothing out of the way (*SC*, p. 9).

The passage indicates that the mysterious figure of Mr Hyde is one of the key elements of the entire atmosphere of the novel, or even more—one of the most important components of Stevensonian philosophy. Appearance of Hyde seems to cause the feelings of terror and mystery growing with every sentence. The progressive split of personality of the main character leads to his self-destruction.

The origin of the duality here (double) is neither new, nor original, and its inception refers to on the concept of the duality of man's morality, i.e. struggling internally with good and evil.<sup>4</sup> The writer made this inner conflict the theme of the novel, and through the plot of the story the reader can trace the problem of the split-personality disorder of Dr Jekyll, the widely respected London physician and inventor of a medicine which supposedly allows to separate the good and bad spheres of human nature. Taking the medicine, the man without moral compunction indulges in debauchery and every kind of evil, and after taking the drug again, he returns to his original form of being. The plot of the novel, however, provides information on the pretense of these returns. In fact, Mr Hyde, who is the 'incarnation' of the night, the dark side of the soul or identity of Dr Jekyll, is physically the same man, which is the fullest revealed in the last chapter of the novel ("Henry Jekyll's Full Statement of the Case," *SC*, p. 52). The atmosphere of tension in the work reinforces the fact that the internal transformation caused by the chemical mixtures at some point is no longer needed, and the unfortunate experimenter spontaneously passes from one transformation to another, in a way that is less and less, and finally—completely uncontrollable:

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<sup>4</sup>Grotstein—James S. Grotstein, „The Alter Ego and Déjà Vu Phenomena: Notes and Reflections”, in John Rowan, Mick Cooper, *The Plural Self Multiplicity in Everyday Life* (London: SAGE Publications, 1999), 28–50—gives the number of literary works where the theme of differently perceived duality (alter ego, other “self”, twin, duplicate) is present. See also: John Herdman, *The Double in Nineteenth-Century Fiction* (New York: Macmillan, 1990).

At all hours of the day and night, I would be taken with the premonitory shudder; above all, if I slept, or even dozed for a moment in my chair, it was always as Hyde that I awakened. Under the strain of this continually impending doom and by the sleeplessness to which I now condemned myself, ay, even beyond what I had thought possible to man, I became, in my own person, a creature eaten up and emptied by fever, languidly weak both in body and mind, and solely occupied by one thought: the horror of my other self (*SC*, p. 64–5).

In this passage Stevenson emphasizes the self-destruction of the main character. The cause of failure is strongly connected with deepest desires and the curiosity of the scientist.

Today, Stevenson's work is one of the most classic horror and sensational stories, which is also kept in the framework of the Gothic tradition (the romantic horror novel). Perceived from a different perspective, *The Strange Case* is primarily a novel that unveils the ideas of the era in which it was written. As previously emphasized, the 19<sup>th</sup>-century was the time of science and technology, which resulted in the cult of science and belief that objective truth can be expressed only in terms of mathematics and natural sciences.<sup>5</sup> The public of that time was deluged with information about further discoveries and inventions.<sup>6</sup> There were opinions that the barriers of ignorance and the unknown would burst when faced with the power of the human mind, and that in the near future, human reason would solve all the problems of humanity.

Continuing, the superiority of reason over spiritual values, presented formerly by many philosophers (e.g. William Godwin, David Hume), manifested itself at most in science. The 19<sup>th</sup>-century development of science and foundations of pioneering technologies was based entirely on experiments and observations, for, as it was believed, the true knowledge of the world arises only from empirical experience. There was even the claim that an objective truth should be expressed in terms of natural sciences. This scientism embraced empiricism and rational thinking to explain the phenomena of any dimension, whether physical, social, cultural or psychological. Most of the scientists argued that the methods of research of the physical and biological sciences were equally appropriate and essential to all other disciplines, including the humanities and social sciences. Apart from the natural sciences, the study of the mind carried out partly via the study of man's behavior was developed. Sigmund Freud, the most famous

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<sup>5</sup> Allen Macduffie, "Irreversible Transformations: Robert Louis Stevenson's Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde and Scottish Energy Science," *Representations* 96.1 (2006): 1–20. "In Stevenson's day, the University of Edinburgh was a thriving center of engineering and scientific research, and Stevenson attended the lectures of two notable members of the faculty" (*ibid.*, 2).

