THE STRANGE CASE OF MR. HYDE: A VICTORIAN VILLAIN AND A VICTORIAN DETECTIVE REVISITED

Abstract

The paper discusses one of the latest revisions of Doctor Jekyll’s dark side, Mr Hyde, as depicted in a graphic novel by Cole Haddon and M.S. Corley *The Strange Case of Mr. Hyde*. The text is a sequel to Stevenson’s novella and sets his character in 1888 during Jack the Ripper’s autumn of terror. What makes it stand out among other adaptations and appropriations is the combination of a Victorian and a modern villain – Edward Hyde and Hannibal Lecter, as well as giving voice to a Victorian police detective – a character that was ignored by the majority of nineteenth-century writers.

Victorian villains and monsters have never been better – they come back in all shapes and sizes, including that of protagonists. Judith Halberstam called monsters “meaning machines,” with those “of the nineteenth century metaphoris[ing] modern subjectivity as a balancing act between inside/outside, female/male, body/mind, native/foreign” – they “can represent gender, race, nationality, class, and sexuality in one body” (Walker 79, 83). Robert Louis Stevenson’s Mr Hyde is one of such late-Victorian monsters. In Cole Haddon’s and M. S. Corley’s *The Strange Case of Mr. Hyde* (2011) he is joined by another infamous villain, Jack the Ripper, and a determined Scotland Yard detective ready to break a few rules while hunting for the serial killer. As is the case in the majority of neo-Victorian texts, this graphic novel gives voice to those who were denied it in the nineteenth century: to Hyde, but also to the policeman. Used to the great consulting detective created by Conan Doyle, we tend to forget that not only Scotland Yarders, but also other pre- and post-Holmesian detectives were usually presented as lacking in both skills and ingenuity. Haddon’s text is not only another postmodern revision of Doctor Henry Jekyll’s foul and dark side: it adapts
Stevenson’s Hyde and H. G. Wells’s Colonel Adye to meet modern audience’s needs and expectations, very self-consciously incorporating numerous pop-cultural tropes and characters, and offering conscious readers more than only pure entertainment.

The idea to link Edward Hyde from Stevenson’s novella (1886) with Jack the Ripper dates back to the 1888 murders. At the beginning of August 1888, two adaptations of Stevenson’s story premiered on London stages: Thomas Russell Sullivan’s at the Lyceum Theatre and Daniel Bandmann’s at the Opera Comic Theatre (Danahay and Chisholm); on the last night of August, the body of Mary Ann Nichols, the Ripper’s fist canonical victim, was found. Throughout September, many journalists and reporters compared the killer to Jekyll’s doppelgänger, as evidenced by quotes from the Globe: “One can almost imagine that Whitechapel is haunted by a demon of the type of Hyde, who goes about killing for the mere sake of slaughter,” or the Pall Mall Gazette: “There certainly seems to be a tolerably realistic impersonification of Mr. Hyde at large in Whitechapel” (Smith 77). The press in general speculated that the killer might have been a mad doctor and stressed the contrast between the working class crime area and victims, and the presumed middle or upper-class offender – another theme present in Stevenson’s novella, as Jekyll lives in a better-off area and Hyde takes rooms in Soho. If it was indeed a gentleman who committed the Whitechapel murders, it would mean that “contemporary criminological theory, which held that delinquents displayed visibly atavistic traits, was based on an illusion” (Ruddick 192). The parallels between the Ripper and Stevenson’s character were further strengthened by the fact that Hyde’s misdeeds and other probable crimes are not described, apart from the trampling of the girl witnessed by Enfield and the murder of Sir Danvers Carew overseen by Jekyll’s maid. What he was up to in the nocturnal “labyrinths of lamplighted city” (Stevenson 15) is left unsaid.

