

Individual Psychology in the Analysis of Literature: Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*

PAUL PLOTKE
London, England

I. INTRODUCTION

On November 13, 1851, Robert Louis Stevenson was born in Edinburgh, Scotland, to live for only forty-four years. In commemorating this centennium, we wish to demonstrate how Individual Psychology may be applied in the understanding of both writers and their creations by an examination of the story of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde.

Individual Psychology is a scientific understanding of human behavior. The corresponding German term "*Menschenkenntnis*" was used by Adler as a title for the most popular and systematic of his works. In contrast to some of the more academic psychological investigations of memory, learning, and thinking, Individual Psychology studies living beings and what they are doing with these functions.

Let us briefly consider Adler's notion of the inferiority feeling. Is this an element of the psyche, a thing in itself? Would it be useful to express it quantitatively? First, we clarify its origin, understanding it as a reflection of the real world in our brain. This feeling mirrors an inferiority, physical or social, which a given person possesses. An inferiority feeling can occur only when one compares oneself with others or with a task before him. Then we observe that it transforms itself and undergoes a metamorphosis. As white is not always white but can be perceived under certain conditions as grey or black, as the noise which a beginner makes on a musical instrument may change through training and take on a musical quality, so our inferiority feeling becomes transformed into something else. We cannot tolerate the inferiority feeling and in fact we transform it into a striving for compensation. So it becomes the force which drives us on whether we are aware of it or not. With courage, it leads us to efficiency and happiness; with lack of courage it becomes a pathological complex culminating in sterile behavior. So we observe the entire and unique individual in his movement from inferiority toward real or imagined superiority. This

* Paper read before the Adlerian Society of Great Britain, November 30, 1950.

movement, which we also call the dynamics of the individual, provides the meaning for each detail of behavior and permits us to interpret it. To interpret a particular aspect of behavior, be it a tic, dream, disorderliness, laziness, or forgetting, it is necessary to understand it in the context of the whole person and his individual movement.

Individual Psychology teaches that we select a personality ideal in order to compensate for our most strongly felt inferiorities. This ideal determines all the details of our behavior which form the life style. We may see ourselves as a great hero or martyr, as a powerful man or a brilliant one, as one who dominates through kindness or weakness. Whatever guiding ideal we choose forms the general pattern and gives uniformity and constancy to all the details of our behavior. We train ourselves towards the goal we have chosen in waking as well as in dreaming by day or by night. We hold that it is not any particular element of our mind, not heredity nor environment, which determines our personality; but that rather our whole I, our Ego, calls forth as much intelligence, emotions, will, etc., as is in accordance with our goal, with our personality-ideal. What does not suit us is not even perceived correctly; and it may be that in certain situations a person acts, from the wrong ideal, very intelligently, even when he plays the fool.

In his most important book, *The Practice and Theory of Individual Psychology*, Adler summed up this point: "It can be demonstrated that all psychic activities are given a direction by means of a previously determined goal. All the temporary and partially visible objectives (after the short period of psychic development of childhood) are under the domination of an imagined terminal goal, of a final point felt and conceived of as definitely fixed. In other words the psychic life of man is made to fit into the fifth act like a character drawn by a good dramatist."

With these last words about the dramatist who creates his characters so that they logically meet the events of the fifth act, Adler hints at the often stated fact that good dramatists and novelists are outstanding among those people who understand the behavior of man—his uniqueness, his wholeness, his dynamics. Adler said, for instance, that Shakespeare possessed greater insight into the human soul or psyche than have the best psychologists of our days, including Freud, against whose interpretation of *Hamlet*, based upon the Oedipus Complex, one can find a polemic footnote in Adler's first great work, *The Neurotic Character*.

There is this essential difference between the poet and the man of science—the poet's intuitive understanding of human behavior ends with him. He leaves his creations to be admired and to be used as illustrations by non-intuitive psychologists. With Adler, however, the science of understanding human behavior has become a complete system which can be taught and learned—and often misunderstood.

It was in 1912, in a lecture delivered in Vienna, that Adler used his science for the first time to interpret a novel. This lecture, "Individual-psychological Remarks on Alfred Berger's *Hofrat Eysenhardt*" has become chapter XXII of the already mentioned work, *The Practice and Theory of Individual Psychology*. Also in the same volume appears the paper on Dostoevsky which Adler read in 1918 in Zurich. With all his admiration for Shakespeare whom he often quoted, Adler never gave us a systematic study of this dramatic genius; but his pupils have done so. In the volumes of the *Zeitschrift für Individual-psychologie*, which has been published since 1914, there are numerous studies of the lives and works of important figures in world literature. One finds among them Rousseau, Nietzsche, Gogol, Kleist, Milton, Ibsen, Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Schiller, and Thomas Mann. One finds there studies of old French epic works as well as the behavior of beautiful *Kriemhild* in *The Lay of the Niebelungen*.