<sup>6</sup> Stiles, "Robert Louis Stevenson's Jekyll and Hyde and the Double Brain," 882–4.

psychologists of the second part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, went on to develop theories about the unconscious mind, the mechanism of repression and the innovative studies devoted to duality within human identity.<sup>7</sup> The interest in broadly understood sciences, their main ideas, theories and methods of research, had been implemented as a meaningful element to the Gothic literary forms in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* was not completely original when the concept of duality of human nature is concerned. The precursors of Stevenson's work were Ernst Hoffman's *The Devil's Elixirs (Die Elixiere des Teufels)* (1816), Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818), Thomas Hogg's *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner* (1824), Edgar Allan Poe's *William Wilson* (1839), and most significantly Theophile Gautier's *Le Chevalier Double* (1840).<sup>8</sup>

As far as human existence was concerned, the possibility of change of human nature and overcoming death was highly proclaimed. It is important in this context to stress that terror in Stevenson's novel is not supernatural. The described transformations of Dr Jekyll to Mr Hyde are not the result of a curse or magic powers.<sup>9</sup> On the contrary, they are the result of scientific experiments, conducted by a London physician, which aimed at eliminating the duality of human nature.

Thus, the title character of Stevenson's novel embodies the 19<sup>th</sup>-century ambitions and illusions. Dr Jekyll is convinced that he has understood the problem of human nature and conducts experiments devoted to finding a solution. In his confession, we find the words that he has dealt with issues of metaphysics and the mystical, but focused his research on unraveling the mystery of human nature:

(...) it chanced that the direction of my scientific studies, which led wholly toward the mystic and the transcendental, re-acted and shed a strong light on this consciousness of the perennial war among my members. With every day, and from both sides of my intelligence, the moral and the intellectual, I thus drew steadily nearer to that truth, by whose partial discovery I have been doomed to such a dreadful shipwreck: that man is not truly one, but truly two. (...) I was so far in my reflections when, as I have said, a side-light began to shine upon the subject from the laboratory table. I began to perceive more deeply than it has ever yet been stated, the trembling immateriality, the

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<sup>7</sup> See: Fred Botting, *Gothic* (London New York: Routledge Taylor & Francis Group, 1996); Markman Ellis, *The History of Gothic Fiction* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2000); David B. Morris, "Gothic Sublimity," *New Literary History* 16.2 (1985): 299–319.

<sup>8</sup> See also: Irving Massey, "The Third Self: *Dracula*, *Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* and *Mérimée's Lokis*," *Bulletin of the Midwest Modern Language Association* 6.2 (1973): 57–67; Mary E. Snodgrass, "Doppelgänger," *Encyclopedia of Gothic Literature* (New York: Facts on File, 2005), 83–5; David Stevens, *The Gothic Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

<sup>9</sup> Similarly, in Ann Radcliffe's *The Italian* or Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, there are no supernatural elements and the thrill and atmosphere of fear are devoid of preternatural beings.

mist-like transience of this seemingly so solid body in which we walk attired. Certain agents I found to have the power to shake and to pluck back that fleshly vestment, even as a wind might toss the curtains of a pavilion (*SC*, p. 52–3).

The above quotation shows that the “solution” (*SC*, p. 54) and discovery of the “truth” (*SC*, p. 52) about human nature were not made in the way of transcendental illumination, but with the development of laboratory concoctions changing man’s personality. Stevenson, then, was ahead of biological testing and subsequent attempts to enhance human beings. The psychological experiment he carries out in his novel, reveals the devastating consequences of playing with nature and of moral relativism. The virtuous physician, unable to control his own transformations, as a consequence of mixture taking, imposes a penalty for himself—he commits suicide, which brings “the life of that unhappy Henry Jekyll to an end” (*SC*, p. 66).