Among numerous cinematic adaptations of Stevenson’s text there are two films which combine the story of the experimenting doctor with that of Jack the Ripper: Dr Jekyll and Sister Hyde (1971) and Edge of Sanity (1989). The former was produced by the Hammer Films – the company famous for its horror and monster movies, whose works and actors Cole Haddon seems to be nostalgic about (“Interview,” “Exclusive Interview”). Sister Hyde is the result of Jekyll’s experiments to extract the elixir of life from female hormones, and the Whitechapel murders are the side effects of obtaining these hormones. It is much easier to move about the area for a female – even one wearing garish red dresses – since the suspect is a male wearing a tall hat and a dark cloak, the now-iconic costume of the gentlemanly Ripper. The Edge of Sanity was received as a potential “cautionary fable for our time” (Canby), a warning against the use of drugs. Its Jack Hyde is created through
a combination of Henry's childhood trauma and his adult experiments with cocaine and pain killers, with the repressed double read in an overtly psychoanalytical manner. Both productions end on a similar note: Jekyll, aware of Hyde's growing strength but unable to stop it – and unwilling to submit to justice and the resultant humiliation – commits suicide, thus ending the autumn of terror. Cole Haddon's Hyde is quite unlike these movie versions: not only is he not the Whitechapel murderer, but he assumes an active role in finding the killer. He is also hardly reminiscent of Stevenson’s creation, which reflected the concerns of its time.

The late-eighteenth-century ideas on physiognomy as expressed by Johann Caspar Lavater, combined with the mid-nineteenth-century notions of criminal anthropology as described by Cesare Lombroso, and degeneration, as introduced by Benedict-Augustin Morel, were widely debated in the 1880s, and the features of a “degenerate” were summed up in the early 1890s by Max Nordau. In 1880, Edwin Ray Lankester stated that “[t]he full and earnest cultivation of Science – the Knowledge of Causes – is that to which we have to look for the protection of our race – even of this English branch of it – from relapse and degeneration” (5). Ironically, six years later Stevenson published his “riddle of atavism” (Pick 165): a story of “an English professional man – the epitome of civilised development” (Greenslade 84) who relapses into a savage state due to his scientific experiments, and whose doppelgänger takes the form of a degenerate criminal:

Edward Hyde was so much smaller, slighter, and younger than Henry Jekyll. Even as good shone upon the countenance of the one, evil was written broadly and plainly on the face of the other. Evil besides (which I must still believe to be the lethal side of man) had left on that body an imprint of deformity and decay. ... the hand of Henry Jekyll (as you have often remarked) was professional in shape and size: it was large, firm, white, and comely. But the hand [of Edward Hyde] ... was lean, corded, knuckly, of a dusky pallor and thickly shaded with a swart growth of hair. (Stevenson 51, 54)

Not only does he have a primitive physiognomy – Hyde incorporates post-Darwinian evolutionary discourse of the ape within by manifesting simian behaviour: attacks “with ape-like fury” (22), plays “apelike tricks” (61), and generally is “apelike spite[ful]” (62). Stevenson exposed what many Victorians did not want to admit: that the criminal type does not have to be the “other” – a foreign savage, an outsider, or a problem stemming from the influx of immigrants – he may very well be found within a white middle-class London gentlemen. Using David Punter’s phrase, he presented them with “an urban version of ‘going native’” (3), a savage in the civilized world.

The first longer description of Edward Hyde presents his monstrosity in rather vague terms:
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 ... I can’t describe him. And it’s not want of memory; for I declare I can see him this moment. (Stevenson 11–12)

It is the readers’ job to fill in the blanks and it is their imagination that sets the limits. The majority would probably envision a big, disfigured brute, since such a portrayal has been disseminated in popular culture. It can be traced back to the earliest stage adaptation performed at the Lyceum Theatre in 1888, and is present in the silent film version of 1920; Hyde’s simian characteristics are in the foreground of the 1931 adaptation, and a combination of the two reached its apogee in *The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen* (1999). However, Alan Moore’s and Kevin O’Neill’s postmodern/neo-Victorian depiction adds a more human side to Hyde’s personality, and other recent revisions, for example the BBC’s *Jekyll* (2007), expand that trace. *The Strange Case of Mr. Hyde* goes further: the deformed monster is invisible, since Hyde’s persona has overtaken Jekyll’s body without any damage to its attractiveness; what is more, the evil side is veiled in genius and cooperates with the police.

