

Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, Schopenhauer, and the Power of the Will

MARTIN TROPP

Man's physical organism is played upon not only by the physical conditions about it, but by remote laws of inheritance, the vibration of long past acts reaching him in the midst of the new order of things in which he lives.

—Walter Pater

ONE OF THE ENDURING ELEMENTS of the horror story tradition is the age-old theme of the power of the dead—through a curse, a will, or a ghost itself—to control the future of those still alive. To ignore or attempt to thwart the wishes of that dead voice meant, as early in the modern Gothic tale as Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* (1764), madness and self destruction. But the dictates of the dead often also meant disaster. The curse fulfilled, the will of the dead carried out, tended to turn the bequest to dust. In *Otranto*, the story ends with supernatural intervention restoring the rightful heir to the castle, as it crumbles around him.

Whether or not there is an actual document, a curse, or merely the genetic fact of inheritance, the reader is made aware of the power of wishes to survive death, to persist as both a lure and a dangerous trap. To be a beneficiary in such tales is a reason for hope, but a foolish one, since it brings pursuit, danger, pain, and ultimately disappointment. To attempt to thwart the wishes of the dead poses even greater danger. The Gothic tale has been defined in many ways, but certainly one of its distinguishing characteristics is the domination of the dead in

the affairs of the living through supernatural or legal means, the material manifestations of the crushing weight of heredity or tradition. So it is no surprise that what Stevenson called his "Gothic gnome," *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1886), at its center, explores the power of a strange will.

Gabriel Utterson is Jekyll's lawyer, charged with carrying out the provisions of a will he keeps in "the most private part" of that safe where all the secrets of his clients reside. It is a document he refused to help the doctor draft, because it offends him "both as a lawyer and as a lover of the sane and customary sides of life, to whom the fanciful was the immodest." In it Jekyll directs that, should he disappear for more than three months, "the said Edward Hyde should step into the said Jekyll's shoes without further delay" (35). We later learn, of course, that Jekyll means this literally; Hyde is bequeathed not only Jekyll's possessions, but also his body.

Utterson is haunted by what he calls "the strange clauses of his will." They appear "before his mind's eye, as clear as a transparency" (42) leading him to begin a search for Hyde that ends in another version of the ironic Gothic bequest. When he and the butler Poole break into Jekyll's laboratory, they find Hyde, dressed in the doctor's clothes, and, no doubt, his shoes. But he is dying. Like the heirs to the disintegrating Gothic castle, the figure Jekyll has called his "son" has come into a legacy that becomes useless at the moment it is his.

What do we make of Stevenson's use of this pattern? First of all, the fact that Jekyll creates such a will indicates that he is planning to bequeath his body permanently to Hyde, to use his creation not merely as his mask, but as his heir. In the published version, Jekyll speaks only once of having "more than a father's interest" and Hyde having "more than a son's indifference" (89). In the uncorrected manuscript, Utterson's speculations about the

will include the suspicion that Hyde is actually Jekyll's son:

How should [Jekyll] have chosen as his heir one who was unknown to his oldest intimates? If it were a case of terrorism, why the will? Or again, if Hyde was Jekyll's son, why the proviso of the disappearance? (Lemendorfer, 54)

Whether his kinship is real or metaphorical, stated or implied, Hyde's slow growth in strength and stature and his spontaneous appearances, contrasted with Jekyll's degeneration and increasing difficulty in reappearing, serve the Gothic theme of generational change. In many such tales, the dangerous and destructive power of the will is but one manifestation of the general failure to safely pass power from one generation to the next.

Like the prototype of Manfred in *The Castle of Otranto*, Jekyll is both hero and villain, brooding over dark secrets, lord of a castle he has no right to inhabit any longer. Dr. Jekyll's life before Hyde was "already committed to a profound duplicity" (81)—his hypocrisy is evidence that he occupies his body under false pretenses. Hyde, freed from the cave of Jekyll's subconscious, becomes the rightful heir to his body, and the representative of the next generation. At the same time, he is a throwback to the undisguised cruelty of prehistoric man, a "troglodytic" (40) presence in modern London. As in earlier Gothic stories, the young protagonist is bequeathed the future, but it is a mirror of the past. The difference is that, in *Jekyll and Hyde*, the castle is the self, the bequest literally a giving over of the old body to a new tenant.

