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Metaphors, Monsters and Magnification: A Study of Horror, Fear and the Grotesque in the Graphic Novel Adaptation of *The Starnge Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*

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While describing Hell in Book 1 of *Paradise Lost*, John Milton states that there is "No light, but rather darkness visible" (1. 61-65). But how do we show "darkness visible" in the visual or graphic mediums? Many critics have argued that the writer is rather talking about the darkness within Lucifer as he has now fallen from his prestigious position due to his hubris. However, the question now has become more complex: how to represent this 'darkness within' visually? Although recent adaptation studies are focusing on the movement from literature to contemporary visual mediums like comics, graphic novels or even video games, how fruitfully do they translate the rhetorical words or phrases that depict fear, horror and anxiety? Does the graphic medium successfully represent human emotions and psychological aspects that are described by mere rhetoric in the original version, or somehow become problematic by dealing with them too literally? I will be discussing it with reference to the graphic novel adaptation of R. L. Stevenson's *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* by Campfire Classics (adapted by C. E. L. Welsh and illustrated by Lalit Kumar Sharma). Translating a classic with all its rhetoric and poetic constructs into a graphic medium is indeed a tough job. Hence this study would be focusing on the following questions: How does the adaptation represent the sense of horror and fear that not only cast an overarching shadow throughout the novel, but is also present within the characters? How does it justify the Victorian anxiety regarding the social constructs of that time? Most

importantly, how does this adaptation deal with the Jekyll-Hyde dualism that creates the utmost sense of horror?

The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde (1886) is probably the most celebrated work by R. L. Stevenson, and it does not conform to one particular genre: it is at the same time a gothic novel, a psychological thriller, a science fiction, and an allegory of the Victorian society itself. Needless to say, that there are multiple adaptations of this novella into films, radio and on stage. Recently, it has also been adapted into comics, manga and graphic novels by various publication houses. However, the work is much more than just another sensational horror fiction that we usually get to see in the popular comics. In fact, the structural and thematic duality on various levels– societal and spatial duality as well as the dualistic nature of an individual– all these contribute in creating the sense of fear, horror and anxiety. Hence, in the next few paragraphs, I am going to discuss how this graphic novel adaptation represents the dualities in order to invoke horror.

The Jekyll-Hyde duality is reflected in the atmospheric background as well. Stevenson sets his story in London and particularly focuses on two contrasting spaces within the same city: a dingy neighbourhood in Soho that serves as the refuge to Mr. Hyde, and on the other hand, the posh neighbourhood where all the (seemingly) respectable characters live. The Soho neighbourhood represents poverty, corruption, violence, immorality and evil– in short, all the societal vermin are present in this poorer part of the city. Most of the horrific actions take place in there by the night-time, like the one when Mr. Enfield encountered Hyde's horrific action of stumping down a little girl. On the other side, the aristocratic part of the city is all about respectability and refinement. However, Shubh M. Singh and Subho Chakrabarty have stated in their essay that these mansions hide dark secrets as well: "Most

significantly, Mr. Hyde enters and leaves Dr. Jekyll's house through the back door which seems a metaphor for the evil that lies behind the facade of civilization and refinement" (par. 8).

The Campfire graphic version is able to represent this spatial dichotomy through its panel images and its use of various colour palates. At the very beginning we get to see "the sinister block of building" with the blistered door (fig. 1), which serves as the starting point of all mystery as this is where Mr. Hyde went in order to arrange money to avoid a scandal related to the accident (Stevenson 2). Further we get to see the interior of his residence situated in a dingy lane, which is a small, clumsy, disordered and disorganised space (fig. 2), in a way reflecting some traits of its owner. In contrast to these two spaces, there is Mr Utterson's well furnished office (fig. 3) reflecting his superiority. Even Dr. Jekyll's mansion does not only reflect wealth, but also the refinement of the higher class English people. The illustrator mostly uses dark colours (various shades of blue and black) for projecting the night-time actions like Mr. Utterson's encounter with Mr. Hyde. The use of bright yellow in the streetlights adds an extra level in creating an eerie atmosphere altogether. However, Mr. Enfield's account of his horrific experience is painted in the shades of yellow, brown, sepia and black in order to make the readers understand that this incident is taking place inside the dingy, dark lanes dimly lighted by some streetlights. It further indicates that this is a flashback scene and hence the use of a different colour palate to differentiate between the past and the present actions. Altogether, the use of mostly dark colours creates a sense of mystery, as well as acts as the indicator of something horrific taking place.