The analysis of *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* is but another example of the utilization of the methods of Individual Psychology in the interpretation of literary productions. It would certainly be valuable if we possessed knowledge of the life-style of Stevenson but since this is not available, we shall now turn to the study of his creation, Dr. Henry Jekyll.

II. DR. JEKYLL AND MR. HYDE

Bartholomeo Belvidéro, in a story by Balzac, produced a liquor which, when spread over a man who had just died, gave him back life and youth. Griffin, in H. G. Wells' famous novel, found a method of making himself invisible, keeping, however, his physical substance. And Dr. Jekyll, Robert L. Stevenson's hero, compounded a drug capable of transforming him into another man, Mr. Hyde, who, at will, could become the doctor again.

These fictions, like similar creations which preceded them, have roused the interest and wonder of innumerable readers, of whom many may have been unfavorably impressed by the tragic end of the

stories. The shameful death of all these imaginary heroes is, however, fundamentally true to life and ranks their creators among the great intuitive psychologists of the past hundred years.

Belvidéro, Griffin, and Jekyll have in common a keen desire to go beyond human limits and to obtain for themselves such qualities as immortality, invisibility, and irresponsibility. Indeed, Belvidéro says at a certain moment: "God? that is I!" Adler has indicated in his book, *The Nervous Character*, that "striving after godlikeness" is characteristic of neurotics; we see now more clearly the warning which such stories contain for us: Keep to common sense! Find your security and your greatness in helping your fellow men who are as limited as you! And, parenthetically be it said: What is the significance of so many tragic Shakespearean heroes, if not the condemnation of their criminal striving for power over men?

Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde is a literary masterpiece written by a man who himself strove hard, in the trial and error of his life, to push our human limits farther away. The compensation—striving—which we may expect in a tubercular individual, itself provides an explanation of the fact that he produced in only three days the novel which has familiarized many laymen with the psychiatric notion of double-personality, or split mind.

After all, had not Goethe's *Faust*, long before, said that, alas, two souls dwelt in his breast? May it not be that certain people among us have two or more distinct and independent personalities in one body? This idea seems to be in line with such psychological conceptions as attributed to man a number of different and independent mental faculties (Gall's phrenology), or a number of elements of the soul; or which endowed him with two minds, the conscious and the unconscious mind and later on with such separate compartments as the ego, the id, and the superego (Freud).

If one desires to cure a person who presents at different times different personalities which seem to ignore each other, how should one proceed? Patients may like a game of double personality: it renders them interesting and irresponsible! But can we consent to play it if we really understand human behavior?

Alfred Adler's *The Practice and Theory of Individual Psychology* has reaffirmed the indivisible unity of the human personality. It has made it clear that apparently contradictory behaviors of a person are

integral parts of one and the same behavior pattern serving as different means to the same end.

Can you not be extremely obedient towards your strict father, having experienced that this is the only way of getting out of him what you want, and very spiteful with your mother who pampers you and lets you "get away" with everything? You can be a free and happy being in a circle of friends who appreciate you, or with children, and a "poor lot" in the presence of people who, rightly or wrongly, impress you with the idea that they are much superior to you. But however different your outward appearance and your behavior may be, it is always the same *you!*

All we propose here, however, is a critical examination, in this light, of Stevenson's book, especially of the last chapter in which the author makes his double-hero state his case. Jekyll tells us first that he "was born . . . to a large fortune." He mentions this material fact in the most casual fashion, as if this wealth had not been created by those who toiled for his forefathers and parents. He speaks, then, about a personal quality, namely his "inclination to *industry*." Here again, he understands human inclination as something he possesses "by nature"—and not as a product of his body and social environment. Besides, an inclination to industry does not in itself reveal much of a person: *what* is he or she *doing* in an industrious manner? That is the question! In the same sentence Jekyll says he was "fond of the respect of the wise and good" among his fellow men! We may note with satisfaction that he realizes at all the existence of "fellow men"; but does he love these good and wise people? No! He likes to be respected by them! Already Jekyll appears to us to be a rich pampered child who is out for admiration and who leaves us wondering what he will use his industry for! His further point is his belief that he has "every guarantee of an honorable and distinguished future." This is very vague indeed, and we may perhaps be permitted to ask a plain question: does that include the wish to contribute to human progress and happiness by being a good friend, worker, and lover?

