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Moral, Social and Psychological Issues in the Works of Robert Louis Stevenson

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1. A human voice in Victorian literature

The works of Robert Louis Stevenson, as widely varied as *The Treasure Island*, “Markheim” and *The Ebb-Tide* are deeply immersed in social, psychological and moral issues peculiar not only to the Victorian age but also relevant to our own time. His is the very benign, unpretentious and fatherly view of mankind common to all great thinkers and insightful artists. In his prose he explores the character of human mind with its deformities and incapacities as well as its virtues, for to be true to life is, in Stevenson’s own words, much more estimable than to idealize it. An honest critique of social illnesses is worth a great deal more than mere show of goodness, prudence and morality often required by the publishers and expected by the reading public of Victorian era.

The present thesis concerns itself both with Stevenson’s theoretical concepts and the practice of his writing. It discusses the motivation, realization and reception of the prevalent themes of Stevenson’s prose: duality of one’s character, internal struggle against social pressure, assumed respectability and criticism of oppressive policies. Along with these, it also deals with the man’s need to stay truthful to his nature, a concept Stevenson defends with some energy both in his essays and his work.

1.1 R. L. Stevenson’s contribution to world literature

Although much of Robert Louis Stevenson’s writing, especially romance, was extremely popular during his lifetime, certain texts were seen as scandalous (e.g. “The Wrong Box” or the anti-imperialist fiction situated in the Pacific) and not in the line with what was generally appreciated in his art. In the decades following World War I, critical acclaim for his works diminished¹ – mostly on the grounds of their being seen as overly traditional and not modern enough. Nothing could be further from the truth, however, as the modernity of Stevenson’s contribution to world literature lies not so much with stylistic novelties as with the subjects treated of either explicitly or, more often, implicitly.

¹ Dury, Life and Works Outline

Stevenson's themes, as well as the settings on whose backdrop they are enacted, are very diverse: ranging from fantastical urban stories inquiring into social pathology to the criticism of Imperialist policies in the Pacific. As one of the pioneers of the English short story of the nineteenth century, he brought to Great Britain a genre already well established and well liked in America, France and Russia², and proceeded to claim a wide readership for his godchild. But he did not only write fiction – Stevenson's letters and essays are an important source of profound views on a variety of subjects from art to ethics and politics.

On the surface, majority of Stevenson's writing is best characterized as romance. He sticks to the age old tradition of storytelling, and a well-narrated tale is to him the very corner stone of any work of literature. Regardless of whether we have in front of us a South Sea yarn inspired by aboriginal Hawaiian myths or a sinister romance set in Scotland, Stevenson's stories reveal the signs of a most vintage craftsmanship. They are essentially simple and stunningly readable, yet each word is precisely selected to either flow harmoniously with the rest, or leave an impact. The plots and the circumstances of the stories are deeply intriguing when the reader ponders their meanings and their wider implications.

The underlying motifs of Stevenson's works range from the analyses of doubles, antagonistic or split characters, to critiques of social values and mediocrity. He also speaks, with a very subtle insight, about the relations between men and women often pointing at the effeminacy of the former and the virility of the latter. In so doing, he frequently contradicts the widespread role expectations of the two genders, an issue hotly debated at his time as well as ours.

1.2 An outline of life and career of R. L. Stevenson

Robert Lewis Balfour Stevenson was born in Edinburgh on November 13th, 1850. On his father's side he came from a family of renowned lighthouse engineers. His mother was a Balfour, one of the family of prominent lawyers and church ministers.

² Dury, Life and Works Outline

From his mother Stevenson inherited a very frail constitution and poor health. His weak chest would further suffer in the cold and damp thick-walled stone houses the family lived in in his youth. As the only child, however, he received his parents' full care and attention; he would later recall that without it, and especially without his nurse Cummie's constant help and encouragement, he could have never survived his childhood at all.³

At the age of seventeen Stevenson enrolled at Edinburgh University to study engineering as it was hoped that he would eventually succeed his father in the family business. However, the son soon tired of engineering and went to study law to satisfy at least the maternal side of the family. He passed his final exam in 1875 but he never practiced the profession as by this time he had already known that he wanted to embark on a literary career. He had been spending all of his university vacations in France in the company of other young artists like himself.

In France he would also meet his future wife Fanny, an American eleven years his senior, with two children and recently separated from her husband. Fanny and Stevenson kept company throughout her stay and two years later a divorce was arranged with the husband. Stevenson would follow Fanny to California shortly after her divorce.

His early years as a writer produced several accounts of travels in France (*An Inland Voyage*, 1878, and *Travels with a Donkey in the Cevennes*, 1879) and, later on, of the transoceanic passage to California (*The Amateur Emigrant*, 1880). He also wrote the first of his collections of essays titled *Virginibus Puerisque* (1881) addressed, in a confidential tone, to young readers. In these essays he mentions for the first time some of the concepts he further elaborates on in his later work. He opposes, namely, a tendency towards mediocre moral judgements (in "Crabbed Age and Youth"), criticizes the obsession with practical affairs and money (in "An Apology for Idlers") and speaks of the relation between the man and the woman in marriage ("Virginibus Puerisque").

³ Harvey

However, Stevenson's importance for the literature of the British Isles consists mainly in his short stories and novellas. Among those, *New Arabian Nights* (published in 1882) occupy a principal position. It is a two volume set of fantastic stories the first seven of which (those of "The Suicide Club" and "The Rajah's Diamond") are loosely linked by Prince Florizel's persona and their common Arabian narrator; they were, in fact, first published separately, in magazine form, in 1878 as "Latter-day Arabian Nights". The second volume of the *New Arabian Nights* contains several more ambiguous pieces, "The Pavilion on the Links" (called by Arthur Conan Doyle "the high-water mark of [Stevenson's] genius"⁴), "A Lodging for the Night: A Story of Francis Villon", "The Sire de Malétrait's Door" and "Providence and the Guitar".

To the first volume of *New Arabian Nights* other Stevenson's masterpieces bear a close semblance in certain respects. The *Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (1886) and "Markheim" (1885) are, too, situated in the complex and shady world of the modern day Victorian city. *New Arabian Nights* and the *Strange Case* are equally concerned with "the guilty secrets of the more respectable members of society"⁵ while "Markheim" and the *Strange Case* represent two thought-provoking studies of doubles, or split characters, a topic recurrent in several other works, e.g. *The Master of Ballantrae* (1889) to name an overwhelmingly important one.

Stevenson, suffering from chronic colds, pneumonias and perhaps tuberculosis, decided to follow his doctors' orders and in 1888 he sailed for the islands of the southern Pacific Ocean. He lived on various islets of the South Seas before he finally settled in Apia in the Samoan Islands taking interest in the local culture and working on an extensive anthropological study he never had the time to finish. Nevertheless, the change of climate did Stevenson's health good and his style became more self-confident, mature and intricately beautiful, even if it lost its former romance character to a certain degree.

⁴ Dury, Life and Works Outline

⁵ Dury, Life and Works Outline

A late collection of tales *Island Nights' Entertainments* (published 1893) was written during his South Sea years and includes several iconic narrative pieces such as "The Bottle Imp," "The Beach of Falesá" or "The Isle of Voices." Among the other works finished at this era of Stevenson's life, *The Ebb-Tide* (1894) is no doubt the most important. Like "The Beach of Falesá" before it, it paints a painfully realistic picture of the Europeans inhabiting the islands and their patronising treatment of the natives.

Although these later stories are now admired mainly for their exotic and thrilling beauty, they were frequently criticised or ignored by contemporary audiences on the grounds of sympathy they showed to the natives and their critique of Imperialist policies. Their surface charm conceals a subtle inquiry into some of the more intricate aspects of human nature, as well as into love, sex and the role of women in society, themes Stevenson avoided in his earlier fiction⁶. With "The Beach of Falesá" and *The Ebb-Tide* Stevenson finally abandons the predominant fantastic tone of his earlier works and adopts a new one which is more realistic.

However, the advent of Stevenson's career as a profit-making writer had been apparent as soon as the publication of *Treasure Island* in 1883. This first full length book was inspired by an idea his twelve-year-old step-son Lloyd brought to him while on holiday in Scotland in the summer of 1881. It is perhaps because of this book that Stevenson's fame among the general reading public rests on books of "adventure" (*The Black Arrow*, 1883, *Kidnapped*, 1886, and *Catriona*, 1893) rather than his more complex pieces.

Prince Otto (1885), second Stevenson's novel length narrative, takes place in an imaginary and allegorical Central European kingdom of Grünewald. Formally a conspicuously plain styled romance, *Prince Otto* is, in fact, a most interesting study of inter-gender relations and the values on which friendships between people rest. Prince Otto of the romance is unmistakably related to Florizel of Bohemia (the protagonist of *New Arabian Nights*), with whose country Grünewald shares its border.

⁶ Jolly xix-xxi

The next “adult” novel *The Master of Ballantrae* (1889) is a narrative centring in upon the lives of two brothers James and Henry who share a good many other traits, besides their initials, with Jekyll and Hyde. James’s (like Jekyll’s) is an essentially “good” but weaker and irresolute character which gives way to his more natural and unreserved twin. The constant reappearance of the “evil,” punishing other self, personified throughout the story by Henry, ends only when both antagonists die simultaneously after one of them has been presumed dead and laid buried for nearly a week.

Throughout Stevenson’s fiction his love-hate relationship to religion is apparent. He was born into a radical Scots Protestant (“Covenanting”) environment and heartily loathed the kind of religious fanaticism which he would often encounter in his childhood. On the other hand, he would not forsake all of his spiritual legacy. He writes in a letter of 1891: “mind you, I am a child of the Covenanters – whom I do not love, but they are mine after all, my father’s and my mother’s – and they had their merits, too, and their ugly beauties, and grotesque heroisms, that I love them for, the while I laugh at them.”⁷

Robert Louis Stevenson died in December 1894, defeated at last by his ill health, and was buried, according to his wish, atop Mount Vaea above his Samoan home. The epitaph on his tomb reads: “Under the wide and starry sky, / Dig the grave and let me lie...,” and is taken out of his own poem “Requiem” (published as part of the 1887 collection).

1.3 The contents of this thesis

Beside the short introduction and biography, this study focuses on the analysis of some of the key moral, social and psychological problems Stevenson explores in his work.

The next chapter is dedicated to Stevenson’s theoretical and moral concepts as he speaks of them in the *Essays in the Art of Writing*. In the following chapters these motifs are discussed in greater detail

⁷ Jolly xvii

as they appear in some of Stevenson's best known works of fiction, namely "Markheim", *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*, *The Ebb-Tide* and "The Beach of Falesá".

