

Duality in Stevenson's *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* and Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray*: A Comparative Study

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Abstract

This study compares the concept of duality in two classic works of late Victorian literature: Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* and Robert Louis Stevenson's *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*. The study examines how both writers depict the moral and psychological tensions between inward transgression and external respectability, mirroring the larger social concerns of the Victorian age. The paper investigates how Stevenson and Wilde challenge these standards through their narratives, which are rooted in the cultural context of rigid moral rules and oppressive societal norms. While Wilde explores the underlying decay of the soul through symbolic deterioration in art, Stevenson employs literal bodily transformation to illustrate duality. Both novels emphasize the dangers of repressing one's darker desires and the consequences of living behind façade of virtue, despite their divergent approaches. The findings show that duality serves as both a thematic issue and a lens through which Victorian concerns about identity, morality, and the unconscious are conveyed. The study indicates that the authors' depictions of the divided-self provide long-term insights into the psychological and cultural tensions of the time. Furthermore, the study stresses the works' ongoing relevance in questions of moral ambiguity and the performative aspect of identity. Future studies may benefit from using interdisciplinary approaches, such as gender studies or postcolonial theory, to investigate how the topic of duality links with broader Victorian and contemporary social concerns.

Keywords: duality, Victorian morality, the divided self, identity, Gothic literature

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Introduction

The theme of duality appears frequently in late Victorian literature. Individualism, personal identity, and reflection were becoming increasingly important in both society and literature at the time. As the Romantic era's foundations matured, late Victorians were increasingly preoccupied with the complexity of the self and the hidden parts of human identity. Baumeister (1987) contends that Victorian society's high moral standards not only resulted in widespread repression, but also encouraged self-deception and hypocrisy.¹ These societal expectations caused inner conflict, confusion, and self-scrutiny, which frequently revealed a hidden or repressed “second-self.”²

One may argue that dualism, or “the condition or state of being dual or consisting of two parts,” piqued the Victorians' attention even as society looked to become more deceitful. This is evidenced by the growing quantity of writing on morality and its manifestations in both good and evil (Hedlund, 2015). The concept of duality enables contemporary readers to investigate both popular late Victorian culture and late Victorian literature. Readers can see this connection by analyzing literary masterpieces such as *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* and *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. Even though duality was prominent in late Victorian literature, the concept of duality was not widely embraced during that time. Duality is a term that describes a scenario in which two concepts, qualities, or aspects of something are opposed or contrasted. The phrase “duo,” which meaning “two” in Latin, is the origin of dualism.

Duality refers to two related but essentially different notions (McDonald, 2008). In literature, it is sometimes depicted as a psychological or moral divide, allowing authors to explore the conflicts inherent in human nature. While dualism has philosophical and religious roots, it regained popularity in Victorian culture, where the conflict between societal standards and personal impulses was especially stark. This cultural background is vital for understanding Robert Louis Stevenson's *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1886) and Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1891), which exhibit the topic of duality. *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* was written by Robert Louis Stevenson and published in 1886. Born in 1850, Robert Louis Stevenson was a Scottish novelist and short story writer. While being an effective advocate, he worked as a writer. He experimented with alcohol, cannabis, and opium and suffered from tuberculosis on a regular basis. His gloomy and spooky stories, such as *Thrawn Janet* and *Markheim*, as well as his sensual adventure novels, *Treasure Island* and *Kidnapped*, are well-known. Robert Louis Stevenson's exploration of duality in *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* is strongly influenced by his early life experiences. This includes the religious upbringing he received from his childhood nurse, Alison Cunningham, also known as “Cummy.” Cummy, a devoted Calvinist, fed Stevenson on grim tales of sin, damnation, and eternal punishment from a young age, as mentioned in Jenni Calder's *Robert Louis Stevenson: A Life Study*, “She condemned dramatically the works of the devil... and fed Louis on a literary diet of the Bible and the more vivid and bloody stories of religious dedication and martyrdom” (Calder, 1980, p. 32). Stevenson's imagination was triggered by both terror and fascination—he would lie awake at night, captivated by Hell-related visions, his body “convulsed with agony.” These early tensions between moral purity and sinful temptation

¹ Victorian moral rules placed a strong emphasis on chastity, restraint, and public decorum, frequently requiring people to hide their private impulses or socially unacceptable behavior, as noted in works by Michel Foucault and Peter Gay.