Stevenson portrays the Victorian anxiety and social fear by creating the duality of the

civilised and bestiality. According to the Victorian critics, this was an age of binaries. With the wake of Darwinism and other scientific discoveries, people also feared the degeneration into the baser, primitive human aspects. There is always the pressure of maintaining the civilised self as well as the anxiety of giving up to our atavistic core, which has ultimately been portrayed by the Jekyll-Hyde duality. Further, the dual existence of a personal and a public life, society's control over one's personal choices, imposed morality– these are often reflected in Victorian writings; be it Oscar Wilde's gothic fiction The Picture of Dorian Gray (1890) or his well-known comedy *The Importance of Being Ernest* (1895). Stevenson's novella is not an exception. Dorian Grey's debauchery, Jack Worthing's 'Bunburying' or Dr. Jekyll's unleashing the beast within– reflect the conflict between society and the individual choice, which results in fear, anxiety and moral dilemma.

Although the societal pressure on the individual is not what can be shown through comic panels, a social hierarchy can easily be found through the physical appearances of the characters in the graphic adaptation. The illustrator, Lalit Kumar Sharma, portrays the nineteenth century London and its people, and he probably draws his inspiration from the English period films and dramas. The physical stature of Mr. Utterson, Mr. Enfield, Dr. Lanyon and even Dr. Jekyll and the way they are dressed up are the indicators of their higher social status and refined appearance. Mr. Poole, Dr. Jekyll's butler and the other housekeepers are dressed accordingly, whereas the poor girl and her family in the dingy lanes of Soho are dressed shabbily. Mr. Hyde however blurs the line of this hierarchy, because he first appears dressed as a gentleman (in an overcoat, hat and carrying a cane, just like Mr. Utterson or Mr. Enfield, whom we see at the very beginning of this graphic novel) but

displays his evil side by trampling over the girl's body without hesitance (fig. 4). Mr. Enfield's horror comes from the fact that a seemingly civilised man can be so cruel that he does not bother about other people's lives. This example, in a way, sums up the Victorian anxiety and fear of our primitive self taking over the civilised persona.

Most importantly, it is the Jekyll-Hyde duality itself that probably invokes the utmost sense of horror. Stevenson suggests that behind Dr. Henry Jekyll's experiment, there was the societal pressure of proper appearance for a gentleman. Towards the end of the novel we find that in his confession he admits:

> 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 around me, and take stock of my progress and position in the world, I stood already committed to a profound duplicity of life. (Stevenson 56)

From this sense of doom, he gradually finds out the duality presents within human being: "...I learned to recognise the thorough and primitive duality of man... it was only because I was radically both" (57). Hence, under his disguised scientific experiment, he tries to separate these two selves, and thus gives birth to his alter ego Mr. Hyde, so that he can live both the lives of debauchery and of respectability. However, Dr. Jekyll's doom comes nearer as Hyde turns out to be pure evil, causing a great deal of sensation throughout the city, and finally having killed a minister of the parliament. Thus Hyde grows powerful day by day and finally

takes control over Jekyll. The entire Jekyll-Hyde narrative creates immense sense of fear among the readers with macabre descriptions of cruelty, murder and mystery surrounding Hyde: “Nothing in the story is as singly frightening as Henry Jekyll's final narrative, for it is there that the reader learns most about the distorted mind which released an unwilling Hyde” (Saposnik, 722).

Now the question is, are they two completely different persons? The answer can be both assertive and negative. In this novel, people like Mr. Utterson or the others have never met Jekyll and Hyde together at any point. In fact, Dr, Lanyon’s letter in chapter nine, and Dr, Jekyll’s confession in the last chapter help the reader to make the Jekyll-Hyde connection. Hence the question automatically arises- is Jekyll’s metamorphosis completely physical or rather psychological? In order to get the answer we have to focus on the language that Stevenson uses to describe Hyde. Mr. Enfield first describes him as just “a little man” and then as “hellish” and “doomed Juggernaut” after his cruel act. Thus, the more Hyde’s evil nature gets reflected, the more he has been described in metaphors. At various point of the novel, he is described to be somewhat deformed, but nobody seems to describe what kind of deformity is that. By comparing Dr. Jekyll’s tall, well built figure to Hyde’s dwarfish and somewhat deformed figure we may simply assume that he has scientifically created a grotesque monster just as Frankenstein did, although this monster resides within him. The story then becomes more of a science fiction, where the scientist turns into a monster while being engaged in some grotesque experimentation. The aspect of Jekyll’s physical metamorphosis cannot be ignored altogether, as it was an inspiration behind the creation of superheroes (like Marvel’s Hulk) and super villains (like Marvel’s Mister Hyde and D. C.

Comic's Two-face) in the world of comics.