One of Stevenson's innovations is, then, to treat the body as a thing, something to be bequeathed and inherited, a place that the aptly named Hyde can first use as an occasional refuge, then as a permanent residence. Another is to make explicit the implication in much of the 'fiction of inheritance' that the term "will" signifies

two things at once—a quality of mind and a document, the force that intends and the instrument for carrying out those intentions. Utterson worries about both aspects of Jekyll's will, at one point saying, "I have been wanting to speak to you Jekyll. . . . You know that will of yours?" Jekyll replies, "My will? Yes, certainly, I know that" (43).

Influenced in part by the Gothic tradition, Stevenson's notion of the will also draws upon contemporary thinkers such as James Sully, who believed that modern man needs to apply the power of the will to prevent a relapse into primitive emotions and instincts—in short, to prevent the evolutionary legacy from becoming a curse. But the shifting signification of body and will central to a thorough understanding of *Jekyll and Hyde* is more complex, and clearly owes much to a German philosopher whose ideas had first been popularized by Edouard von Hartmann in *The Philosophy of the Unconscious* (1869), the most widely read and influential book of philosophy of the century, and whose major work, *The World as Will and Idea* (1818), appeared in its first English translation in 1883. Arthur Schopenhauer's treatise tries to bring together everything from human aesthetics to animal instincts into one system, based upon what he defines as the will and its relationship to the external world.

Schopenhauer's ideas had a profound effect upon a wide range of writers and thinkers of the late nineteenth century, from Tolstoy and Turgenev to Zola and Freud. In England, both Joseph Conrad and Thomas Hardy were deeply influenced, Hardy more than any other writer. Charles Darwin quotes Schopenhauer favorably in *The Descent of Man* (1871), though it appears he never read him directly, but obtained his information from an article in the *Journal of Anthropology*. Another such indirect source was an article in an 1853 issue of *Westminster Review* (edited at the time by George Eliot). The psy-

chologist James Sully, who, as Ed Block shows, was a strong influence on *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* and his friend Stevenson in general, was another conduit for Schopenhauer's philosophy, in such articles as "Genius and Insanity" (1881) and no doubt in their many conversations in the years after their first meeting in 1876.

And Stevenson studied Schopenhauer even before this time. In a letter to Mrs. Albert Sitwell in 1874 he described his prandial pastimes:

I must tell you of my way of life, which is regular to a degree. Breakfast 8.30; during breakfast and my smoke afterwards till ten, when I begin work . . . from one to two, I lunch and read a book on Schopenhauer or one on Positivism. (*Letters*, I 192)

Schopenhauer's most relevant and central thesis is that what he calls the will is the driving force behind all existence. "Will," for Schopenhauer, is many things—unconscious energy in the case of animal instinct, electricity, magnetism, even gravity. In humans, the will is the unique way one knows himself: "This and this alone gives him the key to his own existence, reveals to him the significance, shows him the inner mechanism of his being, of his action, of his movements" (129). The body, on the other hand, is what he calls "an object among objects," merely another thing in the material world.

Schopenhauer sees mind and body as intimately connected, so that "every emotion agitates the body and its inner constitution directly, and disturbs the course of its vital functions" (132). What's more,

Every true act of his will is also at once and without exception a movement of his body. The act of will and the movement of body are not two different things objectively known . . . they do not stand in the relation of cause and effect; they are one and the same. . . . The action of the body is nothing but the act of the will objectified. (130)

Despite Jekyll's confident assertion, "My will? Yes, certainly, I know that" (43), Schopenhauer argues that much of the will is repressed by our conscious mind, yet still

exerts a powerful influence. He states that "man is at once impetuous and blind striving of will (whose pole or focus lies in the genital organs) and eternal free, serene subject of pure knowing (whose pole is the brain)" (262). (It is no wonder that Thomas Mann, among others, saw a profound influence on Freud, even identifying Schopenhauer's will and knowing with Freud's id and ego.) Jekyll's experiments are more than attempts to release a second self; his bodily transformations are, in fact, only manifestations of his real intention—to know and control his will.