² The notion of the “second-self” is often associated with psychoanalytic theory, particularly Freud's model of the unconscious, where repressed desires form an alternate internal identity that may eventually surface through dreams or behavior.

would later manifest themselves in Dr. Jekyll's divided brain and Mr. Hyde's atrocious alter ego, "I would not only lie awake to weep for Jesus... I remember repeatedly... waking from a dream of Hell... my body convulsed with agony" (Calder, 1980, p. 32). In addition to forming Stevenson's moral imagination, this enduring intertwining of dread, guilt, and the attraction of the forbidden had a direct impact on the creation of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, as Claire Harman explains. Harman claims that Stevenson literally dreamed the core transformation scenario and woke up with such intensity that his wife remembered him yelling while he was asleep. Fanny Stevenson illustrated the story first in a letter to Stevenson's biographer Graham Balfour in 1899, "Louis wrote Jekyll and Hyde with great rapidity on the lines of his dream.... I was wakened by cries of horror from him." He later claimed how "in a dream I had a fine bogey tale,"³ and within days, he feverishly wrote the first draft, powered by that vivid subconscious vision (Harman, 2005, p. 295). In an interview, given to a reporter of New York Herald in 1887, Stevenson described the dream he had, "For instance, all I dreamed about Dr Jekyll was that one man being pressed into a cabinet, when he swallowed a drug and changed into another being" (Harman, 2005, p. 298). These factors, which had their roots in Victorian societal anxiety as well as psychological distress, influenced Stevenson's most enduring writing. The novel is a potent allegory of the divided self because of its examination of duality, which mirrors both personal suffering and the oppressive morals of the time. Victorian society was characterized by a rigid moral code that placed a strong emphasis on religious piety and external decorum, yet underlying this façade were widespread concerns about hidden depravity, urban crime, and moral decay (Ledger & Luckhurst, 2000). These early influences combined with Stevenson's keen psychological insight and creative imagination resulted in a work that effectively examines the duality of human nature. This concept serves as the foundation for this investigation and is crucial to *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*. A horrific examination of humanity's dual nature—the ongoing struggle between the suppressed, darker impulses and the socially acceptable self—is shown in *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*. By turning Dr. Jekyll into Mr. Hyde, Stevenson makes this battle apparent and demonstrates how each person is a manifestation of opposing forces. As Jekyll confesses, "man is not truly one, but truly two" (Stevenson, 2003, p. 48). He further reflects, "All human beings, as we meet them, are commingled out of good and evil" (Stevenson, 2003, p. 49), acknowledging the inherent moral conflict in every person. This inner tension deepens as Jekyll admits, "I was slowly losing hold of my original and better self, and becoming slowly incorporated with my second and worse" (Stevenson, 2003, p. 55). Stevenson examines the thin line separating civility and barbarism and criticizes the moral rigidity and hypocrisy of Victorian society through these findings.

The Picture of Dorian Gray is written by Oscar Wilde and published in 1891. Oscar Wilde is an Irish playwright, writer, and poet who was born in 1854. He is well-known for his witty remarks, flamboyant demeanor, and support of aestheticism, which holds that art should be appreciated for its aesthetic qualities rather than its moral or political messages. Wilde became a disciple of Walter Pater while studying at Oxford, whose ideas on aesthetic pleasure had a profound influence on his intellectual life.⁴ This idea is embodied in Wilde's only novel, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, which examines issues of youth, beauty, and the corruption of

³ Dreams are frequently used as a gateway to the subconscious in literature, particularly Gothic fiction. Stevenson's use of a dream as creative inspiration reflects this psychological foundation.

