
Stevenson’s *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* is one of the great nineteenth century gothic tales. Since its publication in 1886, it has crossed over from literature to popular culture; like Dracula and Frankenstein’s monster, the evil Mr Hyde has become a widely known and instantly recognisable figure. Dracula wears the wings of a vampire bat, Boris Karloff’s Frankenstein monster has bolts through his neck and Mr Hyde possesses the ugly, inhuman face of an ape.

It is this ape – ‘the animal within’ – that is the subject of Jay Bland’s *The Generation of Edward Hyde*. His introduction reminds us that Victorian readers, reviewers and critics alike commented on Stevenson’s portrayal of Dr Jekyll’s mysterious ‘other’ as a vicious beast. Hyde is ugly, deformed, ape-like; his hands are ‘thickly shaded with a swart growth of hair.’\(^1\) He gobbles and chatters like a monkey. He is an animal, less than human.

Bland’s thesis states that Jekyll’s ‘animal within’ comes from a long literary and historical tradition, dating ‘from Plato to Darwin to Robert Louis Stevenson’ (the sub-title of this book.) As major influences, he cites Platonicism, Christianity and Darwinism. To view the text through the lens of one of these alone is to risk misinterpreting the figure of Hyde, because Hyde is drawn from all three. However, where these influences are concerned, Jekyll and Hyde scholarship has tended to neglect the first and, to a lesser extent, the second and focus on the third. (33)

Certainly the link with Darwin’s work is a well-known one, often discussed in the criticism of Stevenson’s tale. Victorian readers’ response to the ape-like Hyde was clearly driven by the controversies ignited by contemporary scientific discoveries, particularly Darwin’s theory of evolution. Bland outlines these responses and spends only one short chapter on ‘the Darwinian Hyde’, concentrating instead on the less-examined influences. These are the ideas that dominate the greater part of his book.

Bland’s treatment of the Platonic and religious themes is embodied in his work on a number of seventeenth to nineteenth century authors. He looks at the work of Spenser, Milton and Donne, as well as Jonathan Swift’s *Gulliver’s Travels* and Charles Kingsley’s *The Water Babies*. In doing this, Bland is not claiming a direct influence on Stevenson’s tale; rather, he is setting it in context with the inherited philosophies and thinking of the time. Through this process, he investigates some of the literary creations that prefigured aspects of Edward Hyde: Swift’s ape-like Yahoos, Spenser’s Wild Man, Kingsley’s Doasyoulikes and so on.

Bland’s primary focus in his research is the *form* that Stevenson has given Edward Hyde: ‘The question … becomes not, What does Hyde do? or, Why does he do it?; but What is he?, Why does he look like that?, and, How does he come to be there in Jekyll?’ (5). Part II of *The Generation of Edward Hyde* deals with these questions in a discussion of The Wild Man Tradition. According to legend and

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popular belief, this figure has ‘a hairy body … is frequently of great physical strength’, carries a club and is ‘sometimes reputed to attack the unwary passer, particularly women and children’ (249).

This is a description of the medieval Wild Man; it could just as easily be Stevenson’s description of Edward Hyde on the foggy London nights when he tramples over a child, then attacks and kills Sir Danvers Carew. Bland traces ‘Hyde the Wild Man’ from ancient literary roots in the third millennium BC (the Sumerian epic, Gilgamesh), ranging through classical Greek, medieval and Renaissance texts. He establishes a link to ‘the Wild Man’s descendant’, the seventeenth century’s concept of the Noble Savage, and ‘the Noble Savage’s more domestic offspring, the Child of Nature’ (150). This interesting section of Bland’s book locates Edward Hyde more firmly within the history of ideas about mankind’s origins and nature; it makes fascinating reading.

It is the scope of Bland’s examination of the intellectual traditions contributing to Stevenson’s Mr Hyde – from the Wild Man Enkidu to the Victorians’ ‘angels and apes’ – that makes The Generation of Edward Hyde so satisfying to read. I do have two problems with the format of the book. Firstly, it would have benefitted very much from the inclusion of illustrations, such as a few of the many images of Edward Hyde in ape-like form, the contemporary caricatures of Darwin and the apes, Huxley’s ‘Anthropomorpha of Linnaeus’ and so on. It is a pity to miss the opportunity to enhance the text in this way when the subject is such a visual one. I also disliked the publisher’s practice of including the extensive footnotes on the same page as Bland’s text; not every reader wants to follow up every footnote, and the effect of this presentation is to detract from the writing. My eyes kept drifting down the page to follow the footnotes instead of the main argument, and other readers to whom I lent this book made the same observation.

These are minor complaints. Overall, The Generation of Edward Hyde is a valuable and interesting contribution to the historical and literary discussions around Hyde as the ‘animal within.’ Jay Bland has written a book that I would willingly recommend as background reading to any scholarly reader or student of Stevenson’s brilliant gothic tale, The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde.

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