Schopenhauer asserts that "Every true, genuine, immediate act of will is also, at once and immediately, a visible act of the body. And, corresponding to this, every impression upon the body is also . . . at once and immediately an impression upon the will" (131)—implying a transforming power not unlike that of Jekyll's potion. This view was paralleled in the widespread belief of evolutionist psychologists that a diseased or atavistic mind was reflected in a distorted physiognomy. Cesare Lombrosio, the chief late Victorian authority on criminality, argued that the criminal mind could be detected by examining the shape of a skull, pattern of hair, even the condition of internal organs. His followers (including Havelock Ellis, who wrote *The Criminal* in 1890) went so far as to declare that, like the "dwarfish" Hyde, criminals were "about 2 inches shorter and 17 pounds lighter than the average English population" (Ellis, 94).

Both Schopenhauer and Lombrosio believed, for different reasons, that the body could be read like a document, revealing ancestry or desire, an imprint of the past upon the present. Jekyll strives further, seeking the power to alter that document at will. When, in *Jekyll/Hyde*, Enfield, Utterson, and the crowd of people who confront Hyde are struck with an immediate loathing, they see in his body what Jekyll later calls "the stamp

of lower elements in my soul" (118). The reasons are not only philosophical and evolutionary, but also philological. Like Jekyll's written will, which, for Utterson, was an "eyesore" that "offended him" (35), Hyde's body is an offensive material manifestation of Jekyll's wishes for the future. His will resides in the most private part of Utterson's safe and simultaneously haunts the back streets of London. Thus, in neat Schopenhauerian circularity, Jekyll's will has turned his body into an object—and the object is his will. (This isn't the only example in the novel of a body becoming a document. After Jekyll's friend Dr. Lanyon witnesses Jekyll's transformation, he visibly degenerates until "he had his death-warrant written legibly upon his face" [57].)

Hyde's compulsion to inflict pain—on a helpless child he tramples, a poor street seller he strikes, an aged gentleman he beats until "the bones were audibly shattered and the body jumped upon the roadway" (47) are clues to the unanswered question in the novel—the nature of Hyde's nocturnal pleasures. In fact, what Stevenson elsewhere called Hyde's "cruelty and malice and selfishness and cowardice" (Eigner, 150) all may stem from his overriding purpose, to assert the power of his will. For Jekyll or Hyde, one's own body and that of others are mere material objects, to be possessed, exchanged, damaged, or destroyed. Pain thus becomes an emblem of domination over others and the self.

The witnesses to Hyde's first crime (which Jekyll later refers to as an incident hardly worthy of mention) see him run into a girl of eight or ten and then "trample calmly over the child's body." But not only is his victim merely an object in the road; Hyde himself is seen as a thing: "It wasn't like a man; it was like some damned Juggernaut" (31). Like Hyde, Jekyll is obsessed by his belief that he is a ghost in a machine, striving to make his body serve what Utterson calls "that will of yours."

In this same conversation about his will comes more evidence that Jekyll hates the body and seeks to assert the primacy of will over it. Twice he attacks Lanyon as "hide bound," telling Utterson, "I never saw a man so distressed as you were by my will; unless it were that hide-bound pedant, Lanyon, at what he called my scientific heresies" (43). The pun is obvious—Lanyon's "Hyde" is bound within him. At the same time, he is "hide bound" because he allows his will to be bound by the limits of his body, by his "hide." The will that distresses Utterson and the scientific heresies that distress Lanyon are one and the same; Jekyll's transformations are made possible by his fatal belief in his ability to know his will and thus control his body.

If the assertion of will and the hatred of the body are seen as the center of Jekyll's obsessions, much in the novel is clarified. Jekyll's transformations to Hyde and the crimes he commits in that body become more than the tragedy of someone who tries and fails to live the perfect double life. Jekyll wants to dominate the body completely; he hates it for limiting his will and restraining his pleasures. For a while, he believes he has succeeded in defying its limits. As he tells Utterson, "the moment I choose, I can be rid of Mr. Hyde" (44). In his moment of triumph, when Lanyon sees Jekyll transform, the doctor's features "melt and alter" (80), an echo of the nightmare Utterson has of a figure that crushes a child at every street corner, a figure with "no face, or one that baffled him and melted before his eyes" (37-38)—the body made plastic.