⁴ Walter Pater's *Studies in the History of the Renaissance* (1873) emphasized "art for art's sake," which had a considerable impact on Wilde's embrace of aestheticism and rejection of moral didacticism.

soul. In his private life, Wilde was involved in a secret homosexual identity⁵ that opposed to Victorian moral standards, despite his public persona as a pleasant and intelligent individual. In his book *Oscar Wilde*, Richard Ellmann claims that “Wilde saw his own image in Dorian Gray's vanity and Lord Henry's cynicism” (Ellmann, 1988, p. 321), implying a personal investment in the moral and psychological complexity of the work. This novel's foundation is deeply rooted in Wilde's own experiences and cultural context. The aesthetic movement which was championed by Wilde, placed more emphasis on personal pleasure and physical experience than on religious or utilitarian morals. Wilde famously stated in the novel's preface, “There is no such thing as a moral or an immoral book. Books are well written, or badly written. That is all” (Wilde, 2003, p. xv), a statement questioned the prevalent Victorian belief that art must have a moral function. Dorian Gray, a character who maintains exterior innocence while concealing a decaying portrait that reveals his actual personality, embodies Wilde's obsession with duplicity, image, and performance in its most unsettling form. This concept arose during a dinner conversation, when Wilde reportedly told a friend that he wanted to write a story “about a man who never grows old” (Ellmann, 1988, p. 296), which evolved into a Gothic tale about the price of hedonism and self-deception. Wilde's use of duality in the work reflects the contradictory nature of Victorian society, which idealized restraint while being tormented by hidden vice. As Dorian admits, “I've grown to love secrecy. It seems to be the one thing that can make modern life mysterious or marvelous” (Wilde, 2003, p. 87). The obsession with secrecy, surface, and self-indulgence leads to Dorian's eventual downfall, as represented by the horrific transformation of his portrait. The narrator claims, “It was his beauty that had ruined him, his beauty and the youth that he had prayed for” (Wilde, 2003, p. 137). These dualities between appearance and reality, virtue and vice, soul and self—are central to Wilde's Criticism of Victorian hypocrisy and the human tendency for self-destructive behavior. The duality at the core of *The Picture of Dorian Gray* represents both Wilde's personal struggles and the moral dilemmas of the time. Wilde's novel captures this cultural contradiction of Victorian England was ruled by rigorous social standards but beneath were deep fears about moral decay, making it into a timeless exploration of the self. The internal conflict in *Dorian Gray* is a literary reflection of the dual identities that many people were forced to maintain in a morally repressive society, making the novel a Gothic horror story as well as a psychological study and cultural critique.

Given the context, this study aims to conduct a comparative analysis the novels, *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* by Robert Louis Stevenson and *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, focusing on how the theme of duality is explored in both novels. By analyzing the moral dilemmas and internal conflicts of the characters, this study seeks to uncover how the authors depict the divided self, a concept that is closely linked to the social, religious, and psychological tensions of the Victorian era. This study aims to explore how dualism serves as a wider reflection of the hypocrisy and suppression that define Victorian morality, in addition to serving as a personal psychological struggle inside the characters. The paper seeks to reveal how Stevenson and Wilde challenge the moral rigidity of their era and highlight the negative effects of repressing one's darker tendencies behind a respectable exterior by using this comparative viewpoint.

⁵ Wilde's 1895 prosecutions for “gross indecency” resulting from his homosexual relationships marked a turning point in both his personal life and public perception, demonstrating the societal Cost of deviation from Victorian conventions.