Apparently, the character of Dr Jekyll created by Stevenson resembles the one from Mary Shelley’s novel *Frankenstein*. Victor Frankenstein is also trying to discover the mysteries of human nature in the laboratory. Experiments carried out by the researcher bring a disaster upon himself and his loved ones. In both cases, an interference with the laws of nature and the attempts to change human personality lead to unleashing forces which one cannot control.

Does it sound familiar? Let’s recall an example from an ancient Greece—the concept of *hybris*, which denotes the pride or majesty of ancestral rulers that prevents a person from correctly identifying the situation in which he has found himself. This pride is above the measure which the gods had appointed to man. The concept of *hybris* found expression especially in Greek tragedy, where the hero’s tragic blindness due to his arrogance was regarded as a challenge to the gods and led each time to the punishment of the hero.<sup>10</sup> In this context, both Stevenson’s Dr Jekyll and Shelley’s Frankenstein embody the pride of the human reason, like the ancient heroes who dared to look beyond their capabilities. As the novel in question has it:

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<sup>10</sup>Undoubtedly, *The Strange Case* is one of the novels written within the Gothic convention. Despite many features distinctive for the initially established Gothic literary tradition, Stevenson’s novel contains also those, revealed in various aspects of the text’s structure, which make it markedly different from the literary convention established by *The Castle of Otranto*. The most significant differences, the new elements introduced by Stevenson, are: the setting and place of action; the dualism of place, character, and narration; the complex, multi-dimensional main character; and a variety of symbols. On the one hand, the listed features make Stevenson’s novel truly original but, on the other, *The Strange Case* can still be placed within the Gothic tradition.



It was thus rather the exacting nature of my aspirations than any particular degradation in my faults, that made me what I was and, with even a deeper trench than in the majority of men, severed in me those provinces of good and ill which divide and compound man's dual nature (...). Men have before hired bravos to transact their crimes, while their own person and reputation sat under shelter. I was the first that ever did so for his pleasures. I was the first that could thus 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. But for me, in my impenetrable mantle, the safety was complete (...) I did not even exist! Let me but escape into my laboratory door, give me but a second or two to mix and swallow the draught that I had always standing ready; and whatever he had done, Edward Hyde would pass away like the stain of breath upon a mirror (...) (*SC*, p. 52, 56–7).

As cited above, Stevenson's main character, undeniably a round one with a multi-dimensional identity, brings to scientific solutions the mysteries of life and death as well as good and evil in the human nature. However, his research ends in disaster. Jekyll releases the evil hidden in his own soul (Mr Hyde)—the lowest instincts and desires, which ultimately contribute to his defeat.

*The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* reveals one more perspective from which it can be analyzed. The novel's plot portrays precisely the inner side of people. In this context, one of the most crucial themes of the novel is, mentioned before quite generally, the issue of non-removable tension between good and evil:

With every day, and from both sides of my intelligence, the moral and the intellectual, I thus drew steadily nearer to that truth, by whose partial discovery I have been doomed to such a dreadful shipwreck: that man is not truly one, but truly two (...). (...) from an early date, even before the course of my scientific discoveries had begun to suggest the most naked possibility of such a miracle, I had learned to dwell with pleasure, as a beloved day-dream, on the thought of the separation of these elements. If each, I told myself, could but be housed in separate identities, life would be relieved of all that was unbearable; the unjust delivered from the aspirations might go his way, and remorse of his more upright twin; and the just could walk steadfastly and securely on his upward path, doing the good things in which he found his pleasure, and no longer exposed to disgrace and penitence by the hands of this extraneous evil. It was the curse of mankind that these incongruous fagots were thus bound together that in the agonized womb of consciousness (...) (*SC*, p. 52–3).

The quoted passage points to the pessimism of the Scottish writer, which might be called "anthropology of entanglement". Man, in Stevenson's concept, is seen as a tragic figure, torn internally and prone to evil, whose "(...) much the same inducements and alarms cast the die for any tempted and trembling sinner; and it fell out with me [Dr Jekyll], as it falls with so vast a majority of my fellows, that I chose the better part and was found wanting in the strength to keep to it" (*SC*, p. 59–60).