While Stevenson’s story is “dominated by the representation of aging bourgeois professionals, doctors and lawyers,” and “Jekyll represents the end of a certain kind of middle-class masculinity, [and] Hyde represents the possibility of an alternative life of activity, energy and growth” (Smith 37, 39), Haddon’s sequel, which takes place during the autumn of 1888, five years after Hyde’s presumed death, offers a revitalised super villain. First of all, unlike the original Jekyll, who is “a large, well-made, smooth-faced man of fifty, with something of a slyish cast perhaps, but every mark of capacity and kindness” (Stevenson 19), Mike Corley’s drawings depict the body that looks fifteen to twenty years younger, is slim and attractive.

Haddon upgrades Hyde to a criminal mastermind. While the Hyde-persona’s misdeeds belong to a different time, they are still remembered; moreover, he has learnt from them and now, under the cover of assisting in the Ripper investigation, is capable of manipulating Scotland Yard officers into giving him access to the source of his super-human strength – the serum he invented. It is all the easier for him, since his is not a split personality: he is Hyde but looks like Jekyll, and there are no signs of him transforming into a hideous monster. The only time the readers are offered a glimpse of the monster is the scene at Madame Tussaud’s, where a wax likeness of Hyde is exhibited and his status of a celebrity is established. Stevenson’s doctor’s written confession states that “Jekyll was now my city of refuge; let but Hyde
peep out an instant, and the hands of all men would be raised to take and slay him” (Stevenson 57). Haddon’s Hyde knows better and uses the unchanged body as a cover. He is still considered to be “a creature so lacking in basic morality” (Haddon 19, original emphasis) but as it turns out, moral pretence is what poses a greater threat to the society than a handsome and clever criminal.

Corley introduces Hyde step by step: a smooth but firm hand (17), feline green eyes (18), oval face in the shadows (19) – that and the very prison surroundings are reminiscent of the movie introduction of Hannibal Lecter in *The Silence of the Lambs* (1991), and the comparison to Lecter is what differentiates this appropriation of Hyde from other recent afterings. Chesterton’s division of detectives and criminals as representing civilisation and barbarism respectively, with the former being “the original and poetic figure[s]” and the latter “the children of chaos” has been out of date for some time now, and postmodern detective stories have blurred that division, even exploited it “to the limit” (Marcus 247). Hannibal the Cannibal is not only an imprisoned criminal – he acts as a detective as well. When the readers first meet Hyde, he is kept under lock and key (similarly to Lecter) in the Scotland Yard basements or dungeons; having only one (ex-) friend visiting, “Jekyll, H.”, as the cell door plate says, does not have many pastimes. A visit form a Clarice Sterling-type naïve young law enforcement official arouses his interest and makes him work on the Whitechapel serial killer, whose exceptional physical abilities resemble those of Hyde. Lecter denotes what the creator of the graphic novel “love[s] most about villains: their perspective is often far more interesting than the heroes’. They’re foils for that reason, to help challenge the heroes’ generally far more naïve ideals” (“Exclusive interview”). The complex relationship between Hyde-Hannibal and the young Inspector Thomas Adye, a Clarice Sterling figure, deserves attention.