The final chapter offers a conclusion and a summary of the points made in this thesis as well as an overall evaluation of Robert Louis Stevenson's contribution to world's literature. His honest representation of man's character, with all its pathology, as well as his superb and imaginative narrative style became an inspiration for many authors worldwide (Borges, Conrad, James, Kipling among others); however, he has often been neglected in literary studies. Therefore, I would like to draw more attention to his literary and humanist legacy in this short study, and to give him his due esteem.

2. Robert Louis Stevenson's theoretical concepts

As a preface to the interpretive part of this thesis I have chosen to outline Stevenson's views on many of the points discussed in the following chapters in the form in which they appeared in his essays – principally "The Morality of the Profession of Letters", "A Humble Remonstrance" and "A Chapter on Dreams".

"The Morality of the Profession of Letters", first published in the *Fortnightly Review* in April 1881, was conceived as a defence of the writer's vocation as opposed to other, more practically oriented, professions. Although many of its arguments were later superseded by Stevenson's other theoretical writings (and fiction), this early essay laid out the moral grounds on which most of Stevenson's prose rested.

2.1 On the "profession" of a writer

Written as a direct response to James Payn's article on the topic of the profitability of writing, Stevenson's "Morality of the Profession of Letters" was a soberer piece which put more weight on the sheer pleasure, honesty and usefulness of literary pursuit than its financial benefits – or as Stevenson termed it: "the salary in any business under heaven is not the only, nor indeed the first, question... but that your business should be first honest, and second useful."

In 1883 the Society of Authors was founded in Britain which united the writers who strove for the public acknowledgement of the status of their occupation as on a par with other professions such as the doctor's or lawyer's. One year later, Walter Besant gave his lecture "The Art of Fiction" to the Royal Institution in which he argued the importance of the professional status of writing. True to his positivist and empiricist ideals, he claimed in his speech that fiction was "of this world, wholly of this world."⁸ As such, it should not draw attention to itself as a highly stylized piece of writing and should be kept as simple as possible in order to achieve its two primary goals: the first, to preserve the truth of the information conveyed, and the second, to cater to the widest possible "market" of readers.

⁸ Arata

Besant, furthermore, urged novelists to first consider their writing as a marketable product and only secondarily as art.⁹

Such degradation of writing from art to a trade caused an outcry among many of his contemporaries and prompted critique from such authors as Henry James or, more radically, Robert Louis Stevenson. Stevenson opposed the idea of professionalism for two reasons. Firstly, he associated it with the middle classes and the very bourgeois immoralities which he portrayed in *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*. Secondly, he saw a direct link between the professional status of writing and the literary realism which he despised.

Stevenson was uncomfortable with the notion that writing should constitute a simple mimesis of the middle class life and values, and countered it with his concept of “anti-mimetic” literature: in “Humble Remonstrance” (1885), he stressed that literature does not merely reproduce reality but “pursues instead an independent and creative aim,” and he then went on to say that the novel lives “by its immeasurable difference from life.”¹⁰ Rather than the subject, which “makes but a trifling part of any piece of literature,”¹¹ he emphasized the stylistic and structural elements of literature in saying that “the motive and end of any art whatever is to make a pattern”¹² and not to reproduce life.¹³ A perfect example of Stevenson’s fiction which consciously creates an imagined pattern (and only loosely touches on reality) is “Markheim” in which the protagonist’s journey through the house is allegorical of his own spiritual development.

Such aesthetic notion of art, which would find its continuation in the modernist movement, however, was in Stevenson combined with a love and extensive use of the elements of adventure and romance. As Stephen D. Arata writes in his essay: “Stevenson used the conventions of ‘adventure’ ... in an attempt to reshape his middle-class readership” by portraying life as completely remote from

⁹ Arata

¹⁰ Arata

¹¹ Stevenson, *The Morality of the Profession of Letters*

¹² Stevenson, *On Some Technical Elements of Style in Literature*

¹³ Arata

the bourgeois convention and by trying to draw his readers' attention to other topics. In so doing he enabled them to look at their life and moral conceptions from other perspectives.

2.2 On the conflicts of the soul

In his fictions Stevenson frequently deals with the split allegiances of the Victorian man. The firm moral requirements imposed by society on the individual, on the one hand, often violently clash with the individual's authenticity, or natural disposition, on the other. As a prime example, Stevenson's Mr Hyde embodies many of the Victorian man's anxieties, namely the fear of the "bestial," uncivilized ego continuously struggling to break free of the forced public image. He symbolizes the barbarism and the "essential life force" hidden under the façade of civilization which most people would prefer to suppress or forget about.¹⁴ Jekyll, in his turn, symbolizes the Victorian man haunted by the shadow of the Hyde within him. He is a victim of self-deception and a slave to his moral weaknesses clashing with the severe discipline which he imposes upon himself.

In "Lay Morals" Stevenson writes:

*[The soul] demands that we should not live alternately with our opposing tendencies in continual saw of passion and disgust, but seek some path on which the tendencies shall no longer oppose, but serve each other to a common end. ... The soul demands unity of purpose, not dismemberment of man; it seeks to roll up all his strength and sweetness, all his passion and wisdom, into one, and make of him a perfect man exulting in perfection.*¹⁵

By illustrating the inevitable conflict between natural urges and societal pressures Stevenson warns us, in many of his works, before the consequences of such splits and depicts the tragedy of those who are not able to find a direction of life in which they could unite these conflicting tendencies (like Dr Jekyll or Henry Durie). Jekyll's tragedy, for example, consists primarily in his inability to

¹⁴ Saposnik, The Anatomy of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde 728

¹⁵ Saposnik, The Anatomy of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde 728

acknowledge his kinship with Hyde and the inability to recognize that Hyde has no life separate from his own.

As Irving S. Saposnik writes in his essay “The Anatomy of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde”, Hyde also came to symbolize many of the moral, social, political and economic threats which the Victorian public dreaded. As we shall see in the chapter dedicated to *The Strange Case*, the principal terrifying moment of the novella consists in the fact that Mr Hyde, who would essentially be identified with the immoral (if not criminal) lower classes, is an inalienable part of Dr Jekyll, the respected public figure. Victorian audiences would surely recognize their own fears and problems in the dualistic protagonist of Stevenson’s novella.

2.3 On the duties of a writer to society

Stevenson clearly recognized the writer’s great potential to contribute to and influence the general public opinion. It is in the artist’s power, Stevenson writes in “The Morality of the Profession of Letters”, to “do great harm or great good” by his trade, and he adds that one’s main duty consists in “[treating] all subjects in the highest, the most honourable, and the pluckiest spirit, consistent with the fact.”

On these premises, he criticizes the daily newspapers for their irreverent handling of truth, “daily perverted and suppressed,” and their tendency to degrade grave subjects to the level of profanity in their treatment. After all, he continues, the press serves a *de facto* educational purpose as “the total of a nation’s reading, in these days of daily papers, greatly modifies the total of the nation’s speech.” Interestingly, Stevenson himself was often criticized for his own “irreverent handling” of serious subjects such as the erratic “trading” of a dead body between the characters of *The Wrong Box*¹⁶, the outrageous underlying idea of *The Suicide Club*, or the fake marital certificate of “The Beach of Falesá”¹⁷.

¹⁶ Buckton

¹⁷ See page 40

As for the duties of a writer to the public, Stevenson speaks of two: namely “truth to the fact” and “a good spirit in the treatment.”¹⁸ The significance of these authorial virtues rests on the assumption that a man’s judgement is based on two things: first, his nature or “the original preferences of the soul,” and second, his social conditioning or “the mass of testimony to the nature of God, man, and the universe which reaches [him], in divers manners, from without.”

In addition to this, Stevenson adds a remark that carries a special significance for his own time: “the sum of contemporary knowledge or ignorance of good and evil is, in large measure, the handiwork of those who write” which is a blow directed at the omnipresent hypocrisy of the Victorian age and the critics of the so-called deteriorating moral standards.

In the same breath he also pleads with his fellow writers to “see [to it] that each man’s knowledge is, as near as they can make it, answerable to the facts of life... that he shall not suppose himself an angel or a monster... nor take this world for a hell... nor be suffered to imagine that all rights are centred in his own caste or country, or all veracities in his own parochial creed.”¹⁹ While the first part of this message develops the key humanist values of the whole essay, it is the content of the latter half that attracts our attention with its warning against xenophobia. Moral expectations in relation to a person’s social standing will, indeed, receive a more detailed treatment first in Stevenson’s *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*, which draws attention to the fact that crime is not committed exclusively by the lower classes, and in the Pacific prose, particularly, in *The Ebb-Tide*, which discusses the ambivalent moral quality of being a gentleman, and which severely criticizes the widespread white supremacism in colonies.

“The Morality of the Profession of Letters” further rails against public hypocrisy by declaring that each man should be allowed an unbiased and critical view of himself even if this knowledge should have a discouraging or corrupting influence on him, “for it is in this world as it is, and not in a world

¹⁸ Stevenson, *The Morality of the Profession of Letters*

¹⁹ Stevenson, *The Morality of the Profession of Letters*

made easy by educational suppressions”²⁰ that he must learn to exist. This is a theme developed in “Markheim” and *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* whose protagonists cherish a false idea of themselves. When this self-projection is shattered in “Markheim”, the story reaches its climax and the central character is finally capable of acknowledging to himself the true nature of his life. However, in *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*, Jekyll will barely acknowledge the responsibility for Hyde’s crimes only towards the very end of his “Full Statement of the Case”.

2.4 On the author’s persona

Lastly, “The Morality of the Profession of Letters” also deals with the writer’s persona and the necessary prerequisites of artistic success. First of all, the author’s mind must be wide open and must not “repose in some narrow faith” which would prevent him from expressing “the whole or even many of the sides of this various existence.”²¹ Characteristically, Stevenson always juxtaposes two or more contradictory characters in his stories to explore individual moral dilemmas from multiple points of view (e.g. Herrick v. Attwater in *The Ebb-Tide*).

Stevenson also warns against purely sectarian religion which is only able to convey inhuman and trite ideas. He sets up the author as “a leader of the minds of men”²² who must see to it that his own mind is receptive, charitable and bright in order to write sympathetically and without prejudice. This is, in his view, the essence of all good writing. The sympathetic strain of writing is most clearly visible in Stevenson’s prose written after the move to Samoa in which he speaks favourably of the native inhabitants of the islands and seeks to defend them from the whites’ ignorance and contempt.