Interestingly, the dark side of the human soul has been presented by the writer as more attractive. For Dr Jekyll, it was associated with “freedom” (SC, p. 54, 60), “youth with a light step and secret pleasures” (SC, p. 60). By contrast, integrity and morality in the minds of the main character had been identified with boredom, senile stability and intellectual bitterness. Stevenson, based on Jekyll’s characterization, very precisely presented the example the process of evil getting control over men. An interference in the human nature leads the protagonist to self-destruction. The efforts of the man of science, his sacrifice and dedication—turn out to be futile. The human mind is not able to cross all limitations, it is not even able to restrain human nature. Thus, in the novel, there is apparent distrust in the scientific diagnosis of reality and hopes pinned on the progress of civilization. Failed experiments of Dr Jekyll give rise to overthrowing the main ideas of the philosophy of positivism, i.e. that the world would be better when people become rich, technology and industry develop, when education is disseminated and science replaces the Absolute. *The Strange Case* appears, in this context, to be closer to the ideas of modernism than the “age of reason.”

The formulation of the suggested conclusions is, again, based on the dual perspective of the narration: the perspective of an outside observer, Jekyll’s legal counsel, “a man of a rugged countenance” (SC, p. 5), lawyer Utterson, and the view of the main character, Dr Henry Jekyll. This particular way of narration builds a tension in the novel, the mood of mystery and terror, the most representative features of the Gothic tradition. The double surface of the story allows readers additionally to go deeper into the plot, its themes, explore the motives of individual actions taken by characters, and take a look at events from the perspective of the main protagonists. It should be noted that irrespective of the viewing perspectives, the experiments conducted by the title character did not deserve an ethical approval.

The narrative technique adopted by Stevenson reveals that the principle of construction of the main character, Dr Jekyll, is an embodiment of cognition understood as an intellectual and intersubjective process. It can be emphasized that the indeterminate time (a year of ‘18...’) in the work can illustrate not only the idea of “age of reason” described in 19<sup>th</sup>-century Victorian novel but also as a parable of universal anthropological and ethical themes.

A comparative study of the characters of the same literary tradition, captures Jekyll’s depth and complexity. Once again, the differences between the first Gothic novel—*The Castle of Otranto* and Stevenson’s novel are noticeable.<sup>10</sup> Stevenson’s (Dr Henry Jekyll and his doppelgänger) and Walpole’s (Manfred) protagonists are quite unlike. The latter one was a flat and static figure present, as Snodgrass emphasizes, in a “story-within-a-story told through run-on dialogue

punctuated with dashes and exclamation points to enhance emotional outpourings”.<sup>11</sup> In addition to that, the third-person narrator, as opposed to the dual perspectives of narration in *The Strange Case*, introduces and tells us about Walpole’s hero-villain, without the possibility of independent evaluation or an objective view of himself and his actions.

Stevenson skillfully reveals the internal division of the main character. Outlined by the author, the portrait of the doctor-inventor who tries by means of scientific experiments to correct the problems of humanity, is used to present the destructive influence of evil on the sense of truth and goodness found in man. In parallel, we observe a division of Jekyll’s identity, the origin of his alter ego and the duality of the world presented in the novel. To emphasize this omnipresent duality, scenes that contain descriptions of the investigation and Utterson’s reflections are introduced in the tone of bright colors and within landscaped areas of the city. The appearance of Mr Hyde in the novel reveals the dark alleys of the city and the neighborhoods of poverty and lawlessness. Then, the action takes place at night or in thick fog (*SC*, p. 20, 21, 22, 26), and the descriptions of places and events are dominated by darkness, dampness and cold (*SC*, p. 22, 29, 30, 34, 40, 47). Night is the opposition of the day, symbolizing the mystery and darkness (usually defined in contrast with light), a symbol of chaos and the underworld significantly complemented by fog. The last element, fog, is regarded as a symbol of insecurity, something undefined, which is located on the border between reality and unreality.<sup>12</sup> The events described by Stevenson (especially the revelations of Dr Jekyll’s evil nature, Mr Hyde) are also accompanied by the theme of wind blowing through the streets (*SC*, p. 14, 22, 26, 34, 35, 40, 45, 53) appearing with astonishing regularity. The most prominent symbols of the wind can be found in the Bible, where the word *ruah* means spirit, breath and breathing (1 Kings 19:11).<sup>13</sup> In *The Strange Case*, the reader can notice the originality of the application of this symbol by Stevenson. Wind, in this case, means not only the announcement of a meeting with Good, but stands for masking the mechanisms of evil and its appearance in the novel. Repeatedly invoking the theme enhances the mood of mystery and the subconsciously felt danger. The use of symbolic terms by the writer places the action of the novel not only in the sphere of real events, but also in the symbolic, ambiguous world.

