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Duality in Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, The picture of Dorian Gray, and "Dionea"

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Lauren McDonald**Duality in *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, and “Dionea”**

Duality appears as a common theme in late-Victorian literature. Duality serves as a way for the modern reader to analyze late-Victorian literature and common late-Victorian culture as well. Through studies of pieces of literature such as *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, and “Dionea” readers can see this common theme. Despite the prevalence of duality and the both/and perspective in late-Victorian literature the idea of duality itself was not traditionally accepted in late-Victorian culture. Victorians preferred to look at things in an either/or perspective. I will write about Robert Louis Stevenson’s *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, Oscar Wilde’s *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, and Vernon Lee’s “Dionea” and analyze the duality of the main characters in terms of late-Victorian culture and the both/and and either/or perspectives as well as prove that these three works of literature implicate their historical and modern readers in a negative social way.

Before I begin my discussion of Duality in late-Victorian texts it is important to define some specific terms that will be used extensively throughout the paper. The first term I will discuss is duality. Mona Ericson defines duality as “two conceptually distinctive ideas that are interrelated” (Ericson 10). On the other hand Ericson defines dualism as “two conceptually distinctive ideas that share no middle ground because the fluidity of the elements will threaten the existence of the dualism” (Ericson 10). The both/and and either/or perspectives are important in analyzing late-Victorian literature since their presence is so prominent. The either/or perspective defines things as separate concepts that are either one or the other. There is no mixing between the two elements

much like in Ericson's definition of Dualism stated earlier. On the other hand the both/and perspective sees boundaries as blurred. Someone or something can be both one thing and another. This is comparable to Ericson's definition of Duality noted earlier.

The novel *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* was written by Robert Louis Stevenson and published in 1886. It is an obvious example of duality in late-Victorian literature. Stevenson's novel incorporates duality in several ways. Some of these incorporations of duality are quite obvious to the reader such as the duality of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde and others are more hidden throughout the text such as the duality of the home where Jekyll and Hyde reside. A plethora of examples of duality can be found in Stevenson's *Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, and here I will discuss the duality of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde.

The duality of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde is the most obvious example of duality in Stevenson's *Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*. The duality of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde is very complex and intriguing as well. Throughout the novel the two characters appear to be two separate individuals. This occurs especially because they are so different in nature. As the reader we recognize that they are actually two different individuals living in the same body. We are able to see that the boundaries are blurred much like in Ericson's definition of duality. Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde are very different individuals. Jekyll is handsome and "good" in the eyes of society whereas Hyde is ugly and "evil" when viewed through society's glasses. Because Jekyll and Hyde are embodied in the same individual we realize that they are both handsome and ugly, or, more importantly, both good and evil. The duality of good and evil in *Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr.*

Hyde implicated the historical reader as well as implicates the modern day reader because we see that an individual, even ourselves, can be both good and evil.

Clausson argues in addition that the opposing social classes of Jekyll and Hyde add to the element of duality between the two characters. Jekyll was from the “respected upper class” whereas Hyde was from the “murderous lower class” (Clausson 343). Clausson also notes that “the lower class in late-Victorian society represented degeneration, devolution, and the ‘criminal man’” (Clausson 343) to Victorian society. With Jekyll and Hyde really being one in Stevenson’s novel society was shown that there really was not so much distinction between the classes of society and that everyone was capable of evil. Himmelfarb’s ideas seem to agree with Clausson’s perspectives. She states that “the idea of respectability and all the virtues connected with it were the means by which the middle class sought to dominate the working class” (Himmelfarb 229). She notes that “respectability was an instrument of ‘social control’” (Himmelfarb 229). Jekyll’s apparent social respectability meant nothing because he was also Hyde who was criminal in nature. The lines between the social classes were blurred because one man, Jekyll, fit into two social classes by transforming himself into Hyde.

Foldy states that “‘normal’ and ‘average’ were socially desirable not only because ‘normal’ and ‘average’ represented the abstract ideal of what ‘ought to be’ and what everyone ‘ought to be like’, but also because the ‘normal’ was predictable and easier to manipulate and control” (Foldy 142). Jekyll and Hyde went against this social norm because they were unpredictable; eventually Jekyll couldn’t even predict or control Hyde. I think this suggestion in Stevenson’s novel would probably have frightened the reader because it eluded to lack of control and disorder in society. I think a question posed by

Liebman helps to explain why Victorians sought normalcy; “How does one live in a world in which nothing can be believed and no one can be trusted?” (Liebman 299). Victorians feared abnormality and tried to hide it. I think Victorians wanted to believe that everyone was that they were what they appeared to be. I also think that they wanted everyone to fit into the category of “normal” so their actions would be predictable.