Research Framework and Analysis

A considerable number of studies have been carried out on *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* and *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, each offering different critical perspectives. One such contribution is by Marte B. Sørensen (2012) dissertation titled *Places of Evil in Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde and The Picture of Dorian Gray* explores the evolving desire for evil in both Dorian and Jekyll. She argues that these characters' descent into immorality reflects a deeper conflict between good and evil—an eternal question that humanity continues to grapple with. Whether approached from a religious, philosophical, or psychological standpoint, the definitions of good and evil remain contested, yet the concept of binary opposites—such as good versus evil, hero versus villain, or heaven versus hell—remains central to human understanding (Sørensen, 2012).

Caroline Hedlund, in her dissertation *The Split Human Mind and the Portrayal of Good and Evil in Robert Louis Stevenson's Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde and The Picture of Dorian Gray*, discusses the repression of Victorian morality. According to her, the strict moral standards of the era led to self-deception and hypocrisy, which are reflected in the psychological fragmentation of the characters (Hedlund, 2015). Similarly, Romy Van Luling's research *The Evil Within: A Critical Analysis of the Figure of the Double* analyzes the role of the double in Gothic fiction through a psychoanalytical lens. Her study includes Stevenson's and Wilde's works, alongside Poe's "William Wilson," and considers the double as a symbol of internal psychological division. Another relevant work is Dr. Santosh Vishwanath Bhagat's dissertation *Exploring the Dual Nature of Humanity in Gothic Literature: A Comparative Analysis*. Bhagat examines classic Gothic texts such as *Frankenstein*, *Jekyll and Hyde*, and *Dorian Gray*, emphasizing how Gothic literature often grapples with opposites—light and dark, good and evil, sanity and madness. He argues that these dualities mirror societal anxieties and the internal struggles faced by individuals during the time these novels were written (Bhagat, 2023). Lauren McDonald's dissertation *Duality in Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, The Picture of Dorian Gray, and Dionea* also investigates the dual nature of the human mind through these three narratives. Her work reflects the shared literary concern with psychological fragmentation and hidden desires beneath a polished surface (McDonald, 2008). However, while these dissertations have explored duality in one or both novels, none of them conducts a focused comparative study of *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* and *The Picture of Dorian Gray* alone. This paper fills that gap by examining how both protagonists—Jekyll and Dorian—lead double lives, struggling between public morality and private desire.

This study uses a qualitative textual analysis approach to investigate the issue of duality in Robert Louis Stevenson's *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* and Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. The research is based on comparative literary analysis, enriched by a psychoanalytic framework, with a focus on Freudian and Jungian views of the human psyche and its inherent conflicts. The selected texts were chosen for their shared thematic concern with humanity's dual nature, their Victorian socio-cultural setting, and their long-term value in literary studies. Both stories explore the concept of the divided self, with protagonists who hide their darker impulses beneath socially acceptable facades. This makes them ideal for a focused comparative analysis. The primary texts are closely examined, with an attention on character development, symbolism, narrative structure, and theme expression. The psychoanalytical lens allows for a thorough investigation of internal tensions, repression, and identity development. The psychological dualities portrayed by Dr. Jekyll and Dorian Gray are interpreted using concepts such as Freud's id, ego, and superego, as well as Jung's theory of the "shadow self." The secondary sources of information are Robert Louis Stevenson and

Oscar Wilde's writings, relevant websites, books, research articles etc. For better ideas of the research, the researcher studied some of the research papers prepared by the teachers and students of literature of different universities from home and abroad.

This study uses Sigmund Freud's structural model of the mind (id, ego, and superego) to investigate the characters' psychological dualism. Dr. Jekyll's transition into Mr. Hyde symbolizes the id's dominance over the ego and superego. Hyde represents Jekyll's repressed urges and instincts, behaving without moral constraint and engaging in violence. The story depicts Jekyll's inner conflict as his "better self" is gradually replaced by the darker, unconscious half of his psyche. The id is also foregrounded in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, when Dorian descends into hedonism, motivated by Lord Henry's ideals. His ego and superego, as represented by Basil's moral gaze and society, are increasingly subdued. The portrait becomes a representation of Dorian's damaged inner self, carrying the consequences of his actions while his outside appearance remains unchanged. This represents the loss of his moral consciousness and the unchecked dominance of desire. Carl Jung's theory of the shadow self-enhances the analysis. In both novels, the characters hide unwanted characteristics behind a socially acceptable image. Mr. Hyde and Dorian's portraits serve as symbolic representations of the repressed shadow, revealing the terrible sides they deny. Jekyll's inability to integrate his shadow leads to his destruction, whereas Dorian's denial of his own self causes moral collapse. Through Jung's lens, the narratives warn against repressing the unconscious and highlight the psychological cost of maintaining a divided self.