Stevenson’s novella “implies the presence of a detective” but he is, in fact “a nonentity” there (De Young 183, original emphasis). Inspector Newcomen of Scotland Yard enters the scene after the murder of Sir Carew, and his actions are limited to the searching of Hyde’s Soho apartment and the decision to simply wait for Hyde at the bank. Such a lack of initiative on the part of a policeman should not be surprising, since the Victorians were distrustful of detectives. The ones they knew – be it from newspapers, like Vidocq, or from fiction, like Dupin – were not only foreign but French, and the whole concept of policing the middle and upper classes seemed unacceptable due to the British “tradition that figured the detective as a low, criminal, and foreign Other, and detection as an activity tainted by elements of duplicity, prurience, and the invasion of privacy” (De Young 181). In Haddon’s text, Newcomen is a Chief Inspector, and collating his actions with those of the historic 1888 chief commissioner of the
Metropolitan Police, Sir Charles Warren, or his From Hell counterpart and co-operators presented by Alan Moore, reveals certain similarities.

Inspector Thomas Adye of Scotland Yard is the proper hero of the graphic novel. The readers of H. G. Wells’s Invisible Man (1897) are familiar with the name, as one Colonel Adye, the chief of the local police, is working on the Griffin case, to which the Ripper case is made a prequel. However, in Wells’s text, similarly to Stevenson’s story, it is the representative of the middle-class, doctor Kemp, who decides what should be done and is more active than the police. Haddon’s Inspector Adye is a different man. He is first seen in a church, listening to a sermon on morality and the internal war between the Good and the Evil taking place in every man (11). The text is a quotation from the 1920 adaptation of the Jekyll and Hyde story, which begins with a caption: “In each of us, two natures are at war – the good and the evil. All our lives the fight goes on between them, and one of them must conquer. But in our hands lies the power to choose – what we want most to be, we are.” (original emphasis) Thomas Adye is a partly idealistic, partly naïve policeman who wants to change his social position but remain decent and religious: “I simply strive to be a better sort of a man.” Hyde, however, perceives him as “pompous, uptight, boring” (20) and sees as much as Lecter did when he first met Agent Sterling. Adye is neither a gentleman nor a common peeler: his education cannot conceal his East End roots, but his modern approach to conducting criminal investigations, forensic science included, makes him stand out from among other Scotland Yarders. He dreams of the world of the upper classes, e.g. of riding in first class train carriages (25), but once he is offered entrance into that world and discovers what hides behind the facade of appearances, he does not want to part of it. Thus he avoids the fate of Stevenson’s Utterson and Jekyll, whose “allegiance to a particular class-bound notion of respectability has effectively dehumanised them” (Smith 38).

Even though Adye does not belong to Jekyll’s class of “educated professional men with an elite access to the classics that both shapes their thinking [...] and gives them a medium of privately shared communication” (Linehan 22), he is well-read. Not only is he capable of maintaining a conversation with sarcastic Hyde, but also shares his knowledge of the classics and their sentences: Seneca on religion, Cicero on wisdom, or Marcus Aurelius on evil (Haddon 32, 35–36), which serve as remarks on contemporary attitudes to morality. However, Adye tellingly does not comment on a sentence from Confucius: “Learning without thought is labor lost” (60). The detective acquires certain knowledge from the criminal and learns from his experiences. Although Hyde does not facilitate Adyes transformation from a naïve idealist, he does speed up the process; in the meantime, he grows fond of the detective, which does not stop him from
being Hyde – similarly to Hannibal tutoring Clarice, he is also patiently waiting for an opportunity to use what he has learnt during his imprisonment. One more element that links Hyde and Adye is their appearance: similar height and built, similar hair colour and hairstyle; wearing a formal dress while attending the Griffin dinner party, with waistcoats matching their eye colour and identical white bow ties, they look on a par.