In one of the essay’s concluding statements Stevenson’s Presbyterian education is reflected: namely in the requirement that in spite of the inherent state of imperfection, a man must strive to express himself and his own views and preferences as they are, unembellished; since to pretend anything else would be “a far more perilous thing than to *risk* being immoral: [it would be] to be *sure* of being

²⁰ Stevenson, *The Morality of the Profession of Letters*

²¹ Stevenson, *The Morality of the Profession of Letters*

²² Stevenson, *The Morality of the Profession of Letters*

untrue," (emphasis added). To be partial and to present only one side of reality is, therefore, in Stevenson's view, to be worse than immoral and give a misleading picture of the world and life.

2.5 In defence of romance

In "A Note on Realism" Stevenson condemns the idea that realism should contain more tangible veracity, intrinsic natural or moral values than romance, and calls it "only [a] technical method" of writing. The "photographic exactitude in dialogue" and the "insane pursuit of completion" of realism represent merely an artistic fashion and are not a significant literary evolution.

The essay speaks of the truth contained in literary art as independent of genre and style. It "may be told us in a carpet comedy [as well as] in a novel of adventure, or a fairy tale," without any impediment to the degree of expressiveness or accuracy conveyed by the piece. Stevenson proves this point rather well by writing gothic fiction which deals with complex moral problems (*"Markheim"*, *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*).

2.6 Summary of the Essays in the Art of Writing

Looked at from a proper distance, the points contained in the "Morality of the Profession of Letters" express a great many of the ideas recurrent both in Stevenson's critical thinking and his artistic creations. They relate to a range of ideas beginning with the utility of writing and its shortcomings, through the social and moral functions of literature all the way down to firm ethical requirements laid upon the artist's persona.

Stevenson explains that while the profession of letters is, indeed, not the one with the highest income rates, it brings to the one dedicated to it other advantages including, but not limited to, moral and personal satisfaction.

As a writer, one may both entertain and educate the masses, he may fight against the oppression of minorities but, first and foremost, he should always take heed that he does not mislead his followers; for by selecting the profession of a writer, one becomes a natural leader of sorts.

Most importantly, the author should never help create an artificial and hypocritical cultural environment in which too much undue strain is put on an individual in the name of blank and nonsensical virtues. On the contrary, an author should always be frank about the flaws of a man's character in order to help him come to terms with them. He should also paint his surrounding reality in true colours without making it seem either too bleak, or overly angelic.

All in all, to write picturesque, human and moral fiction successfully the author must be perceptive, sympathetic and open-minded, and his inspiration "healthy and potent".

3. “Markheim” as a fable of morals

3.1 Context and form of “Markheim”

In writing his 1885 short story “Markheim”, Stevenson created what is essentially a fable dealing with man’s inherent moral cowardice. At the same time it is the first of his narratives in which a part of one’s character comes into life as a separate entity (a trend to be developed in *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* and *The Master of Ballantrae*).

Markheim’s moral cowardice consists in the fact that he is unwilling to acknowledge the course of gradual spiritual and moral deterioration his life has taken while making a considerable mental effort to conceal the facts from himself and silence his conscience. Although he seemingly murders the pawnbroker of the tale for certain excellent reasons of his own, known only to God and himself, it is in reality a desperate act of escapism through which he attempts to shut the guilt out of his mind.

In its form, “Markheim” is a thoroughly symbolist piece of writing which has had its realistic elements reduced to a functional minimum²³ to allow for a wider communication channel between the author and the reader. Thus, both the movement of the protagonist through the house and his actions require a largely symbolic explanation while the whole physical setting gradually gives way to an allegory of Markheim’s own state of mind.

The fact that the tale takes place at Christmas is also significant: firstly, Christmas is a time for introspection when a man must account for all his actions of the past year.²⁴ And, secondly, it is also the time when the Saviour comes into the world to help redeem man. Both elements are present in the story to a degree; nevertheless, the manner in which it is narrated most likely excludes any intended supernatural explanations. This essay, at any rate, shall take the psychological and moral, rather than the religious, view of the author’s intentions.

²³ Egan 377

²⁴ Saposnik 279

3.2 Many rich mirrors

From the start, the motif of mirroring is very prominent in “Markheim”. Beginning with the shopkeeper’s searching eye, into which the protagonist is unable to look as he enters the house, seeing in it his own concealed dark motives, down to the ultimate change in the ethereal alter ego, when he finally admits his true nature, this is a tale of various stages of introspection. In this sub-chapter we will begin to analyse how self scrutiny works in the story.

Taunted and sneered at by the pawnbroker for his shady trade, Markheim is reminded of why he came to the house in the first place, and asks the shopkeeper to recommend to him a gift for a lady. At this the dealer presents a Renaissance hand glass; Markheim staggers and explodes: “Why, look here – look in it – look at yourself! Do you like what you see? No! Nor I – nor any man.” In that mirror Markheim sees “[a] damned reminder of years, and sins and follies – [a] hand-conscience.” Like Markheim, the dealer, too, jumps back as soon as the mirror is put to his face.

Here, at the very beginning, we catch glimpses of Markheim’s evil, sinful past from which he is running away and which he is trying desperately to erase from his memory. The dealer, who has just reminded Markheim of the thing he is escaping from, becomes a kind of reflector for him. In his speech, behaviour and countenance Markheim sees a perfect mirror of his own dishonesty.

Perceiving that neither of the two men is able to confront the mirror unflinchingly, we realize how alike they both are.

In a vague hope that a chance discovery may yet avert the course of events, Markheim questions the dealer earnestly if he is, in private life, a charitable man and if he has ever loved anyone. Playing, at that moment, the self-imposed role of a moral judge and executioner, Markheim still cherishes the idea that the pawnbroker may not be as morally corrupt as he originally thought. He would fain find an excuse to not carry out his murderous plan; and seeing, perhaps, in the dealer an image of himself he is reluctant to believe him altogether devoid of good qualities. However, when the shopkeeper retorts in the negative refusing all such nonsense, Markheim utters his final sentence: “Not

charitable, not pious; not scrupulous; unloving, unbeloved; a hand to get money, a safe to keep it. ...

Dear God, man, is that all?"

Such wickedness and moral void, perceived all the more clearly and accusingly in another, compel Markheim to stab the shopkeeper. Nonetheless, he is not merely carrying out a sentence or obtaining a means to get at the dealer's money, the murder is also an attempt at silencing his own train of conscience which has spoken so loudly through the victim's mouth.

At the instant of the homicide, the ticking of the many clocks in the shop, "some stately and slow... other garrulous and hurried," becomes painfully apparent as time grinds to a halt with the dealer's death and then resumes as "the seconds [are told out] in an intricate chorus of tickings," to the sounds heard outside in the street. This is, indeed, the cliff-second Markheim has spoken of earlier: "Every second is a cliff, if you think upon it – a cliff a mile high – high enough, if we fall, to dash us out of every feature of humanity." Just so, this final sin of murder dashes the remnants of humanity from Markheim himself.

At this point, in the candle-lit room filled with moving shadows, the narrative takes its last step and shifts from real to ideal: Markheim's actions and his movement now become symbols of his spiritual transformation.

Markheim's eyes pause for a moment on the dealer's corpse, the temporarily silent heap of small voices branding him as reprobate; he regards it and sees it as "incredibly small and strangely meaner than in life. In these poor, miserly clothes... like so much sawdust." But then, despite its inanimate state, the corpse begins, once again, to accuse Markheim through a voice in his head, and threatens his safety if found.

Staggered by all the bells in the shop chiming three o'clock at once, as if for a funeral, Markheim moves around dizzily and sees, in many rich mirrors, "his face repeated and repeated, as if it were an army of spies," "his own eyes [meet] him and [detect] him," and "the sound of his own steps...

[vexes] the surrounding quiet.” With this, the doubts and the fear of Markheim push the narrative into its second phase. Before we reach that, however, we will take a look at how the tension between society and the individual functions in “Markheim” and what form it takes.

3.3 Accusing neighbourhood

“Terror of the people in the street sat down before his mind like a besieging army.”

Another aspect of “Markheim” which is worth our attention is the protagonist’s fear of society’s judgement, the fear lest someone should hear a sound and suspect the murder, the feverish doubting whether the people on the other side of the partitioning wall know about the deed. This is the fear of the super ego, of the society which judges its members on the basis of standards which Markheim refuses to or cannot comply with.

However, his fear is far from purely external. Beside visions of the happy families, who stop eating their Christmas dinners at the strange sounds heard from the dealer’s house, and the random passers-by in the street, Markheim is much more concerned about someone else’s undesirable attention:

The neighbour hearkening with white face beside his window, the passer-by arrested by a terrible surmise on the pavement – these could at worst suspect, they could not know; through the brick walls and shuttered windows only sounds could penetrate. But here, within the house, was he alone?

Markheim is afraid of some presence in the house above him, yet he cannot give a name to it; he imagines it first as “a faceless thing,” then “a shadow of himself,” or even “the image of the dead dealer.” It is, in fact, the voice of his conscience which is slowly emerging as a separate entity only to make its full appearance in the last stages of the story.

Disturbed from these musings by a jovial gentleman beating on the door of the shop with his staff and calling the dead dealer by name, Markheim is overcome by fear lest the corpse be resurrected by the voice and answer the man’s shouts. Waking from this fancy, Markheim longs to escape from his

“accusing neighbourhood,” “to plunge into a bath of London multitudes, and to reach... that haven of safety and apparent innocence, his bed.” In other words, Markheim seeks anonymity in hope that it will somehow dissolve his sin, or at least protect him from society’s verdict.

Studying his victim’s body, Markheim is reminded of a day in his childhood when he went to see an exhibition of paintings of famous crime scenes. Although he was then greatly appalled, to the point of nausea, by these pictures, he is now unable to feel any emotion when faced with the reality of crime. The actual corpse, despite Markheim’s palpable effort, raises no “remorseful consciousness,” and the “same heart which [shuddered] before the painted effigies of crime, [looks] on its reality unmoved,” because Markheim is too far gone in his descent from virtuousness.

In this we may read criticism of the protagonist’s hypocrisy: while he is repelled by the general idea of sin, he will not stop before committing one, nor acknowledge it afterwards – not even to himself. By extension, that applies to the whole society: we often partake in general criticism of an idea but will easily find an excuse for our own misdemeanour. Just such is Markheim’s case: he asserts that his reasons are known only to God and himself, and poses as some sort of accursed Byronic hero²⁵, or *poète maudit*, when he really is a moral coward, unable even of an honest admission of wrongdoing until just before the very end of the story.