This comparative analysis reveals that both Robert Louis Stevenson's *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* and Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* explore duality as a fundamental component of human nature. The novels use their protagonists to show the psychological tension between moral restraint and secret desire, as well as the fatal consequences of indulging or concealing the darker self. Duality is externalized in *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* by physically separating the respectable Dr. Jekyll from his murderous alter ego, Mr. Hyde. Stevenson depicts this divide as an experiment to liberate Jekyll from the burden of constant self-denial, allowing him to indulge his instincts without shame. As Jekyll puts it, "I felt younger, lighter, happier in body... an unknown but not an innocent freedom of the soul" (Stevenson, 2003, p. 58). However, the experience of liberation is temporary. Hyde becomes stronger and more uncontrollable, and Jekyll admits, "I was gradually losing grip of my original and better self, becoming slowly incorporated with my second and worst" (Stevenson, 2003, p. 59). This deterioration reinforces Stevenson's point that attempting to separate good and evil within oneself is both unnatural and dangerous. Stevenson also emphasizes Jekyll's moral conflict through his growing terror of Hyde: "This momentary condescension to evil had left on the soul an imprint of deformity and decay" (Stevenson, 2003, p. 60). The farther Jekyll delves into Hyde's identity, the more he loses his autonomy and moral clarity.

In contrast, Wilde depicts duality not through bodily transformation, but through the symbolic presence of Dorian Gray's portrait. Dorian remains externally beautiful and charming, but his image reveals hints of moral degradation. In the novel, Dorian expresses his envy for the painting: "I am jealous of everything whose beauty does not die..." "I would give my soul for that!" (Wilde, 2003, p. 28). As he descends into vice and cruelty, the painting transforms into "a visible symbol of the degradation of sin," with "the touch of cruelty round the warped lips" (Wilde, 2003, p. 105). Despite his awful crimes, Dorian maintains his pristine appearance, illustrating society's indifference to inner corruption when external charm is maintained. His vanity deepens as he delights in the contrast: "Behind every exquisite thing that existed, there was something tragic" (Wilde, 2003, p. 39). Wilde uses this to critique

aestheticism's dark underside—beauty as a mask for moral decay. Both characters defy the constraints of traditional morality, Jekyll through scientific means and Dorian through supernatural wish fulfillment. Jekyll's potion allows him to explore his “evil twin” without consequences, but this illusion of control crumbles when Hyde takes over: “The brief condescension to my evil finally destroyed the balance of my soul” (Stevenson, 2003, p. 61). Dorian's quest for eternal youth frees him from external consequences but not from internal guilt, as shown in his desperate reflection: “It would kill this monster soul-life...and without its hideous warnings, he would be at peace” (Wilde, 2003, p. 159). Despite their divergent paths—Jekyll's in science, Dorian's in aesthetics and mysticism—both characters end in self-destruction. Jekyll dies trapped by the evil he attempted to isolate; Dorian destroys the image containing his soul, thereby destroying himself. Despite their divergent paths, Jekyll's in science, Dorian's in aesthetics and mysticism, both characters end in self-destruction. Jekyll dies, trapped by the evil he attempted to isolate; Dorian destroys the image containing his soul, thereby destroying himself. Furthermore, both novels criticize Victorian society's emphasis on appearances and repression. Jekyll maintains his reputation while secretly engaging in immoral acts. Despite the rumors, Dorian remains an admirable character. According to Basil Hallward, “Sin is a thing that writes itself across a man's face...the droop of his eyelids, the moulding of his hands even” (Wilde, 2003, p. 134). However, society ignores it in favor of beauty and charm.