In the following words, he presents us with some of his self-knowledge (which, as Adler has pointed out, may be much less than self-understanding): ". . . the worst of my faults was a certain impatient gaiety of disposition, such as has made the happiness of many . . ." Gaiety the worst fault! Is not that meant to suggest how many ever so superior qualities he possesses? But we would add: What a poor

lonely fellow must be he who despises gaiety, this human bond between people of all conditions! And how our democratic feeling is shocked by his craving to appear different from the many, to be superior, superhuman, to be like God—to whom we customarily do not attribute gaiety and laughter. Jekyll confirms our interpretation when he mentions his “imperious desire to carry (his) head high and wear a more than commonly grave countenance before the public.” And in order to appear superior, which he identifies with “grave and serious,” he must “conceal (his) pleasures!”

A child, directed towards love of neighbors, or towards human solidarity (or whatever name you prefer to give to what Adler named “*Gemeinschaftsgefühl*” or “social interest”) will train himself in his doing, thinking, feeling, and even dreaming, to become useful. If not humble, he will certainly be modest. The goal of usefulness will determine all of his “guiding lines” and thus he will create his uniform “life-style” or behavior pattern as that of a well-balanced fellow man. If, however, the goal or, as Adler said, “the guiding fiction, the personality-ideal,” is seen in extraordinariness, uniqueness, special superiority, then the child will train only those character traits and actions pointing toward this aim. He becomes a misfit, and friendship, work, and love, man’s eternal and permanent tasks, are either avoided or are abused as means to the end of superiority.

As some people indulge in drinking secretly, because their pretended moral standard will not admit it being done publicly, so Jekyll became secretive about his pleasures as they conflicted with his public character as a grave superman. He calls this “duplicity of life”; however, he misunderstands himself and all we see is a twofold character in the means which are to serve the erroneous end of his life. This error, unfortunately, is not only his; it is common enough. There are many pampered children who want to have it both ways and who strive to make others regard them as grown-ups.

Let us read again the first lines of Jekyll’s statement to make sure we have not misinterpreted his life-style.

I was born in the year 18— to a large fortune, endowed besides with excellent parts, inclined by nature to industry, fond of the respect of the wise and good among my fellow men, and thus, as might have been supposed, with every guarantee of an honorable and distinguished future. And indeed, the worst of my faults was a certain impatient gaiety of disposition, such as has made the happiness of many, but such as I found it hard to reconcile with my imperious desire to carry my head high, and wear a more than commonly grave countenance before the public. Hence

it came about that I concealed my pleasures; and that when I reached years of reflection, and began to look round me, and take stock of my progress and position in the world, I stood already committed to a profound duplicity of life.

Could we not call this behavior hypocrisy pure and simple? We are all hypocrites more or less and not many of us worry much about it. The aim of most of us being rather the "I" than the "We," we bow publicly to the neighbor as a comforting means to indulge privately in our Self. Could Jekyll behave likewise? No! His exaggerated ideal of superiority, his striving for uniqueness, would not allow him to be a mediocre hypocrite like most other mortals. He mentions "an almost morbid sense of shame," but he evidently realizes that this feeling of "shame," in spite of its exaggeration into morbidity, is rather too common a phenomenon to be worthy of him. For Adler, indeed, the often quoted "guilt feeling" is but a neurotic substitute for an act of reparation which justice demands. It gives us the fine, but valueless feeling of being better than the more criminal fellow who also acts in an unsocial manner but has no particular feelings about it.

What way out is left for a man with Jekyll's dynamism? There is no sane one except to change the goal of godlikeness and to accept the fact of being an imperfect human being, whose love of his neighbor is, however, always perfectible. But people who, from early childhood, have directed their behavior along such lines as did Jekyll will most often refuse the very idea of a better adjustment to the social life of the community. Rather they may try to change all the world to suit them. Jekyll, uneducated from the viewpoint of social interest, is by no later circumstances brought to a "conversion"—brought to accept the framework of human society. This utterly unsatisfactory social organization with all its follies, all its errors and horrors past and present, is a challenge for each individual to help towards the constitution of a unified humanity. Solidarity, reciprocity or mutuality mean respect and love for other human beings, responsibility for one's deeds, and the acceptance of our human limitations as regards time, space, and power. All this is strange to Dr. Jekyll; and as he has not turned towards power politics, he goes the way of self-destruction, involving also a number of his fellow beings!