3.4 House of the soul

The whole house in which the story takes place serves as an allegory of Markheim’s mind and its transformation. From the overwhelmingly physical and tense basement which contains the dealer’s corpse (the emblem of guilt) Markheim ascends the staircase (in purifying agony), reaches the predominantly spiritual first storey (in which he will encounter his other self) and enters a room whose condition can be compared to his state of mind.

²⁵ Egan 382

Moreover, the name of the protagonist himself is highly suggestive²⁶: “Mark” means “core” (or essence, soul) in German, and “heim” is simply “home” (or house). Put together, “Markheim” means “house of the soul”. While the dealer’s house represents Markheim’s own mind externalized, the neighbouring buildings and the street, in this allegorical reading, embody the collective mind of society judgmental to Markheim’s deeds.

We have already touched upon Markheim’s apprehension of not being alone in the house. There are, indeed, several conflicting selves within Markheim – and the realisation that “he [is] not alone [grows] upon him to the verge of madness.” He complains that were he “deaf,” or mentally imperceptive, he would take his situation more calmly. However, Markheim is far from dumb or insensitive, and, indeed, cannot be so for the story to work its moment.

On the first storey of the house, to which lead the twenty-four steps, the “four-and-twenty agonies,” there are three doors open ajar “like three ambushes.” At the sight, Markheim’s fear of society’s “observing eyes,” possibly hiding in the rooms, resurfaces and he longs to be “buried among bedclothes, and invisible to all but God.” He harbours no fear of heavenly avengers, for he believes “himself at ease [with God],” and he knows that “his act was doubtless exceptional, but so were his excuses, which God knew.” He is afraid rather of the laws of nature which might “preserve some damning evidence of his crime,” or reveal it to others.

Even though Markheim contends that “in a sense, [the laws of nature] might be called the hands of God reached forth against sin,” it is quite apparent that more weight is given to worldly dangers and consequences than to the religious ones. We can see here that Stevenson is anxious to keep away from using religious concepts as a justification for or the actual force behind Markheim’s spiritual progress.

²⁶ Egan 380

The drawing room into which Markheim enters, having ascended the stairs, is symbolic of his state of mind²⁷ – it is chaos incarnate: “quite dismantled, uncarpeted besides, and strewn with packing cases and incongruous furniture.” Moreover, it contains “several great pier-glasses, in which he [beholds] himself at various angles, like an actor on a stage,” suggesting the latent capacity for introspection and the multiplicity of conflicting self opinions.

As Markheim proceeds to ransack the cabinets of the room he is arrested by “the music of a hymn and the voices of many children.” The sound carries him all the way to his childhood and brings back the images of church-going children, of the church organ, the parson and the Sunday readings of the Bible. It is precisely at this moment, in which we see that Markheim is still capable of thinking about pleasant and virtuous things, that the story offers him a way to redemption through the means of his visitor.²⁸

3.5 The visitor

Identity of the visitor, described by Markheim as bearing a likeness to himself and at the same time appearing to be neither of the earth, nor of God, has caused a lot of confusion in literary criticism of the story²⁹ – there is a clash between those who see the visitor as good and those who see him as the embodiment of evil. This is mainly due to the fact that in spite of the pattern of speech which would suggest that he really is the devil Markheim takes him for, the visitor’s countenance softens and brightens as Markheim finally confesses the truth of his life and resolves to hand himself in to justice. Still another view (perhaps dominant and certainly the one which we adopt in this essay) refrains from putting a qualitative label on the visitor’s identity and sees him rather as an aspect of Markheim’s soul: thus we may agree with Markheim when he says that the visitor is neither of the earth, nor God – he is of the man. He acts as yet another mirror and enables Markheim to see his genuine self.

²⁷ Egan 381

²⁸ Egan 382

²⁹ Saposnik 277

The visitor is reluctant to reveal his true identity but exclaims that he knows Markheim “to the soul,” so Markheim, assuming that he really is the devil, defends himself and pleads: “My life is but a travesty and slander on myself. I have lived to belie my nature.” He refuses that he should be judged by his acts, stating that he should be rather judged by his will to do good and puts forth to be “the unwilling sinner,” a thing common in humanity, brought down by the circumstances.

The eloquent speech notwithstanding, the visitor points out that Markheim’s life has been one of a steady fall from virtue to disgrace, and foretells that his downfall shall continue in much the same way as it has been doing for the “six-and-thirty years that [he has] been in this world.”

Coaxed through the visitor’s taunting and use of sarcasm, as well as his own desperate self-defence, Markheim realises the truth about himself and resolves that if all of his acts are doomed to lead to an evil end, his only chance for redemption consists in inaction. His hatred of the visitor whose reasoning he is unable to resist, moreover, causes him to “behold his life as it was, ugly and strenuous like a dream, random as chance-medley – a scene of defeat.” He perceives that such life tempts him no longer and surrenders himself to justice.

Thus the fable comes to an end which provides a solution to the initial predicament of Markheim’s moral cowardice: it is the acknowledgement of the truth about one’s life no matter how harsh it may be, for to pretend is more immoral than anything else (see Chapter 2.2).

3.6 Significance of “Markheim”

With “Markheim” Stevenson created a complex study of a criminal’s mind. It deals with a whole range of psychological and moral problems at once: the relation between an individual and his environment, hypocrisy and the ability for truthful introspection and pity are only some of them.

It meant a breakthrough for Stevenson’s psychological story in many ways. First and foremost, it was the first work in which Stevenson divided the protagonist’s character into several conflicting selves each of them represented by a separate being. This was an innovation which he would take further in

The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde and, arguably, bring to its ultimate form in *The Master of Ballantrae*.

“Markheim” is a story which relies heavily on emblems to convey its message. We have discussed the significance of the Christmas setting, the various mirrors in the dealer’s house, as well as the function of that edifice itself. More could be said, no doubt, on the topic of the flux of time with all the emphasis it gives to certain moments of the narrative, viz. the briefly mentioned ephemerality of time in critical transmutations of the protagonist’s character. Perceptions of sound and noise are also crucial in several passages for reaching the desired effect (consider the staff patting on the door of the shop when Markheim is inside with the corpse of his victim).

Taking into account its brevity, “Markheim” is a story of remarkable moral depth. Through it, Stevenson was able to articulate many of his points even more clearly than in his ingenious essays. This is mainly due to the fact that in the symbolic environment of the story he was free to experiment with his ideas and to explore them in greater detail than in the essays whose form would constrain him.

4. Dr Jekyll, Mr Hyde and criticism of the middle class morality

Despite the apparent moral black-and-whiteness of *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*, this novella primarily deals with something else than the struggle between the good and evil in oneself.

The Strange Case constitutes, more than anything else, an angry critique of the Victorian middle classes and the moral standards which conditioned the appearance of the discourses of criminality, degeneration and atavism as traits inherent to the lower classes. In this chapter I will try to analyse some of the more complex implications of the narrative in addition to its key message.

4.1 Connection to Stevenson's life

It is an irony that in writing *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*, which sold 40,000 copies in Britain in the first six months after its publication in 1886³⁰ (and five times as much illegally in the USA), Stevenson became for the first time in his life financially independent and, in consequence, one of those professional middle class burgesses he himself so vehemently criticised: "I am now a salaried party... I am a bourgeois now; I am to write a weekly paper for Scribners', at a scale of payment which makes my teeth ache for shame and diffidence. I am like to be... publicly hanged at the social revolution."³¹

The moral concerns expressed in *The Strange Case* may have been related to Stevenson's attitude to his own vocation, i.e. the "profession" of a writer. In April 1884 Walter Besant gave the above mentioned lecture called "The Art of Fiction", in which he argued the importance of the professional status of writers, analogous to that of the lawyers, doctors and scientists, and regarded literature as a product aimed at the middle class reader and his tastes. This was a notion Stevenson found wholly unacceptable and criticised severely.

³⁰ Middleton viii

³¹ Arata

4.2 About the gentlemen of *The Strange Case*

In *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*, the most prominent feature of all professional men like Utterson, or middle class gentlemen “well known about town” like Enfield, is their worship of reputation. Reputation, that is to say, of a grave, serious and industrious man who does not indulge in pleasures other than his professional life may offer. The novella is full of such portraits. Most frequently we find these men either at a fireplace reading a book or discussing, in a business-like tone, the matters which concern them (like Utterson and Guest), or dining with other men who share those above mentioned virtues. As early as the first page a miniature portrait of the period gentleman is given: “Mr Utterson the lawyer was a man of a rugged countenance, that was never lighted by a smile; cold, scanty and embarrassed in discourse; backward in sentiment. ... He was austere with himself; drank gin when he was alone, to mortify a taste for vintages; and though he enjoyed the theatre, had not crossed the doors of one for twenty years.”³²

As we have said the primary concern of these gentlemen is to preserve their good reputation. This is obvious in the scene where Hyde is caught in the act of trampling a child by Enfield, the girl’s father and a doctor. Determined to have their vengeance on him, they threaten to “make such a scandal of this, as should make his name stink from one end of London to the other. If he had any friends or any credit, [they] undertook that he should lose them.” Hyde in his turn replies: “If you choose to make capital of this accident, I am naturally helpless. No gentleman but wishes to avoid a scene. Name your figure.”³³

Unmistakably, we recognize in Hyde’s reply the voice of an (affluent) gentleman and, in consequence, he is treated like one “of the club” even in spite of his deed. A certain form of camaraderie ensues which revolves around the men’s effort to preserve the reputation of one of their class. All four gentlemen, including Hyde, spend the rest of the night at Enfield’s where they even breakfast together before they set out for the bank to cash Hyde’s cheque. Throughout the

³² Stevenson, *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde & The Merry Men and Other Tales and Fables* 3

³³ Stevenson, *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde & The Merry Men and Other Tales and Fables* 5

novella, Hyde's easy manner with great sums of money used to compensate for his behaviour is indicative of Stevenson's criticism of the ease with which crimes of the moneyed elite were often overlooked.