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<sup>11</sup> Douglas M. MacDowell, “Hybris in Athens,” *Greece & Rome* 23 (1976): 14–31

<sup>12</sup> Mary E. Snodgrass, “Doppelgänger,” in *Encyclopedia of Gothic Literature* (New York: Facts on File, 2005), 83–5.

<sup>13</sup> Hans Biedermann, *Leksykon symboli*, trans. Jan Rubinowicz (Warszawa: Muza, 2003).

The antinomy of the character, inscribed in the novel form, as well as events and themes, reveal Stevenson's pessimistic anthropology and enhance the anti-scientific nature of the work. Stevenson's main character is a creative unit—a *homo creator*. He is characterized by the continuous quest for life, self-perfecting growth towards higher goals, and the influencing reality according to his ideas and needs: physical, intellectual, and spiritual ones. His attitude is characterized by curiosity, enthusiasm, and selfless sacrifice in the name of progress. The scientific activity of the eponymous character produces negative consequences which disturb the natural way of life. The human intellect is powerless against one of the most important mysteries of life—the mystery of human nature. Dr Jekyll is not able to stop the forces of evil, which destroy his existence as a result of the unethical experiment. The struggling of the main character with the forces inherent in his complex personality, his inability to control this sphere, or even its cognition, as well as his helplessness in the fight against the evil forces of nature, allow us to define his actions as the “philosophy of futile action.” The doctor-inventor would be in this concept perceived as a tragic figure—torn between trusting in the power of human reason and the inability to transform reality.<sup>14</sup>

At that time, the existential philosophy, e.g. of Søren Kierkegaard (1813–1855), was of special importance. For him, human existence appeared as fugitive, finite, temporal, even though man would look at himself from the point of eternity.<sup>15</sup> In such an approach man has been described as a synthesis of finitude and infinity, temporality and eternity, necessity and freedom. Based on these considerations, there was formed the idea of varied antinomies which man cannot fight with, the contradictions and conflicts arising from the variability of existence and the inevitability of being, of transience and eternity. Kierkegaard's philosophy points to the temporality of human existence, fear of the infinite supreme deity and the introduction of finite human existence. This duality of man's attitude leaves the philosopher with a choice of either aspiration to eternity, or the full approval of temporal existence. As a result, it influences the decision on which way of life: the aesthetic or ethical (religious) to choose. According to the pre-

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<sup>14</sup> More on the connection between *The Strange Case* and biblical interpretations is presented in Katherine Linehan, “The Devil can cite Scripture: Intertextual Hauntings in *Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*,” *Journal of Stevenson Studies* 3 (2006): 5–32.