One interesting and perhaps slightly complex way we can see evil in Dr. Jekyll and his opposite, Mr. Hyde, is through homosexuality. In *Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* there are virtually no female characters. The lack of female characters leads the reader to suspect homosexuality in the case of Jekyll and Hyde. Homosexuality was not very well known in society at the time but was seen as evil and deviant in late-Victorian culture. This perspective would bring an evil element to the seemingly good character of Hyde. Hyde’s act of murder (Stevenson 22) adds an evil element to Jekyll since Jekyll and Hyde are two beings in one body.

Stevenson’s own sexuality was questioned by the public. Whatever Stevenson’s own sexuality, Clausson argues that he was the “fin-de-siecle laureate of the double life” (Clausson 345). Rosenfield believes that the confession at the end of *Jekyll and Hyde* is Stevenson’s own. She believes that Stevenson is confessing that he is a criminal similar to Jekyll “and that we, as second selves, unconsciously share his guilt” (Rosenfield 331). I think that the duality in *Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* can be seen as a reflection of Stevenson’s own double life. The novel implicates readers both historically and today by suggesting that they too lead a double life just as Stevenson or his characters Jekyll and Hyde led.

Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* is another well-known example of late-Victorian literature. The novel was originally published in 1890. In the novel we see many examples of duality that can serve to implicate the past and present reader. The novel, just like *Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* can be related to the both/and and either/or perspectives.

Perhaps the most evident example of duality in Wilde's novel is the struggle between good and evil in Dorian that is depicted through his body's youthfulness and the painting's ugliness. Dorian himself is supposed to be good and the painting of Dorian is supposed to be evil. The reader finds out that both Dorian and the painting are both good and evil. I think this sent a strong message to late-Victorian readers that no matter what their physiognomy they embodied both good and evil. I believe modern day readers can probably recognize the duality of good and evil in Dorian just as easily as the late-Victorian reader could have. However, I also believe that the modern day reader is more willing to accept their duality because of changes in social expectations and beliefs. Late-Victorian readers would have been afraid of exposing their double life but modern readers tend to be more accepting of duality in their lives.

Within *The Picture of Dorian Gray* I also see duality between the public and the private selves. This relates greatly to the duality of good and evil discussed previously. Dorian was afraid of revealing his private self to the outside world. He took great caution in hiding and covering up his portrait that showed his evil side. Dorian's good looks were the centerpiece of his public life. I think the reader can see clearly that the painting and Dorian's good looks are just separate elements of Dorian's life. Together they make Dorian who he is and he could not be whole without the other. The public and private

selves in late-Victorian society were supposed to be very separate things. According to Himmelfarb Victorians were very hypocritical in their behavior by acting one way in public and another way in private (Himmelfarb 224). I think that the Victorians hid their sinful nature so they would still be seen as good to the public even though they had an evil private side like Dorian had. The duality of the public and private self in *The Picture of Dorian Gray* implicated late-Victorian readers of leading a double life and suggested that they were both good and evil.

Liebman brings a very interesting perspective to the duality of public and private self in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. He argues that “Dorian’s failure to integrate his opposing ‘selves’ is not a consequence of his own psychological inadequacy, but a condition of modern life” (Liebman 297). From this statement I would conclude that duality of the self was a social problem in the late-Victorian era. People were supposed to keep their opposing selves as far away from each other as possible. I think that Dorian was simply unable to survive in a society that put so much stress on leading an either/or life. I believe that *Dorian Gray* served to merge two selves into one and to make the reader realize that they had two opposing selves as well.

Rosenfield points out that to Victorians “double novels became devil novels” and that “the devil is simply the projection into the external world of man’s buried instinctual life” (Rosenfield 321). I think this statement agrees with the fact that Victorians demonized a double life even though duality is instinctual to all human beings. This demonization of the double can be seen in Victorian literature and the reactions it received as well as in the life of Oscar Wilde. Foldy points out in his book *The Trial of Oscar Wilde* that the author of *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, Oscar Wilde, was a person

who embodied duality because of the differences in his public and private selves. Himmelfarb argues that “when Wilde was put on trial Victorian manners and morals were also put on trial”(Himmelfarb 226). I think the two selves of Oscar Wilde seem to have merged in his novel *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. Late-Victorians were so against the both/and perspective and duality that Oscar Wilde was even put on trial as a result of his novel. It was believed that the novel reflected Wilde’s own life so *The Picture of Dorian Gray* was used against Wilde at trial. I think that the trials of Oscar Wilde would have only pointed out to Wilde’s readers and others at the time that they were an embodiment of the both/and perspective just as Wilde was.