In the contorted view of morality presented by this novella, a gentleman may sin all he likes provided his reputation does not suffer in the process. "I feel very strongly about putting questions," Enfield says later to Utterson about the Hyde incident, "it partakes too much of the style of the day of judgement. You start a question, and it's like starting a stone. You sit quietly on the top of a hill; and away the stone goes, starting others; and presently some bland old bird (the last you would have thought of) is knocked on the head in his own garden, and the family have to change their name. No, sir, I make it a rule of mine: the more it looks like Queer Street, the less I ask."³⁴

And, indeed, Hyde is presented like a middle class gentleman even elsewhere in the novella. What we glimpse of his life are the luxurious quarters in London Soho, the boiling kettle and cups set for tea in the room in which he commits suicide, and the overall civilized manner of verbal expression. This environment, however, is in stark contrast with Hyde's actions. Stevenson is careful never to specify where Hyde's forbidden tastes lie, though, which makes his character all the more enigmatic and elusive and stays in tune with the general tone of the novella whose central characters often mention silence as a way of preserving good reputation.

It is possible that in creating the scene where Hyde tramples the little girl Stevenson pointed a critical finger at the widespread problem of child prostitution as the act of trampling suggests physical abuse. In any case, as Tim Middleton writes, prostitution and the spread of venereal disease into middle class homes by seemingly respectable men were a national scandal and "were regarded as a threat to national identity and Britain's (increasingly threatened) status as chief among the imperial powers."³⁵

³⁴ Stevenson, *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde & The Merry Men and Other Tales and Fables* 6

³⁵ Middleton xii

4.3 Jekyll as a victim and the villain

This, then, is the moral climate in which lives Henry Jekyll, M.D., D.C.L., LL.D., F.R.S., &c, the renowned physician and professor, in whom the two conflicting tendencies – to conform and preserve reputation, or to preserve authenticity – clash: “Hence it came about that I concealed my pleasures... and stood committed to a profound duplicity of life. Many a man would have even blazoned such irregularities as I was guilty of; but from the high views that I had set before me, I regarded and hid them with an almost morbid sense of shame. ... I was driven to reflect deeply and inveterately on that hard law of life which stands at the root of religion, and is one of the most plentiful springs of distress.”³⁶ (In this confession we may trace a little nod to Stevenson’s own split allegiance to religious piousness and the enjoyment of life.)

However, Jekyll is not merely a victim of the repressive superego of society which sets standards for its members to follow. It is, above all, in looking for ways to avoid responsibility for one’s acts that Jekyll’s character is most markedly presented.

*Men have before hired bravos to transact their crimes, while their own person and reputation sat under shelter. I was the first who ever did so for his pleasures. I was the first who 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. ...whatever he had done, Edward Hyde would pass away like a stain of breath upon a mirror; and there in his stead, quietly at home, trimming the midnight lamp in his study, a man who could afford to laugh at suspicion, would be Henry Jekyll.*³⁷

Characteristic of this extract from “Henry Jekyll’s Full Statement of the Case” is the shift to the third person narrative in which Jekyll, seeking to avoid moral responsibility, speaks of the shameful acts which he does not regard as his own. Similarly in the following passage: “Henry Jekyll stood at times

³⁶ Stevenson, *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde & The Merry Men and Other Tales and Fables* 42

³⁷ Stevenson, *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde & The Merry Men and Other Tales and Fables* 46; my emphasis

aghast before the acts of Edward Hyde; but the situation was apart from ordinary laws, and insidiously relaxed the grasp of conscience. It was Hyde, after all, and Hyde alone, that was guilty.”³⁸

To fall unreservedly for Jekyll’s account of things, however, is to forget that Hyde was “created” as a direct consequence of Jekyll’s experiment conducted with full knowledge of its impact, as well as to forget that Hyde has no existence separate from Jekyll’s. As Daniel L. Wright’s reading suggests³⁹, Jekyll’s psychological (and also moral) problem lies in his addiction to the quality of being Hyde – which he refuses to confess to himself. Behaving with an uncontrolled abandon and then blaming the outcome solely on Hyde, that is the doctor’s chief problem. Indeed, as Jekyll states several times throughout the novella, he shares in Hyde’s pleasures; they are not different in kind from those which he would pursue himself, only in degree – and this deterioration he attributes to Hyde alone; as if Hyde were not a part of himself: “The pleasures which I had made haste to seek were, as I have said, undignified; I would scarce use a harder term. But in the hands of Edward Hyde they soon began to turn towards the monstrous.”⁴⁰

After all, the very argument upon which the novella is ostensibly based: that man’s character is not uniform, or made of one whole, but dualistic in its essence – containing the good and evil parts – is suggestive of Jekyll’s continued attempts at finding an excuse for his behaviour, as well as blaming it on “someone else”; in this case his other, “evil” self, Hyde.

Like all addicts, Jekyll supposes himself unaffected by exercising the Hyde part of his character. He misinterprets Hyde as an evil clearly separated from his own true “good” self. And as he perpetuates this self-delusion, he assures Utterson that “the moment [he] choose[s], [he] can be rid of Mr Hyde.”⁴¹ Such proclamations of freedom from a drug are well known to anyone who has ever dealt with an addicted person. The illusion of self control enables Jekyll to continue to lead a dual,

³⁸ Stevenson, *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde & The Merry Men and Other Tales and Fables* 46

³⁹ Wright

⁴⁰ Stevenson, *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde & The Merry Men and Other Tales and Fables* 46

⁴¹ Stevenson, *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde & The Merry Men and Other Tales and Fables* 15

essentially hypocritical, life without a compelling reason to change, and it also frees him from the bounds of conscience.

As for the split condition of Jekyll's ego – if the reader had any doubts before the uncontrollable morphing begins between the two sides of Jekyll's character, he must have realized by this point that Jekyll's condition is far from being “truly two”, as he mistakenly supposes, but is “truly one” – only moving towards the doctor's suppressed self. And this is where Jekyll's addiction reaches its high point and the final stage of the cycle of addiction – despair, isolation and the realization of a certain degree of the truth. However, even until his last moments, Jekyll refuses to acknowledge the full extent of his guilt (“for even now I can scarce grant I committed it”⁴²) and remains obstinately fond of his alter ego: “his love of life is wonderful,” “I find it in my heart to pity him.”⁴³

The friends whom Jekyll makes bear his suffering along with him are incredulous. Lanyon the most visibly so – he dies in consequence of his, almost physical, refusal to believe in the apparent change in Jekyll – and the extent of the breach of moral conduct made by a gentleman of Jekyll's class and status.

4.4 The significance of *The Strange Case*

In describing Jekyll's pathological state Stevenson completely subverts the moral and class expectations of the Victorian public which would glorify the morality of the upper middle classes and look down on the immorality and criminality of the mob. In this context, it is interesting to note that Jekyll's “double” London house has its main building turned onto a semi-fashionable square, towards the West End, and the laboratory, separated from the main building by a court, with a door leading out into a by-street oriented towards the East End. However, it is important to realize that Jekyll is not two people; on the contrary, he is just one person who would fain split into two but cannot. Therefore, he makes a failed attempt at blaming all his immorality on a deus-ex-machina character of

⁴² Stevenson, *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde & The Merry Men and Other Tales and Fables* 46

⁴³ Stevenson, *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde & The Merry Men and Other Tales and Fables* 54

Hyde to avoid responsibility for his actions. However, the novella clearly shows the impossibility of such course as Jekyll warns his audience in "Full Statement of the Case": "I have been made to learn that the doom and burthen of our life is bound for ever on man's shoulders; and when the attempt is made to cast it off, it but returns upon us with more unfamiliar and more awful pressure."⁴⁴

In *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*, Stevenson, rather than make us simply sympathetic with Jekyll's burden, calls to our attention the more complex problems of moral responsibility and honesty, especially about one's attitude to, and the role in, society.

There have been numerous other readings of *The Strange Case*, some of them reaching rather interesting conclusions. Thomas L. Reed, for example, reasons in his book *The Transforming Draught: Jekyll and Hyde, Robert Louis Stevenson and the Victorian Alcohol Debate* that the "transforming draught" of Stevenson's novella must be nothing else but strong drink with whose effects Stevenson had immediate personal experience. Alcohol, indeed, emerged in the Victorian public debate as one of the chief reasons behind street crime.⁴⁵ Hence, the likely connection to Jekyll's raving fits when he is "being Hyde", his hungover pangs of conscience and his addiction to the state which his transforming liquid makes possible.

⁴⁴ Stevenson, *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde & The Merry Men and Other Tales and Fables* 43

⁴⁵ Cooper 365

5. *The Ebb-Tide* and “The Beach of Falesá”

In 1888 the Stevensons made a decision to go on a cruise around the Pacific Ocean which was meant to improve Robert Louis’s sharply deteriorating health and revitalize him. Stevenson left the San Francisco harbour on the chartered yacht *Casco* with a commission to write a series of travel articles for English and American newspapers – and during the next six years he would write a large body of fiction as well as non-fiction on Pacific themes. He was deeply fascinated with the islanders' way of life and he started to work on a voluminous treatise on the subject of Polynesian anthropology – however, he never completed it. Despite the fact, many of his thoughts on the contemporary social as well as political topics are preserved in his travel account *In the South Seas* and in the letters to his friends.

This chapter focuses on the questions of moral responsibility, imperialism, racism and the role of the native population within the colonial society of the Pacific islands. These topics would frequently recur in Stevenson’s fiction – especially in *The Ebb-Tide*, whose first part forms a sharp moral allegory and paints a miniature portrait of the imperialist society aboard a ship and whose second part deals with man’s right to kill another, with the value of money and one’s conscience. In “The Beach of Falesá” the depiction of these problems may be more subtle but is none the less significant while they also make their appearance, although in a lesser degree, in the shorter pieces “The Bottle Imp” and “The Isle of Voices” inspired by native folk tales. The moral fables “Something in It” and “The Cart-Horses and the Saddle-Horse” present Stevenson’s concerns with unprecedented clarity. However, we will only mention them in passing as their extent and depth merit.

5.1 Criticism of the imperialist society and white supremacism

As early as 1889, soon after coming to Polynesia, Stevenson would start criticizing the abhorrent practices of the colonial administration and the barbarity of the more developed and, supposedly, more civilized white minority on the islands. Letters to his friends and newspaper articles, in which he did not make any effort to conceal the fact that he preferred the native society to that of the

whites, caused an outcry on the part of the white expatriates who accused Stevenson of betraying a “prejudice against civilized men” and bearing an “indiscriminate love for Polynesians”.⁴⁶ However, Stevenson did not view the native inhabitants of the Pacific as mere noble savages. His islanders share in all of the common human faults and follies – beginning with laziness (in “The Isle of Voices”) and ending with sly manipulation (in “The Beach of Falesá”). He describes them “like other folks, false enough, lazy enough, not heroes, not saints – ordinary men.”⁴⁷

Like Conrad, Kipling or Forster were to do after him, Stevenson would use the edges of empire as a setting for inquisitive fiction. Unlike theirs, however, perhaps with the exception of Forster’s, his aim was not simply to discuss European concerns but to focus on the suffering of the natives subjected to the imperial rule.⁴⁸ Stevenson especially condemned the matter of fact assumption of superiority and the arrogant exploitation of the native peoples by whites.