To summarize, Stevenson and Wilde show that man's duality cannot be simply separated or hidden. Attempting to do so merely empowers the repressed ego, with irreversible consequences. Their writings are not simply gothic tales of horror and fascination, but also psychological and social criticisms on the risks of rejecting one's true humanity.

Conclusion

This comparative study has investigated the representation of duality in Robert Louis Stevenson's *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* and Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, focusing on how both authors explore the inner conflict between outer respectability and internal transgression. According to the findings, both works use duality not just as a literary device, but also to portray inner psychological challenges and Victorian society's oppressive moral atmosphere. While Stevenson's *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* depicts the dangers of suppressed desires by means of the physical and literal transformation of the divided self, Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* offers a more subtle but equally powerful portrayal, in which the corruption of the soul is symbolized by the portrait, enabling Dorian to keep up an appearance of virtue while indulging in vice. Although their methods of representing duality differ, Stevenson uses bodily metamorphosis and Wilde uses symbolic art, both authors eventually convey the same critical message: a sharp critique of the Victorian double standards that forced people to hide their true selves behind facades of morality and respectability. This study emphasizes that the search of moral perfection frequently results in the sacrifice of personal integrity, exposing the hypocrisy and self-deception generated by strict societal norms. The concept of duality thus serves as a lens through which Victorian fears about identity, morality, and the unconscious are revealed. The findings of this study imply that these narratives are still significant in considerations of psychological suppression, moral ambiguity, and the performative nature of identity, even in modern circumstances. They also help us comprehend how literature can reflect and critique the cultural and psychological dynamics of the period. This work provides a foundation for future research, particularly in investigating a broader range of Victorian writings to discover how duality appears across genres and writers. Incorporating interdisciplinary perspectives

such as gender studies, postcolonial theory, or queer theory, could also help us understand how the concept of the divided-self links with other social and cultural issues of the Victorian period.

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Declaration of Generative AI and AI-Assisted Technologies in the Writing Process

As the author of this work, I used generative AI technology (specifically ChatGPT by OpenAI) to assist with certain aspects of the research writing process. This included tasks such as refining language, guiding formatting, managing references, and clarifying academic conventions. However, all critical thinking, textual analysis, interpretation, and the development of arguments were carried out independently by me. I did not rely on AI to generate original ideas or conduct any form of analysis. Its use was strictly supportive, and at no point did it compromise the academic integrity or originality of my research.

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Appendices

Appendix A

Comparative Table: Themes and Motifs in the Two Novels

Element	<i>Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde</i>	<i>The Picture of Dorian Gray</i>
Central Theme	Duality of human nature	Duality of appearance and reality
Gothic Elements	Transformation, horror, secret experiments	Decay of the soul, supernatural portrait
Role of Science	Moral conflict through science	Corruption through supernatural means
Setting	Victorian London	Victorian London
Psychological Conflict	Repression vs. indulgence	Morality vs. aestheticism
Symbol of Duality	Jekyll/Hyde as two personas	Portrait vs. real Dorian

Appendix B

Timeline of Key Publications and Events

Year	Event
1886	Publication of <i>The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde</i>
1890	First publication of <i>The Picture of Dorian Gray</i> (in <i>Lippincott's Magazine</i>)
1891	Revised and expanded version of <i>Dorian Gray</i> published as a book
1980	Calder publishes <i>Robert Louis Stevenson: A Life Study</i>
1987	Baumeister publishes study on the self in <i>Journal of Personality and Social Psychology</i>
1988	Ellmann publishes <i>Oscar Wilde</i> biography
2003	Penguin and Barnes & Noble reprints of the two novels