<sup>15</sup> It is worth mentioning the so-called “anthropology of pessimism”, in which man appears as a tragic figure (internally complex, torn between good and evil), one can find also in the selected works of 20<sup>th</sup>-century Polish writers. For instance, Stefan Żeromski (*Dzieje grzechu* [*A Story of a Sin*]) and Jarosław Iwaszkiewicz (*Zmowa mężczyzn* [*Conspiracy of Men*], *Młyn nad utratą* [*The Mill on the River Utrata*], *Matka Joanna od Aniołów* [*Mother Joanna of the Angels*]).

sented worldview, man is a being who always stands in the face of “either-or” (referring to an excellent work of Kierkegaard *Either/Or* (1843) [*Enten Eller*]).<sup>16</sup>

The last important feature of Stevenson’s story is “Henry Jekyll’s full statement of the Case” (*SC*, p. 52). This theme (i.e. confession) fully reveals man’s dilemma and uncertainty in the world. Confession, generally, serves as an unmasking device of false attitudes marked by pride; here, it reveals the identity of the appearance of unethical behavior and motives of actions: “God knows; I am careless; this is my true hour of death, and what is to follow concerns another than myself. Here then, as I lay down the pen and proceed to seal up my confession, I bring the life of that unhappy Henry Jekyll to an end” (*SC*, p. 66). Undoubtedly, as the passage shows, Jekyll’s letter can be read in the category of confession. His posthumous statement includes the origins of the experiment, the process of its implementation and motives of his actions.<sup>17</sup> It is also the certificate of a sinful man – one who knowingly committed faults:

I declare, at least, before God, no man morally sane could have been guilty of that crime upon so pitiful a provocation; and that I struck in no more reasonable spirit than that in which a sick child may break a plaything. But I had voluntarily stripped myself of all those balancing instincts by which even the worst of us continues to walk with some degree of steadiness among temptations; and in my case, to be tempted, however slightly, was to fall (*SC*, p. 60).

The letter from Dr Jekyll to a friend, lawyer Utterson, being a confession or an attempt to explain past events, demonstrates one more time the failure of its author. The scientist was endowed by Stevenson with the consciousness of defeat. Culminating, in this context, is the first act of Jekyll’s uncontrolled transformations: “This inexplicable incident, this reversal of my previous experience, seemed, like the Babylonian finger on the wall, to be spelling out the letters of my judgment (...)” (*SC*, p. 58–9). These words are a reference to the Book of Daniel and the description contained in the feast at the court of Balthazar (Dan 5:1–30). The inscription, which appeared on the wall during the feast—*mene tekel upharsin*—in the literal sense, expresses the names of eastern coins or weights commonly used in trade. In Daniel’s interpretation of the mysterious words are related to the Aramaic verb “measure,” “brew,” “share.” Their metaphorical presence meant a court of misdemeanors ruler, put an end to his rule and partition of the country. Biblical

<sup>16</sup> Margaret Drabble, “Gothic Fiction,” *The Oxford Companion to English Literature* 6th ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

<sup>17</sup> Władysław Tatarkiewicz, *Historia filozofii. (T. 3). Filozofia XIX wieku i współczesna* (Warszawa: PWN, 1998), 64–7.

narrative is not strictly historical and in the opinion of exegetes have character of instructive parable.<sup>18</sup> Balthazar was not a king of Babylon, nor the son of Nebuchadnezzar, but only a notary in the reign of his father Nabonidus. Enigmatic inscription was made aware that retribution will meet anyone who may be sacrilege to Balthazar, who profaned the sacred vessels taken from the Temple of Jerusalem. Undoubtedly, this story has a deeper significance: as Balthazar staggered back to God, reaching the temple vessels illegally, so every other person can fail to meet God in a worthy way of treating your neighbor and himself—a sign of God’s presence in the world. The biblical theme in the novel reflects a violation of (a sacrilege) laws of nature and is a prelude to the of the main character’s defeat.

The story of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde shows, primarily but not only, the duality of man, originated in moral confusion. It would be an oversimplification to read the work only as a “philosophy of pessimism and resignation.” Although evil in Stevenson’s work is destroyed, the price of this annihilation turns out to be very high—it is human life. Additionally, it demonstrates how Stevenson was influenced by the new evolutionist sciences of psychology, degeneration theory, and anthropology. The 19<sup>th</sup>-century work in question indicates that “the light of reason”, progress in science and civilization are not able to alleviate the human tragedy associated with the eternal search for answers to the questions about the meaning of life and human nature. As a result, Dr Henry Jekyll, on the one hand— a villain, can also be perceived as a victim of his time and a victim of the complex human nature. Evidently, the epoch of rationalism did not destroy the concepts of goodness, justice and fairness. Dr Jekyll may have been defeated as a scientist, but he won as a man.