Characteristically for Stevenson, this exploitation is depicted from several angles in *The Ebb-Tide*. At the beginning of the story we learn an unflattering account of the Europeans’ role in the Pacific:

*Throughout the island world of the Pacific, scattered men of many European races and from almost every grade of society carry activity and disseminate disease. Some prosper, some vegetate. Some have mounted the steps of thrones and owned islands and navies. Others again must marry for a livelihood; a strapping, merry, chocolate-coloured dame supports them in sheer idleness...*⁴⁹

As early as this prelude, white settlers are depicted as a source of illnesses – both literally (especially small pox) and metaphorically – of social ills.

5.2 Moral issues in *The Ebb-Tide*

However, the strength of Stevenson’s fiction consists largely in his ability to ingeniously juxtapose two or more characters whose moral composition is to a degree mutually exclusive in order to

⁴⁶ Jolly xii-xiii

⁴⁷ Jolly xiii

⁴⁸ Jolly xxxiii

⁴⁹ Stevenson, *South Sea Tales* 123

explore a certain conflicting issue. This is what happens in *The Master of Ballantrae*, *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* and other prose works. Likewise, *The Ebb-Tide* is loosely based around the comparison of Herrick to other central characters. In fact, Herrick works as a model reflector character: initially in the black–white moral comparison of “The Trio” and then, more intriguingly, in “The Quartette” where his appreciation for Attwater and his idea of gentlemanly and cultivated demeanour are gradually shattered only to be eventually rebuilt in a rather confused form which leaves a lot of space for hesitation about what the desirable moral qualities really are.

In “The Trio”⁵⁰ we witness the lives of three white underdogs, all failures in their own particular ways, who are left penniless and without a home – “on the beach”⁵¹ of Tahiti. As we meet them, bereft of self-esteem, outcast by their compatriots and forced into adopting aliases, their very existence, indeed, seems merely vegetative. To earn their bread they must forsake the last remnants of their self-conception as whites and fawn in front of the natives whom they, however, secretly despise on racist grounds. Stevenson points at the groundlessness of the claim to superiority made by the Europeans coming to the Pacific. In this scene of “The Trio” he contrasts the industry and charity of the native crew with the idleness of the whites who are not beneficial to society in any way and whose “usefulness” is reduced to begging. Moreover, he indirectly criticizes the double morals of the Europeans who on the one hand boast Christian values but somehow fail to acknowledge them in relation to the native populace.

The hand of colonial administration, eager to be rid of the three men, appoints one of them captain of a merchant vessel bound for Sydney and suddenly transforms the outcasts into the representatives of the ruling society. Whatever their faults may have been before, with power Davis’s and Huish’s true natures are given a more prominent voice as they begin to domineer and tyrannize the native crew of the schooner *Farallone* thus creating a steep moral divide between

⁵⁰ First half of *The Ebb-Tide*, followed by “The Quartette”

⁵¹ “The place where whites lived and traded in the Pacific; also taken metonymically to mean the whites themselves.” (Stevenson, *South Sea Tales* 259) Also means “down and out”. (Jolly xiii)

themselves and Herrick who treats the crew with sympathy and politeness. Aboard the ship, as if viewed through a microscope, the two juxtaposed societies find an even more eloquent representation than on land: the whites Davis and Huish begin to drink their way through the ship's cargo of champagne, mismanage both the ship and its crew leaving their duties to the landsman Herrick who, disgusted by their behaviour, draws closer to the native crew.

The *haoles* (native word for the whites⁵²) of the *Farallone* treat the crew with brutality – threatening them with physical violence, oppressing them verbally and ignoring the very foundations of their allegedly superior European civilization. “Upon the Sunday [each of the native crew] brought forth his separate Bible ... each read or made believe to read his chapter ... and they would all join together in the singing of missionary hymns. It was thus a cutting reproof to compare the islanders and the whites aboard the *Farallone*.”⁵³ The whites openly neglect the Christian duties which the native crew honours, they fail to recognize the natives' names, some taken from the Bible, and give them scornful aliases – for instance, one of them who is called “Taveeta”, which is the island pronunciation of “David”, is thus dubbed “Uncle Ned”.

In “The Quartette” the simple rudeness of Huish and Davis are juxtaposed with the “silken brutality” of Attwater who behaves towards them with very open contempt, much unlike a gentleman. In spite of that, everything about him – from the snow white clothes, the picturesque island with a bright lagoon to Latin quotations from Virgil – attracts Herrick to this enigmatic man. However, *The Ebb-Tide* is strongly concerned with the contrast between the face of things and their true nature, and so we learn that the bright lagoon hides a graveyard where several dozen Attwater's native “souls” lie and that the spotless dress conceals a man who has first driven one of his natives to suicide through reprisals for someone else's shortcomings and who, when he realized the mistake, took God's justice in his hands by shooting the real culprit.

⁵² Jolly xiii

⁵³ Stevenson, *South Sea Tales* 168

The moral dilemma behind taking responsibility for the killing of a man is, indeed, something around which the larger part of “The Quartette” revolves. When Davis and Huish decide to get hold of Attwater’s treasure of pearls by violence and murder, it is Herrick who is faced with the choice between the lives of his ship comrades’ and Attwater’s and he must decide which party to support. Although Davis and Huish are generally presented as base and undeserving, Herrick still cannot bear the thought of sentencing them to death.

He considered the men. Attwater intrigued, puzzled, dazzled, enchanted and revolted him; alive, he seemed but doubtful good; and the thought of him lying dead was so unwelcome that it pursued him, like a vision, with every circumstance of colour and sound. Incessantly, he had before him the image of that great mass of man stricken down in various attitudes and with varying wounds... Next he considered Davis, with his thick-fingered, coarse-grained, oat-bread commonness of nature, his indomitable valour and mirth in the old days of their starvation, the endearing blend of his faults and virtues, the sudden shining forth of a tenderness that lay too deep for tears... No, death could not be suffered to approach that head even in fancy.⁵⁴

Allowing a man to be killed is literally inconceivable for Herrick. It is less so for Attwater who despite his fervent religious fatalism, or perhaps because of it, appears inhuman to Herrick as they speak in parables of the diving dress in which men descend into the world and which protects them from its evil. While Herrick suggests that this should be the diving dress of self-conceit or, better yet, self-respect, Attwater demands that it be God’s grace. In this scene we recognize a typically Stevensonian dilemma of the split between the blind faith in God, on the one hand, and the more human value of self-reliance and self-respect, on the other.

It is extremely interesting to see how Stevenson vents his own ambiguous attitude to religion in crafting Attwater’s character: here is a holy man who, on the one hand, kills one of his flock in an “eye-for-an-eye” act. But who, on the other, also honours Christian God’s union – in the role of a

⁵⁴ Stevenson, *South Sea Tales* 207-208

minister, he marries the sole female survivor of the island's small pox epidemic to a native servant to avoid sexual temptation. Herrick, in his turn, is more than surprised to see that marriage should work as an effective safeguard against adultery. To complement the mixed picture of Attwater's character we learn towards the end of the story that he is also able to find in himself a very Christian-like forgiveness for Davis who was plotting to murder him.

The contrasts of "The Quartette" are thus a lot less black and white than they initially seem. Although Davis and Huish are easily the villains of *The Ebb-Tide*, Attwater is presented as a morally complex character and the story does not leave us with a clear cut verdict with respect to the quality of being a virtuous gentleman. The dilemma of the conflict between social expectations and one's own authenticity is something that Stevenson had been exploring on and off ever since writing his first urban fiction pieces – and he did so most vividly in *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*.

5.3 "The Beach of Falesá"

While "The Beach of Falesá" does not make the exploitation of the natives by whites its explicit topic, it does explore other problems foreshadowed in *The Ebb-Tide*, such as the value of a human life, the legitimacy of certain means to becoming rich and the relationship to women (especially native ones). "The Beach of Falesá" is particularly interesting in that it is narrated by the protagonist Wiltshire, a white merchant with blatantly racist views. Since the reader is left to discover the truth about all of the events, as well as the characters, of the story through Wiltshire's preposterously narrow mind, the story becomes partially a moral satire on and a warning against the prevalent white supremacism of the nineteenth century. This direction of writing was to inspire other authors as well. As Roslyn Jolly writes in her superb introduction to *South Sea Tales*: "Stevenson foreshadows Conrad in his use of a narrator who is partly complicit with, partly critical of, and not fully conscious of his own place within, imperialism," and Wiltshire's "lack of self-awareness and his refusal to modify his preconceptions in the light of his experience make his narrative an unconscious satire on the

assumptions of racial and cultural superiority held by most of Stevenson's European contemporaries."⁵⁵

Shortly after his arrival on the island, Wiltshire complots with the leader of the beach Case to trick a young native girl Uma into marrying him. She is given a fake marriage certificate which is valid "for one night" and he is "at liberty to send her to hell next morning"⁵⁶. This is a hundred and eighty degrees opposite of the attitude to marriage shown by Attwater in *The Ebb-Tide*. The marital document of "The Beach of Falesá" caused Stevenson a lot of problems with his publishing house. The publishers asked him to leave it out from the manuscript and when he refused, they simply went ahead and printed the story without it – they were too afraid of the public outrage at the lack of morality contained in such statement. Incidents such as this one help explain why there had been so few female characters in Stevenson's fiction: Victorian reading public would, apparently, not tolerate uncensored depiction of real relationships between men and women, and so Stevenson avoided them altogether. "This is a poison bad world for the romancer, this Anglo-Saxon world; I usually get out of it by not having any women in it at all," Stevenson would write in one of his letters⁵⁷.