We also see a mixing of homosexuality and heterosexuality in Oscar Wilde’s *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. Nils Clausson points out that it was “the homosexual theme that outraged many early reviewers of *Dorian Gray*” (Clausson 341). The duality of homosexuality and heterosexuality seems to be brought out in the seemingly homosexual relationship Dorian has with Basil and the heterosexual relationship he has with Sibyl. Personally I think that Dorian is more of a bisexual character because he is torn between his relationships with male and female partners. Dorian’s bisexuality results in duality in the novel. In regards to Victorian society Clausson notes that homosexual relationships “could only be carried out in private,” were considered to be “excessive intimacy,” and that homosexual relationships went against “conventional morality” (Clausson 343). The bisexuality alluded to in the novel would not have implicated all readers of being bisexual but rather made them aware that not all humans are one or the other (homosexual or heterosexual) and that there are people who are both (bisexual). I think the bisexuality in

The Picture of Dorian Gray could have led readers to recognize other areas of their lives where duality was present.

Vernon Lee's short story "Dionea" is a story of duality from late-Victorian literature that is not as well known to modern day readers as *The Picture of Dorian Gray* and *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* are. I think it presents duality in a way that is perhaps more subtle than in the two previous works I have discussed. It presents duality in terms of good and evil in a more subtle way, and it also presents duality in additional unique ways. The main character in "Dionea" seems to embody both opposing aspects of duality whereas the opposing aspects of duality in *Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* and *The Picture of Dorian Gray* were embodied in two separate beings that the reader had to recognize as being one; Jekyll and Hyde and Dorian and his portrait. I will now discuss a few of the aspects of duality present in Vernon Lee's "Dionea."

As stated earlier the main character Dionea seems to embody several opposing aspects of duality. She is not either/or but rather both/and. She possesses "two distinctive ideas that are interrelated" (Ericson 10). When Dionea arrived or was washed up onto the shore of the small village where she was to live she was between life and death (Lee 78). This duality would continue throughout her life in the village. She became a figure of pity and admiration to the village people. She was between being a girl and a woman. She spoke both eastern and western dialects. She was foreign but associated with the monarch. In the novel she was associated with white pigeons that were constantly surrounding her (Lee 104). White symbolizes purity while pigeons symbolize dirtiness; two opposing ideas that contribute to Dionea's duality. Dionea was both civilized and a savage. She was both Christian (because she grew up in a convent) and pagan (because

she wore a myrtle wreath). Finally in the end of the short story she was on a ship full of Greeks but singing in a foreign tongue. These numerous opposing ideas make Dionea the object of duality in Vernon Lee's Short story. She is both/and rather than either/or because she embodies opposing elements. This implicates the reader of duality because they see that opposing characteristics can be found in one person and that it seems to be impossible to be only one or the other.

I believe Dionea's multiple dualities would have had quite an effect on the late-Victorian reader. The morals and values of the late-Victorian reader would not have agreed with those of Dionea. Late-Victorians believed a person should be either one or the other and not both. Foldy notes that Victorians viewed "morality in terms or normality" (Foldy 142). In most cases one of the opposing aspects of Dionea's duality is not "normal" according to Victorian standards. The savage and pagan qualities of Dionea illustrate her abnormality. These qualities thus make her immoral because they are abnormal. Victorians would have been confused about the status of someone who was both abnormal and normal and both immoral and moral. According to Gertrude Himmelfarb Victorians would have felt obliged to cover-up their immorality when they committed some transgression (Himmelfarb 223). Dionea did not follow the manners that were typical of the late-Victorian era because she made no effort to even make herself seem like one or the other. She did not show her Christian side while hiding her pagan side. She did not try to hide her foreignness by speaking only the native tongue of the village. I think the numerous and obvious examples of duality in "Dionea" probably made readers realize that they were both/and even though they pretend like they were either/or. Some readers would probably have been outraged that "Dionea" could be so

immoral, but at the same time they would have realized that they were immoral as well. In his essay Sheldon W. Liebman noted that “positive and negative moral influences are two opposing factors represented in Victorian literature” (Liebman 296). Dionea embodied this duality as well. It can be seen when she is viewed by the village people to have a negative moral influence on girls who are in her company (Lee 93). Claire Rosenfield states that that the Victorian “novelist used duality consciously in order to reveal the mental struggles of his characters” (Rosenfield 314). I think this perspective can be extended to the reader as well. As the past or present reader engaged in this short story they would have seen that Dionea’s double life was reflected in their own. This implicates the historical and modern-day reader of duality and immorality. It shows the reader that they are both/and rather than either/or. This would have shown the Victorian reader that they were immoral as well as moral and abnormal as well as normal.

Duality was a very important and prominent theme in late-Victorian literature. It impacted the lives of its readers at the time it was written. Readers and the general public went so far as to press charges against those who had written some of these double novels. One of these authors who were put on trial was Oscar Wilde. The late-Victorians were so offended by duality as a theme in literature because it threatened to expose their duality and hypocritical nature as well. Duality in late-Victorian literature has the same effect on modern day readers. It shows us that we are not either/or but rather both/and. Duality in late-Victorian literature taught historical and modern-day readers that everyone leads a double life.

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