However, Irving S. Saposnik analyses this novel as a document of Victorian anxiety and therefore in his essay "The Anatomy of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde" he argues:

> Hyde is usually described in metaphors because essentially that is what he is: a metaphor of uncontrolled appetites, an amoral abstraction driven by a compelling will unrestrained by any moral halter. Such a creature is, of necessity, only figuratively describable, for his deformity is moral rather than physical. Purposely left vague, he is best described as Jekyll-deformed– dwarfish, stumping, ape like– a frightening parody of a man unable to exist on the surface. (730-31)

Indeed, the metaphorical language used to describe Hyde justifies this argument, as well as adds a layer of mystery surrounding the Jekyll-Hyde duality.

Needless to say that nobody can ignore the psychological aspects: that Hyde is a creation within Jekyll's mind that ultimately goes out of control, is what frightens the readers most. According to the Freudian psychoanalytic terms, Jekyll can be identified as the ego, bound by the conformations and moral boundaries of society that can be identified as the super ego. On the other hand, Hyde can be regarded as the id. The ego has thus been caught into a struggle between the id and the super ego. Jekyll finally gives up to the impulses of the id, and thus Hyde takes over. Therefore, this psychological metamorphosis justifiably creates a sense of horror, as we get to see the gradual degeneration of a so called rational person.

The Campfire graphic version however chooses the easier path by illustrating two different characters as Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde instead of indicating the fact that Hyde is the alter ego of Jekyll. The illustrator could have been a little more subtle and could portray Hyde in such a manner that there would have been an indication of Jekyll's psychological disorder. Instead, he takes the metaphors used to describe Hyde too literally, and makes a grotesque monster out of it. As we can see that Hyde is initially shown almost as a silhouette, his features are partially hidden by the light and shadow effects of the dingy lane (fig. 5 and 6). However, the sense of mystery soon disappears as the grotesque, cunning and evil looking Hyde is shown afterword (fig. 7). We get to see this Hyde killing people and indulging in debaucheries afterwards. Towards the end, as a part of Dr. Jekyll's confession, the dual nature of him is illustrated by showing Hyde and Jekyll's facial features side by side: Jekyll is a civilised gentleman with sharp facial features, whereas Hyde is wilder, with untidy hair, cruel eyes and a cunning smile (fig. 8). Further, the illustrator discards the psychological aspects by showing Dr. Jekyll experimenting in his lab (fig. 9), and finally being transformed into a monster, wilder than before, with sharp nails, and the cruellest smile with a hint of canine that symbolises its animal-like ferocity (fig. 10 and fig. 11). He even makes quite a sensational cover for this adaptation by showing this Jekyll-Hyde duality— we get to see the juxtaposing figures of civilised Dr Jekyll and the wild Mr. Hyde— holding a test tube that contains some mysterious potion (fig. 12). This obviously indicates that the illustrator has focused on the physical metamorphosis of the protagonist as a result of some gruesome experiment rather than diving deeper into the psychological aspects.

There can be two explanations behind projecting Hyde as a monster: the illustrator

may have completely undermined the metaphorical aspects of Hyde's character and instead has followed the usual trope of magnifying the grotesque in order to create the sense of horror and fear. Metaphors thus have turned into a monster, which is, in a way, quite horrifying, but not convincing enough. On the other hand, the illustrator might have consciously followed this traditional path of exaggeration, as it is a part and parcel of this particular medium. After all, we must not forget the target readers of Campfire graphic novels. The publisher's mission statement goes like this: "To entertain and educate young minds by creating unique illustrated books that recount stories of human values, arouse curiosity in the world around us, and inspire with tales of great deeds of unforgettable people." From this we can easily deduce that the target audiences of this graphic novel are kids, presumably not more than thirteen to fourteen years old. Further, at the end of this book, they also have included a list of 'Mad Scientists' of real life and their grotesque experiments that are no less than Jekyll's so-called experimentation. This is clearly a part of their marketing strategy as it shows that the kids are not only enjoying a classic in a graphic novel format, but they are gathering some interesting real-life information as well. Hence, we cannot really blame the artists as they make monsters out of literary metaphors because that, in a way, matches the kids' curiosity, and their understanding of horror and fear. Another interesting aspect is that Jekyll's exaggerated physical transformation shown in here reflects the transformation of a simple human being to a super hero (or even a super villain), which is a common trait in the world of comics. For an example, we can think of Hulk, Marvel's monstrous hero and his alter-ego Bruce Banner, a frail-looking physicist. Although we have previously discussed that the Jekyll-Hyde duality worked as an inspiration behind creating Hulk, it can be possible that Hulk's metamorphosis has now consciously or unconsciously

has inspired the illustrator to create a monstrous Hyde, because kids nowadays are more familiar with the superheroes than these classics. Therefore, it would be easier for them to recognise the duality instead of dealing with more serious aspects like the society vs. individuality, or travelling through the psychological realms of human mind.