But above all, "The Beach of Falesá" is concerned with the value of money as weighed against happiness and the human life. The story's protagonist Wiltshire goes through a moral development in his relation towards his native wife, whom he originally wants to misuse, as well as in his general attitude to the island's inhabitants. These he strives to protect from Case's manipulating influence – which is where we come across Stevenson's juxtaposition of two characters who stand in a moral opposition again. Neither of the two men is a saint, however. Case manipulates the islanders through deus-ex-machina idolatry, he will not hesitate to kill a man who stands in his way to gain wealth but, on the other hand, in his last will he leaves all his effects to his native wife. Wiltshire, who throughout the story comes across as the more likeable and sympathetic of the two, discovers that

⁵⁵ Jolly xv

⁵⁶ Stevenson, *South Sea Tales* 11

⁵⁷ Jolly xx

the happiness of a married man is worth more than an immediate financial success but he is at the same time an outrageous racist and his original intent in coming to the island was to become rich at any cost to those around him. Moreover, at the end of the story, he kills Case. Here is where the moral dilemma of killing one's neighbour resurfaces again although this time in a rather different way than in *The Ebb-Tide* as it is Case who first tries to shoot Wiltshire dead – and Wiltshire is thus apparently in the right and kills in self-defence. This, of course, raises the question whether killing a man is moral even in such extreme circumstance as direct self-defence and whether forgiveness, required by Christianity (such as Attwater's), is even possible under such exceptional conditions.

5.4 Stevenson's view of missions

According to Stevenson the missions and missionaries represented at best a mixed blessing for the Pacific world. In *A Footnote to History* and "Father Damien" he was openly critical of the missionaries' practice of "cultural imperialism"⁵⁸, a policy of promoting European and American values and customs at the expense of the native ones; missionary activity was also frequently linked to the pursuit of "white" political interests which Stevenson found unacceptable and immoral.

The missionaries of "Something in It", *The Ebb-Tide* and "The Beach of Falesá" enabled Stevenson to explore the ways in which Christianity coped with the clash with other systems of beliefs and allowed him to examine his own understanding of religion.

The two conflicting views of life represented by the characters of Herrick and Attwater in *The Ebb-Tide* are symbolic of Stevenson's own indecision about religion⁵⁹ which dates back to his youth. On the one hand, he was deeply influenced by the Presbyterian education of his youth but he was, at the same time, repulsed by that religion's obstinacy and exposed to the free thinking of his artist friends. Such conflict would understandably leave Stevenson with a very ambivalent view of religion, and writing of fiction gave him an excellent opportunity to come to terms with it.

⁵⁸ Jolly xvii-xviii

⁵⁹ See page 8

5.5 Reception of Stevenson's late works

Stevenson's contemporaries failed, to greater or lesser extent, to appreciate his Pacific prose. In the eyes of the reading, as well as critical, public Stevenson was still the champion of a romantic novel. His essays such as "A Gossip on Romance", "A Note on Realism" and "A Humble Remonstrance" represented arguments, both elegant and eloquent, in defence of romance form against realism, and his plots of adventure and fantasy set a trend seemingly incompatible with the likes of *The Ebb-Tide* which took a sordidly critical view of imperialism and European civilization as a whole. While some of Stevenson's friends and associates were afraid that his literary reputation would suffer with the publication of the Pacific tales, their fears proved groundless. Stevenson's late works, with the exception of *Catriona* and *Weir of Hermiston* which were set in Scotland, were simply omitted in the period accounts of his works.⁶⁰

Oscar Wilde, who had Stevenson's earlier romances sent to him in gaol, would write about the later pieces that the romantic surroundings of Samoa proved the worst possible environment for a romantic novelist who would have been much better off in the dreary Scotland.⁶¹

Another hindrance to the popularity of the Samoan fiction would be its exotic locale. While Kipling's India was almost an intrinsic part of everyday British life, Samoa would be little known and thus of little concern to Stevenson's European readers.

What most critics, with few exceptions, did not see was the importance of this writing both in its self critical aspect (it was after all written by a European) as well as its explorative aspect. Stevenson was one of the first European writers to take such deep interest in aboriginal cultures not merely for their relation to his own cultural background but mainly for their own sake.

⁶⁰ Jolly xxx

⁶¹ Jolly xxix

6. Conclusion

In a way which both defined him as a writer and which he shared with some other novelists of the Victorian era, Robert Louis Stevenson explored in his fiction the contemporary middle class mores from the perspective of a double. The tradition of literary doubles had already been there when Stevenson wrote his "Markheim" and *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*; however, it was these two works that developed the fledgling sub-genre into a distinctively mature one. The foundation of and inspiration for these works is to be looked for in several varied sources. One of them is Stevenson's own split legacy of a man who was raised in the very pink of Presbyterianism but whose artistic ambitions and bohemian surroundings made him reconsider it. Another is the contrast between the ostentatious disgust caused him by middle class values and his own conscious, albeit unwilling, steady transference into the very environment which constituted them.

Victorian Britain was all aflame with the semi-scientific notion of man's dual character which was thought to hide, in its essence, a primitive *ego* governed solely by emotions and concealed behind the attractive façade of morality and civil manners. This psychological concept went straight against the received idea of evolution as described by Charles Darwin, and it suggested a reactionary movement – a resurgence of the "dark age" of humanity. The apprehensive Victorian public would prefer to obliterate this primitive inner self from its perception of human psyche. But, as we may read in "Lay Morals"⁶², Stevenson partly subscribed to this idea of conflicting, contradictory forces present in human character, and he suggested that man must try to reconcile these tendencies in order to live a content life of a mentally and spiritually healthy person. He vividly portrays his conclusions in both "Markheim" and *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* whose protagonists suffer mainly from their inability to acknowledge and reconcile their natures, their actions and their self-conceptions.

⁶² See page 12

In this thesis, however, I have made the decision to analyse not only the prose situated in the moral climate of the modern city but also those which deal with a society very remote, at least in geographical terms, from Victorian Britain. My decision was not based on the mere fact that these prose share similar structural devices with the urban fictions, such as the juxtaposition of two central characters who display contradictory values; but also, and more importantly, on the fact that they resemble the other texts in their concern with situations and conditions which pose complex challenges to the accepted and prescribed moral norms. In each of the four selected Stevenson's works a certain moral precept is subverted when theory clashes with the reality of inter-human relations.

The most prominent feature of all these texts is the opposition between the protagonist's self-conception and the reality of their deeds – Markheim, Jekyll, Herrick and Wiltshire all cherish (even if unconsciously) a certain ideal which they are, for various reasons, unable to attain. Their tragedy lies chiefly in the fact that they are not able to recognize and acknowledge the disparity between their inadequacies and their self-conception.

This dualism is frequently realized by mirroring of the protagonist in another character. The mirroring enables Stevenson to analyse the complexity of the protagonist's self and to develop his character over the course of the story. A prime example is to be found in "Markheim" where the protagonist undergoes a marked spiritual development when he is confronted by the visitor who serves as a mirror for his soul. But Stevenson is far less optimistic in his other works. In *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*, Jekyll is reluctant to condemn Hyde's deeds even until his last breath.

Another important aspect of all these works is the desire, often subconscious, for anonymity and exile in which responsibility for one's behaviour is alleviated. This longing for exile (which is not necessarily geographical) is conditioned by the fear of society's appraisal (Jekyll, Markheim, Herrick) and by, what I choose to call, "reputation anxiety" – a gentleman's preoccupation with his own good

name, and that of his associates (consider Utterson or Enfield), at the expense of genuine introspection.

Another grand conceit of these works is the ability (or inability) of man to connect, relate and apply larger-than-life moral precepts to his own behaviour. In the short stories and novellas discussed here, Stevenson often explores the protagonist's murderous conscience and invariably juxtaposes the, arguably, natural lack of remorse (Markheim, Hyde, Wiltshire, Attwater) with repentance imposed by society (Jekyll) or religion (Davis). The contrast between the authentic and the imposed is something Stevenson speaks of in the above mentioned "Lay Morals", and he reaches the conclusion that the inner and outer pressures must be balanced in order for the individual to survive.

Last of the recurring points of Stevenson's which I have chosen to emphasize here is the subversion of class (and race) expectations. A prime example may be seen in the overthrowing of the idea of an "atavistic criminal", the widespread Victorian notion which held criminals to be mentally backward or underdeveloped, and of lower class origin. Many of Stevenson's "criminals" (Markheim, Jekyll, Attwater, Herrick) are portrayed as highly intelligent and sensitive men from well-to-do middle class backgrounds. Likewise, many Stevenson's gentlemen possess qualities which are only arguably "gentlemanly" (Attwater, Jekyll or Enfield).

As Robert Louis Stevenson's main contribution to both English language and world literatures I see the emphasis on the authentic and natural human qualities and impulses which he defends against the oppression of prescribed social norms and values. Through a romantic depiction of the alternatives to the received idea of middle class life Stevenson sought not only to delight his readers but also to move them to avoid hypocrisy and find a balance which would let them come to terms with their inner selves and enable them to lead a less troubled life.

Despite his style which is distinctively nineteenth century, some of the literary devices and motives (especially in the highly experimental "Markheim") carry Stevenson over to the twentieth century in which he would find his admirers, among others, in Nabokov or Borges. His tragedy consists mainly in

the fact that his achievement has often been overlooked and forgotten because of his emphasis on the traditional plot-driven story writing, especially despised by his immediate literary followers, the modernists.

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8. České shrnutí

Tato bakalářská práce se zabývá analýzou mravních, společenských a psychologických otázek v díle skotského spisovatele Roberta Louise Stevensona, který je známý především svou novelou *Podivný případ doktora Jekylla a pana Hyda* a literaturou pro děti, například *Ostrovem pokladů* nebo *Černým šípem*. Tato studie se však zaměřuje pouze na díla nějakým způsobem zajímavá z morálního hlediska, jmenovitě na novely *Podivný případ doktora Jekylla a pana Hyda* (*The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*) a *Odliv* (*The Ebb-Tide*) a povídky „Markheim“ a „The Beach of Falesá“.

Robert Louis Stevenson se narodil roku 1850 do rodiny se silnými presbyteriánskými kořeny. Zároveň však z otcovy strany pocházel ze známé linie stavitelů pobřežních majáků a v jeho zázemí se tak mísily hluboké duchovní tradice s pokrokovým technickým smýšlením. Na přání svého otce Stevenson nastoupil na vysokou školu s úmyslem získat inženýrský diplom, ale studií po roce zanechal a přestoupil na práva. Svá studia sice úspěšně dokončil, ale právníckou profesí se nikdy nežil. Již za svých univerzitních let totiž každé prázdniny odjížděl do Francie, kde vyhledával společnost mladých umělců. Toto bohémského prostředí bylo v přímém rozporu s jeho, téměř bigotním, zázemím a kontrast těchto dvou protichůdných tendencí Stevensona poznamenal i do budoucna. Ve Francii se také seznámil se svou budoucí, o několik let starší a tehdy již vdanou, ženou Fanny a s jejím synem, s nímž měl později společně napsat několik povídek a knih. Stevenson se těšil jen velice chatrnému zdraví a v osmatřiceti letech se na radu lékařů přestěhoval do Samoy v Polynésii. Zpět do Velké Británie se už nikdy neměl čas vrátit, zemřel ve svém domě na Samoe v prosinci 1894.