Let us read now how Jekyll himself sees the situation, and watch how he isolates himself gradually from this world of ours.

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. It was thus rather the exacting nature of my aspirations than any particular degradation in my faults that made me what I was, and, with even a deeper trench than in the majority of men, severed in me those provinces of good and ill which divide and compound man's dual nature. In this case I was driven to reflect deeply and inveterately on that hard law of life which lies at the root of religion, and is one of the most plentiful springs of distress. Though so profound a double-dealer, I was in no sense a hypocrite; both sides of me were in dead earnest; I was no more myself when I laid aside restraint and plunged into shame than when I labored in the eye of the day at the furtherance of knowledge or the relief of sorrow and suffering. And it chanced that the direction of my scientific studies, which led wholly toward the mystic and transcendental, reacted, and shed a strong light on this consciousness of the perennial war among my members. With every day, and from both sides of my intelligence, the moral and the intellectual, I thus drew steadily nearer to that truth, by whose partial discovery I have been doomed to such a dreadful shipwreck: that man is not truly one, but truly two. I say two, because the state of my own knowledge does not pass beyond that point. Others will follow, others will outstrip me on the same lines; and I hazard the guess that man will be ultimately known for a mere polity of multifarious, incongruous and independent denizens.

How ridiculous is Jekyll's exaggeration of a "polity of independent denizens" which he believes constitute the individual! We know he always exaggerates. Here, the sense is clearly to cover the original error: that man, the individual, is two, is divisible. Is it already clear that his erroneous idea was inspired by his initial wrong goal of unique superiority and irresponsibility, a goal we find so often among pampered only children?

Jekyll said he "labored . . . at the relief of sorrow and suffering." Had he, in becoming a physician, found the honorable and distinguished profession which enables the practitioner to contribute to human happiness? Or is the expression he "labored" one of his usual exaggerations? In fact, he gave up his practice and teaching and allowed his scientific studies to lead "wholly towards the mystic and transcendental," which would be of little assistance to sick and distressed people.

By and by, Jekyll says, he came to his private truth that man is not truly one, but truly two. He offers us a few more revealing lines of how he created the private world of a madman. Here they are:

. . . from an early date . . . I had learned to dwell with pleasure, as a beloved day dream, on the thought of separation of these two elements. If each, I told myself, could but be housed in separate identities, life

would be relieved of all that is unbearable; the unjust might go his way, delivered from the aspirations and remorse of his more upright twin; and the just could walk steadfastly and securely on his upward path, doing the good things in which he found his pleasure, and no longer exposed to disgrace and penitence by the hands of the extraneous evil. It was the curse of mankind that these incongruous faggots were thus bound together—that in the agonized womb of consciousness, these polar twins should be continuously struggling.

Again, what he calls "curse of *mankind*" is only the curse of *himself*, the pampered child who strives after godlikeness and who wants both to condemn low pleasures and to indulge in them irresponsibly. We see again that his character and his fallacious attitudes are the result of his initial fear of accepting responsibility for all of his deeds and also a result of the common error that there are subhuman pleasures which are greater than the human pleasures each of us can enjoy decently.

Having intended only to reveal the dynamism of Jekyll's character, we can dismiss the rest of his statement and leave the listener to enjoy reading all the story again by himself. It is, of course, pure phantasy of Stevenson's to let his hero find a drug which also physically separates the alleged two moral personalities and allows the honorable Dr. Henry Jekyll to become, at will, the dishonorable Edward Hyde, who was "pure evil." That an author follows up such a phantasy in all its details is not only entertaining for the reader. Robert Louis Stevenson, with his great insight into human behavior, also proves by means of his story that whenever a man pursues the path of irresponsibility, he never meets the desired satisfaction, but only disaster.

The basic character of the fictitious Dr. Jekyll is so true to life that we can but admire the art of the author. Intuitively he also confirmed the justness of Adler's test for a correct life-style, which is an individual's positive attitude towards friends, work, and a love partner. Jekyll, the human shipwreck, fails three times: We saw him faring poorly as a physician; he had hardly any real friends; and he remained unmarried.

This study of Stevenson's literary masterpiece, *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, suggests that in each case of "split mind" or "double personality" the comprehension of the dynamism of the given case would be helped by investigating the following questions: Who derives advantage from this hypothesis? What is the nature of this advantage? We should not be content unless we have understood the particular case in its uniqueness and dynamism.