While “Victorian audiences tolerated the detective if he stayed in the ghetto in which they had mentally confined him” (De Young 187), neo-Victorian audiences not only accept the detective and expect him to solve the case, but also sympathise with him. Recent changes introduced to the character of Inspector Abberline, who was in charge of the real Ripper case, are reflected in Haddon’s text as well. In the film version of *From Hell* (2001), Sir Charles Warren, the Metropolitan Police Commissioner, comments on Abberline: “He has that kind of cleverness you’ll sometimes find in the middle classes. A cheap sort of intelligence, but effective nevertheless.” Alan Moore’s portly middle-aged officer was transformed into a romantic and sexy detective further humanized by his romantic involvement with Mary Jane Kelly. Cole Haddon’s Adye, however, is not romantic – his first awkward meeting with Mary Jane leads him to a suspect whose imprisonment becomes the detective’s springboard to the society, but once disappointed, he quickly returns to his area to “bed a whore” (52) and pour out his problems to her. Unfortunately, unlike in Moore’s version (but like in the historic one), there is no hope for this Mary Jane. It is her avoidable death, together with the discovery that Hyde has already deduced the identity of the Ripper and kept it to himself, that turn Adye against his criminal helper/mentor.

When the identity of the Ripper is revealed, Hyde takes revenge on both the killer – yet another doctor who has gone to the bad, and further developed the serum – and those who were covering his actions. His reasons, however, are not altruistic: he craves for the super serum, but also for fame – the “elaborate” murder of Mary Jane makes him “look like a rank amateur” (76), and vengeance is too mundane a reason: “Call it a point of professional pride, but I couldn’t bear it if I were only remembered as London’s second-worst villain. I want it to be my name that sends shivers down their spines and keeps their little ones up at night.” (79, original emphasis) Hyde is egocentric – his experiment led to many evil deeds, but it does not make him the villain of this story; and neither was he the real villain in Stevenson’s text. While in the source text he inflicts self-punishment, the sequel continues the Hannibal Lecter theme: Hyde uses the opportunity to escape long-term imprisonment and remains at large when the story ends.

*The Strange Case of Mr. Hyde* retains the accusations made by *Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, which “uncovers the crimes and hypocrisies
of a middle-class character” (De Young 195). The villains are the authorities who instead of learning from Jekyll’s mistakes, cover up crimes committed by his follower in exchange for a recreational serum-based drug called Liberation and under the false pretence of “performing a public service by cleaning up Whitechapel” of prostitutes (Haddon 71).

Stevenson’s characters have been analysed from various perspectives: degeneration theory, post-Darwinian, psychoanalytical, spiritualistic. Jekyll may be read both as a tragic hero and allegorical villain, or a negative exemplum (Linehan 8); he has even been read as a medium for the double Hyde (Clayson). Hyde may be Jekyll’s alter ego, the devil himself, or “the unacknowledged colonizer of Jekyll’s mind” (Linehan 21); he is “stitched together from a variety of parts, [i.e.] critical perspectives, and at the same time defies, through this multiplicity of meanings, clear classification” (Walker 83). No wonder such “a peculiarly modern monster” (Walker 84) was recycled to meet postmodern needs. If Stevenson’s Hyde was a consequence of degeneration brought about by modern civilisation, Haddon’s Hyde is a product of intertextuality brought about by postmodern culture, but, even though he is a veritable super villain, he is reduced to being Adye’s sidekick. A Victorian ‘non-existent’ police detective has little room in contemporary fiction. Stevenson’s ineffective inspector is merged with historic and fictional police authorities engaged in the Ripper case, and another ineffective colonel is transformed into a neo-Victorian Abberline/Sterling character. The readers, well acquainted with crime fiction and crime series, sympathise with him not only as the hero of the story, but also as a fellow investigator learning the ropes in the postmodern world of Haddon’s and Corley’s creation.

NOTES

1 See Richard Dury’s “Strange language of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde” (44) on the indecent associations of the trampling incident.

2 Had a paraphrase of or a reference to Ozzy Osbourne’s song “My Jekyll doesn’t Hide” been included in any of the panels, it might have become a pop cultural comment on Hyde’s appearance.

3 These commentaries are reminiscent of those made by Sergeant Godley, an assistant and friend of Inspector Abberline in the film adaptation of Alan Moore’s From Hell (2001), who was commenting on the events citing Shakespeare.
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