Díla Roberta Louise Stevensona, o nichž pojednává tato studie, zkoumají různé společensko-mravní otázky především z perspektivy dvojí, či rozdvojené, osobnosti. Čtenáři se v nich často setkávají se dvěma ústředními postavami, které odrážejí rozdílné, či dokonce protichůdné, morální hodnoty a zpodobňují roztříštěnost osobnosti. V eseji „Lay Morals“ se dočteme, že Stevenson byl toho názoru, že v každém člověku existují protichůdné tendence – jedna má své kořeny v jeho přirozenosti a jedna je mu vnucena společností, v níž žije. Stevenson zde také říká, že každý z nás se musí pokusit tyto

tendence vyvážit a docílit tak vnitřní harmonie. To se v mnoha jeho dílech stává ústředním tématem a hlavním problémem – z pojednávaných děl se jedná o povídku „Markheim“ a novelu *Podivný případ doktora Jekylla a pana Hyda*. Na literárních příkladech Stevenson také dokazuje, jak zhoubné následky může takový nesoulad mezi dvěma aspekty osobnosti mít.

Stevenson měl s dvojitým životem do jisté míry vlastní zkušenost. Jeho hluboce nábožensky zaměřená výchova se v něm bila s uměleckými ambicemi a humanistickým pohledem na život. Navíc byl zapáleným kritikem povrchních mravů střední anglické společenské třídy – podnikatelů, doktorů, právníků a zástupců dalších kvalifikovaných povolání. Paradoxem však je, že díky úspěšnosti svých děl se sám stal členem této třídy. Tento rozpor si jasně uvědomoval, jak je patrné z mnoha jeho dopisů přátelům. Právě zde je možné hledat kořeny jeho „dvojnických“ próz. Stevenson ovšem využil otázky dvojího života k hlubšímu prozkoumání základů mravnosti jako takové a především rozporu mezi mravností upřímnou a společensky předpisovanou.

Takový přístup ke zkoumání etických otázek ovšem není ani Stevensonovou výsadou, ani vynálezem. Anglická literatura devatenáctého století zná hned několik spisovatelů, jejichž díla se vyznačují podobnou strukturou. Namátkou se jedná například o *Vyznání ospravedlněného hříšníka (The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner)* Jamese Hogga nebo o *Obraz Doriana Graye (The Picture of Dorian Gray)* Oscara Wilda.

Viktoriánská Anglie byla téměř posedlá pseudovědeckou představou, že uvnitř každého člověka se skrývá temné primitivní *ego*, které se snaží probít na svět skrz křehkou skořápku civilizovaného zevnějšku spořádaného občana. Anglická veřejnost se této představě jak děsila, tak jí byla skrytě přitahována, jak je vidět na úspěšnosti literárních děl podchycujících tento směr uvažování. Zmíněný populární, a do jisté míry především módní, postoj byl v přímém rozporu nejen s teorií evoluce Charlese Darwina, ale také s celkovým dobovým chápáním vývoje člověka a společnosti – zpochybňoval totiž představu vývoje lidí ve stále dokonalejší stvoření a do jisté míry nabourával tehdejší technicko-materialistický náhled na svět. Literatura věnující se tomuto tématu navazuje na

romantickou tradici a často nabírá podobu tzv. „gotického románu“, který stírá hranice mezi realitou a iluzí v zájmu snadnější a přímější komunikace mezi autorem a čtenářem. To je například dobře patrné u povídky „Markheim“, v níž vypravěč postupně opouští hranice reality a přenáší příběh do hrdinovy mysli symbolizované domem, v němž se děj odehrává.

Čtyři vybrané texty představují široké spektrum Stevensonovy tvorby – dva z nich jsou příběhy situované v mravním prostředí velkoměsta a jsou tak v samém srdci společnosti, pod jakýmsi sociálním drobnohledem; druhé dva jsou naopak situovány na samém „kraji světa“, na polynéských ostrovech, v prostředí, kde je vliv evropské společnosti a jejích mravních norem částečně potlačen. O to výrazněji zde na povrch vystupují vlastnosti jednotlivých postav. Stevenson je ovšem ani zdaleka neoproštuje od evropského civilizačního dědictví – ač se v jeho případě jedná o jednoznačně negativní pojem. Evropané ve Stevensonových očích přinášejí do Polynésie především svou povrchnost, své vzájemné neshody, neopodstatněnou nadřazenost a útlak. V novele *Odliv* jsou všechny ústřední postavy evropského (případně severoamerického) původu. Kontrast mezi hodnotami domorodého obyvatelstva a bělochů je v ní o mnoho zřetelnější (v neprospěch těch druhých) než v povídce „The Beach of Falesá“, v níž se na prominentní místo dostává domorodá žena vypravěče Wiltshira. Stevenson domorodé obyvatelstvo zbytečně neidealizuje a zobrazuje ho se všemi průvodními nešvary – především sklonem k pletichaření a lenosti. Jeho Evropané však ze srovnání vycházejí jednoznačně hůře.

V umístění svých společenských dramát na samé okraje „civilizovaného“ světa nachází Stevenson spřízněné téma například s Kiplingem, Forsterem nebo Conradem – na rozdíl od nich se však ve svých prózách soustředí především na problémy domorodého obyvatelstva (ač ty ustupují právě ve dvou pojednávaných dílech na pozadí) a nevyužívá exotického prostředí pouze pro vyhranění evropských společensko-mravních a politických témat.

Navzdory určitému stupni rozdílnosti jsou všechna čtyři díla spojena několika ústředními motivy. Snad nejdůležitějším takovým motivem je nesoulad mezi představou hrdinů o sobě samém (jedná se

bez výjimky o muže) a jejich skutky. Každý z nich – Markheim, Jekyll, Herrick i Wiltshire – má jistý idealizovaný pohled na sebe sama, který je v příkrém rozporu s realitou. Jejich zásadní tragédie spočívá v neschopnosti tento nesoulad rozeznat a smířit se s ním. Jekyll například není schopen uvědomit si, že on i Hyde jsou jedno tělo a jedna mysl a že jeho neustálá snaha ospravedlnit své činy tím, že z nich obviní Hyda coby cizího člověka, je vlastně pokryteckým činem. Markheim pak obdobně není schopen prohlédnout přes závoj lichotivé představy o sobě samém a dosáhnout hlubšího pochopení sebe sama, dokud není vyprovokován záhadným „návštěvníkem“, který nastaví zrcadlo jeho duši.

Dalším ústředním tématem, které do značné míry souvisí s výše zmíněným, je snaha ústředních postav vyhnout se odpovědnosti za své činy. Exil hledají Stevensonovi hrdinové nejen v exotickém prostředí (v případě Davise, Herricka, Attwatera či Wiltshira), ale také fantastičtěji v uměle vytvořených bytostech, jako je Hyde. Ve všech případech se ovšem jedná o pokus o útěk před sebou samým, před svědomím a před hodnotícím zrakem společnosti. Tím se dostáváme k dalšímu důležitému bodu, který je jedním z ústředních témat především *Podivného případu doktora Jekylla a pana Hyda*, a to sice strachu a péči o svou dobrou pověst. Ta pak v pokrouceném dobovém chápání nabývá větší platnosti než samotné skutky „gentlemana“. Snaha o uchování dobrého jména je místy znázorňována až jako chorobná – například u Uttersona, který se snaží zachovat dobré jméno přítele a klienta, nebo u Enfielda, který se za úplatu zaváže očistit Hydovo jméno (nebo jej přinejmenším nevystavit veřejnému skandálu) poté, co jej přistihne, jak šlape po malém děvčeti.

Jiným společným motivem těchto děl je schopnost (či spíše neschopnost) člověka vztáhnout si obecné mravní předpisy na sebe a uplatnit je na své vlastní chování. Ve zkoumaných dílech například Stevenson často poukazuje na absenci lítosti v myslích vrahů. Vyostřuje tím kontrast mezi vnucenou lítostí a pokáním (například u Davise v *Odlivu*) a téměř zvířecou absencí slitování (u Markheima či Hyda). U Markheima je navíc zajímavé porovnat reakci na obraz vraždy a realitu zabití člověka – zatímco samotné násilí jej nechává chladným, při pohledu na obraz se rozplácne. Stevenson tím

ukazuje na výrazný rozdíl mezi dopadem obecné mravní výchovy a skutečným osvojením mravních hodnot.

Posledním z důležitých ústředních témat je Stevensonovo zpochybnění zažitých mravních stereotypů. Ve Velké Británii devatenáctého století byla často představa zločince spojována s fyzickou i mentální zaostalostí (proto je Hyde zobrazován jako ohyzdný). Stevensonovi „zločinci“ a provinilci proti mravním zákonům jsou ovšem snad bez výjimky velice inteligentní a pocházejí z dobrých poměrů (Jekyll, Attwater, Herrick). Navzdory svým pochybnostem se však stávají buďto pachateli nebo komplici zločinů. Obdobně Stevenson zpochybňuje i představu viktoriánského „gentlemana“ – čelní představitelé pojednávaných děl často skrývají povahové vlastnosti neslučitelné s tímto ideálem (Jekyll, Attwater).

Hlavním Stevensonovým přínosem anglické literatuře je bezpochyby důraz na lidskou přirozenost a její obhajoba proti společenskému tlaku. Pomocí romantického znázornění světa ukazuje Stevenson svým čtenářům, pocházejícím převážně ze středních tříd, alternativy k životu řízenému pokryteckými měšťáckými ideály. Ve svých dílech říká především to, že řešení mnoha společensko-mravních problémů spočívá ve sjednocení dvou protichůdných tendencí: přirozenosti a konformity.

Stevensonův literární přínos byl po první světové válce na dlouhou dobu zapomenut, a to především přičiněním modernistů, kteří jeho dílo odmítali kvůli přílišnému důrazu na dějovost a hodnoty vyprávění, které považovali za přežitě, zastaralé a překonané. I přes toto zhodnocení si troufám říci, že Stevenson je v mnoha ohledech, a to především motivy svých próz, moderním spisovatelem, jehož odkaz patří ve světové literatuře na čelní místo.