Although the present analysis was limited to the field of philosophical interpretations of literature and anthropological philosophy, some further possibilities of research can be suggested. Namely, the discussed character could also be examined from the standpoints of psychology, ethics and moral theology, which were not taken into consideration in this article. Such interpretations would definitely require separate, in-depth studies.

All in all, a novel is ultimately about various things and approaches presented by Stevenson and this study makes a convincing case that multidimensional dualism (duality) is definitely one of them.

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<sup>18</sup>Masao Miyoshi, “Dr. Jekyll and the Emergence of Mr. Hyde,” *College English* 27.6 (1966): 470–80.

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ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON FILOZOFICZNIE:  
DUALIZM I EGZYSTENCJALIZM  
W GOTYCKIEJ TRADYCJI LITERACKIEJ

## Streszczenie

Powieść *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll i Mr Hyde* [Dr Jekyll i pan Hyde] (1886) Roberta Louisa Stevensona jest często traktowana jako bezpośredni tekst o wielowymiarowej koncepcji dualizmu, niepewności, lęku i słabości. W atmosferze wiktoriańskiej Anglii, gdzie świadomie unikano podejmowania nakreślonej hasłowo problematyki, powieść nie unika tematów, o których społeczeństwo wolałoby milczeć. Specyficzna tradycja literacka, historia Wielkiej Brytanii, XIX-wieczne odkrycia oraz debaty naukowe są jednymi z najważniejszych czynników, które sprawiają, że *The Strange Case* jest dziełem oryginalnym i niezapomnianym.



Przedstawiona w artykule filozoficzna refleksja nad powieścią obejmuje szereg pytań: dlaczego zagadnienie dualizmu w literaturze powraca? jaki jest jego sens w danym kontekście? na czym polega „wyjątkowość” dzieła inspirująca wielu następców Stevensonsona (np. Stephen King *Mroczna połowa*, 1989)? dlaczego ten motyw literacki jest tak popularny? Udzielenie odpowiedzi na powyższe pytania w jednym artykule nie jest proste. Dlatego główny cel artykułu został ograniczony do prezentacji i analizy stanu człowieka w obliczu powstającego modernizmu z odniesieniem do idei filozoficznych popularnych na przełomie wieków. Na tej podstawie zostały sformułowane Stevenson’a podstawy filozofii dualizmu.

ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON PHILOSOPHICALLY:  
DUALISM AND EXISTENTIALISM  
WITHIN THE GOTHIC CONVENTION

S u m m a r y

Robert Louis Stevenson’s *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (1886) has often been regarded as a direct text in its dealings with a multi-dimensional conception of dualism, insecurity, anxiety and weakness. In the constrained moral atmosphere of Victorian England, where such issues were consciously or even intentionally avoided, the novel seemed to be articulating difficult themes about which society preferred to remain silent. A specific literary tradition, the history of Great Britain, scientific discoveries and lively, scientific debates of the 19<sup>th</sup>-century are ones of the most significant factors which make *The Strange Case* so original and memorable.

The study poses a number of questions: Why does the history of the double return? What is a meaning of a double in a given context? What is so significant about this concept that it has inspired many others successors (e.g. Stephen King’s *The Dark Half*, 1989)? Why this motif is so popular? The project of delivering the answers to these questions in a one paper is not straightforward. Therefore, the main purpose of this article is limited to presentation and analysis of a condition of men in the face of emerging Modernism with a close reference to philosophical ideas of the turn of the century. On such basis, it investigates the foundations of Stevensonian philosophy of dualism.

*Summarised by Urszula Czyżewska*

**Słowa kluczowe:** Stevenson, filozofia dualizmu, dualizm, gotycka tradycja literacka.

**Key words:** Stevenson, philosophy of dualism, duality, Gothic convention.

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