Regarding his own and other bodies as objects, mere instruments of his will, not only explains Hyde's brutalities, but also Jekyll's profession. Stevenson links Jekyll to a particular kind of doctor, and perhaps a particular doctor, one the public believed shared his attitude toward the will, the body and pain. Jekyll performs his exper-

iments in a room reached through a "surgical theatre," a place

indifferently known as the laboratory or dissecting-rooms. The doctor had bought the house from the heirs of a celebrated surgeon; and his own tastes being rather chemical than anatomical, had changed the destination of the block at the bottom of the garden. (51)

Why this seemingly unnecessary detail? Stevenson's equation of Jekyll's chemical experiments with dissection and surgery, and especially placing the dissecting rooms in a separate place with a disguised entrance on a back street, would no doubt bring to mind the "resurrectionist" scandals earlier in the century.

Because surgeons and anatomists were strictly limited in the number of corpses available for dissection earlier in the century, an illicit trade in bodies stolen from graveyards was extensive, including even an export business among England, Scotland, and Ireland. These activities had long aroused public anger, leading to mob attacks on suspected grave robbers, and, in 1828, the inevitable Select Committee Report. In Stevenson's Edinburgh that same year the most notorious case came to light when the infamous Burke and Hare were arrested for smothering a series of paupers and prostitutes and selling the bodies to a highly respected doctor, Robert Knox, who paid good money and asked no questions. On February 12, 1829, a mob sacked and burned Knox's home, but were prevented by the police from lynching Knox himself. Continually harassed, he was forced to leave Edinburgh and died in obscurity. For a time, then, at Dr. Knox's back door, as at Dr. Jekyll's, human bodies became commodities.

In a time and place closer to the writing of *Jekyll/Hyde*, doctors were targets of public anger for a similar reason—this time treating living beings as unfeeling objects. The anti-vivisection movement had gained powerful impetus in the second half of the century in part, perhaps,

because evolutionary theories had established man's kinship with the lower animals. Testimony before *The Royal Commission on the Practice of Subjecting Live Animals to Experiments for Scientific Purposes* in 1875 caused a huge outcry. The public was horrified not only by the details of the experiments, but also by the callous attitudes of the vivisectors describing them. One doctor, Emanuel Klein, told of the most gruesome experiments with apparent disregard for suffering, commenting, for example, that he used anesthetic only when the animals' screams "inconvenienced him" (Pearsall, 225). According to R. D. French, "the impact of Klein's testimony upon opinion within the Commission and upon the public, after the minutes of the evidence appeared, cannot be overestimated" (Landsbury, 429). It came to be commonly believed that vivisectors enjoyed inflicting pain. In 1882, a book attacking vivisection was presented to Queen Victoria; her response mirrored public attitudes: "the subject causes her *whole nature* to boil over against these 'Butchers' (Doctors and Surgeons)" (Pearsall, 228).

In the extensive realm of Victorian pornography, women also became victims or objects, tied to ingenious "saddles," regularly whipped and tortured—treated like experimental animals. Sometimes the connection with doctors is direct, as in *The Amatory Experiences of a Surgeon* (1881) by the pseudonymous "James Campbell." As Carol Landsbury concludes, "Throughout Victorian pornography, the riding master with his whip and the doctor with his scalpel exchange roles" (424).

Although Schopenhauer's doctrines referred to the relationship of mind and body without the explicit references to gender linked qualities which permeated Victorian culture, the misogyny of the secret lives of Victorian males, like the obscure activities of the all bachelor cast of *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, suggests where belief in bodies as puppets of the will could lead. In fact,

the most horrible reduction of body to thing of this period—the Jack the Ripper murders, in which some unknown person (presumed to be a gentleman and a doctor), found perverse pleasure in murdering and mutilating prostitutes—stands at the end of the path that begins with the reduction of body to thing. That Stevenson's novella is on the same path is made clear when, during the height of the Ripper scare in 1888, Richard Mansfield, who was playing the Ripper on the stage, was forced to close the play when he kept being fingered as the elusive killer.

In the popular mind, there was then a common denominator linking the activities of doctors, vivisectionists, pornographers, and partakers, like Hyde, in the obscure pleasures of the Victorian secret life—all reduced another body to an object and gained pleasure in subjecting it to the will. In the most extensive relic of late Victorian pornography, the eleven volumes of *My Secret Life* by the anonymous author called "Walter," the reader is struck by how many sexual relationships he has with bodies and how few human relationships he has with people (even though he is infinitely more truthful and complete than the typical pornographer). Walter is obsessed by his own power or the power of his money to subject women to his often bizarre and degrading whims. Colin Wilson comments on one typical scene, where Walter is fascinated by watching himself in a mirror having sex with a ten year old girl: "The image captures something essential about Victorian sex: the male's complete indifference to everything but his own desires" (53) as well as the depersonalized pleasure of simultaneously exercising his will and observing his body.

As Jacques Lacan has pointed out, the image in the mirror is a mysterious thing to a child, since it is ourselves, yet not ourselves. As we grow up, he maintains that we continue to identify with the reflections of ob-

jects, the images of the world around us, the mirror reality where bodies are two dimensional and apart. When Jekyll first becomes Hyde, after watching the ingredients of his potion "boil and smoke together in the glass" (83), his first act as Hyde is to look for a mirror; later, he puts one in his laboratory "for the very purpose of those transformations" (84). Thus, from the start, Stevenson makes clear the change is not complete until Jekyll/Hyde looks in a mirror, until he detaches his self from the image of his self, until, like Walter in *My Secret Life*, he watches the effect of his will on his body.

At the end of Utterson's futile quest for knowledge also stands the mirror, discovered by him and Poole in Jekyll's dissecting room which was "but for the glazed presses of chemicals, the most commonplace in London":

"This glass has seen some strange things, sir," whispered Poole.

"And surely none stranger than itself," echoed the lawyer in the same tone. . . .

"What could Jekyll want with it?" (71)

What Utterson and Poole see in the glass is not only itself, but also a "hundred repetitions" of the fire, for the glazed drawers of chemicals are also mirrors. Within it as well are "their own pale and fearful countenances stooping to look in" (71).

The mirror in Jekyll's laboratory is the final door in a story about doors. Utterson's friend Richard Enfield first encountered Edward Hyde by the sinister back door to Jekyll's respectable house, in a chapter entitled "Story of the Door"; Utterson and Poole gain entrance to the laboratory by breaking in another door that seems alive, a door that "leaped against the lock and hinges" and gives out a "dismal screech" (69). Between those doors stands the locked cabinet concealing Jekyll's mysterious chemicals, while Utterson's study has its own mysteries hidden in his safe. The danger of seeing the body as merely an object or a reflection is that, as in Hyde's case, pleasures

can turn from the “undignified” to the “truly monstrous.” Violence directed towards others becomes an expression of power over the outside world, as well as a displaced expression of hatred at the frailty and limits of the self, a rebellion against being “hide bound.”

As Hyde loses control of his violence towards others, Jekyll loses control of his own body, finding it no longer subject to his own conscious desires but changing on its own, following the dictates of unconscious drives he is powerless to arrest. Jekyll/Hyde becomes both tormentor and victim simultaneously, asserting his will upon other bodies and losing his own to the same force. At the end, locked in his dissecting room and inside the body of Hyde, he searches frantically for a way out. When Utterson and Poole arrive outside the last locked door, a voice calls out:

“Utterson!” said the voice, “for God’s sake, have mercy!”

“Ah, that’s not Jekyll’s voice—it’s Hyde’s!” cried Utterson. “Down with the door, Poole!” (69)

The call is from Jekyll, but the body is Hyde’s. Reacting to a voice that the body determines rather than the spirit—the will—behind it, Utterson and Poole show no mercy, and the long struggle of Jekyll and Hyde ends in death. In the end, Jekyll’s will remains bound to a body, the wrong body, and thus both body and will are destroyed. Hyde’s poisoned corpse, a thing “sorely contorted and still twitching” (70) on the dissecting room floor, is the only tangible result of Jekyll’s experiments, a vivisectionist’s victim reduced to matter by a doctor’s will.

In the last, glass door of the laboratory, near the untenanted body that Jekyll can no longer call his own, Utterson and Poole see the world and themselves reflected and transformed, a world of surfaces, stripped of the will that makes them live. In a mirror, bodies do indeed become what Schopenhauer called “objects in a

world of objects," things that have shape but no substance, separated from the will that observes and animates them. This is the relationship that drove and destroyed Henry Jekyll, until all that was left was the body of Hyde, a distorted mirror image of a twisted will. As Schopenhauer once declared, and Stevenson embodied in his most famous work of fiction, "Will is the thing-in-itself, the inner content, the essence of the world. Life, the visible world . . . is only the mirror of the will" (354).

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