Although the pop culture influences might have made this graphic novel quite popular among children, an adult reader, who has read the actual work by Stevenson and is familiar with the literary, socio-political and psychological interpretations, would be quite disappointed by this particular graphic version. In a way, it demeans the prevailing sense of horror, as well as, does not do justice while dealing with the imaginative, poetic constructs of the author. It would have been a more fruitful study if I could have got a bunch of different comics and graphic novel adaptations of this story and present a comparative study of the adaptors' technique of dealing with the notions of horror, fear and anxiety. However, during the lack of time and accessibility to other versions, I have tried to be focused on this single version. As Colin Beineke, in his thesis "Towards a Theory of Comic Book Adaptation", discusses that a comic adaptation of a canonical work does not necessarily has to be secondary to the original work rather it can emerge as an independent work (11). In Case of an adaption of this novel, perhaps a more researched version that gives importance to the societal and psychological duality, rather than focusing on the grotesque, written for broader target readers would have been able to justify this novel's true essence.

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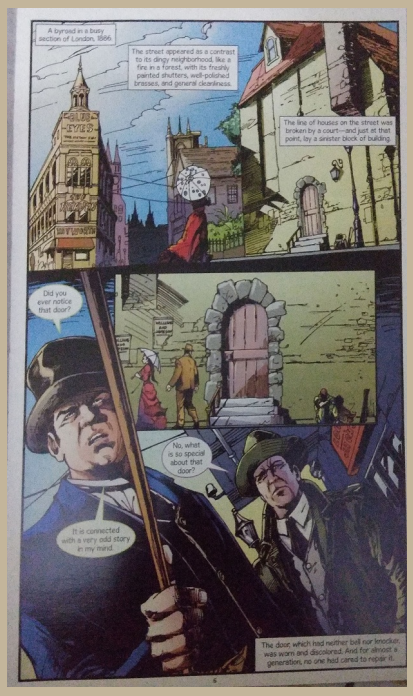

fig. 1: The “sinister” building: Mr. Hyde’s hiding place (Shrma 5).

fig. 2: The interior of Mr. Hyde’s hiding place (Sharma 23).

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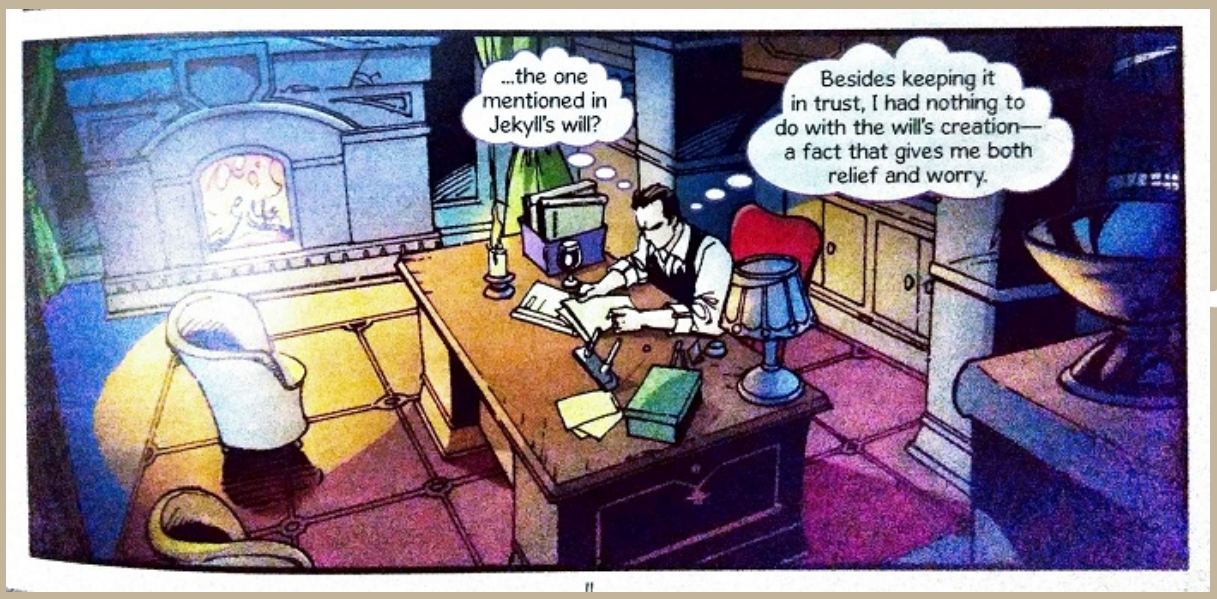

fig. 3: The interior of Mr. Utterson's sophisticated office (Sharma 11).

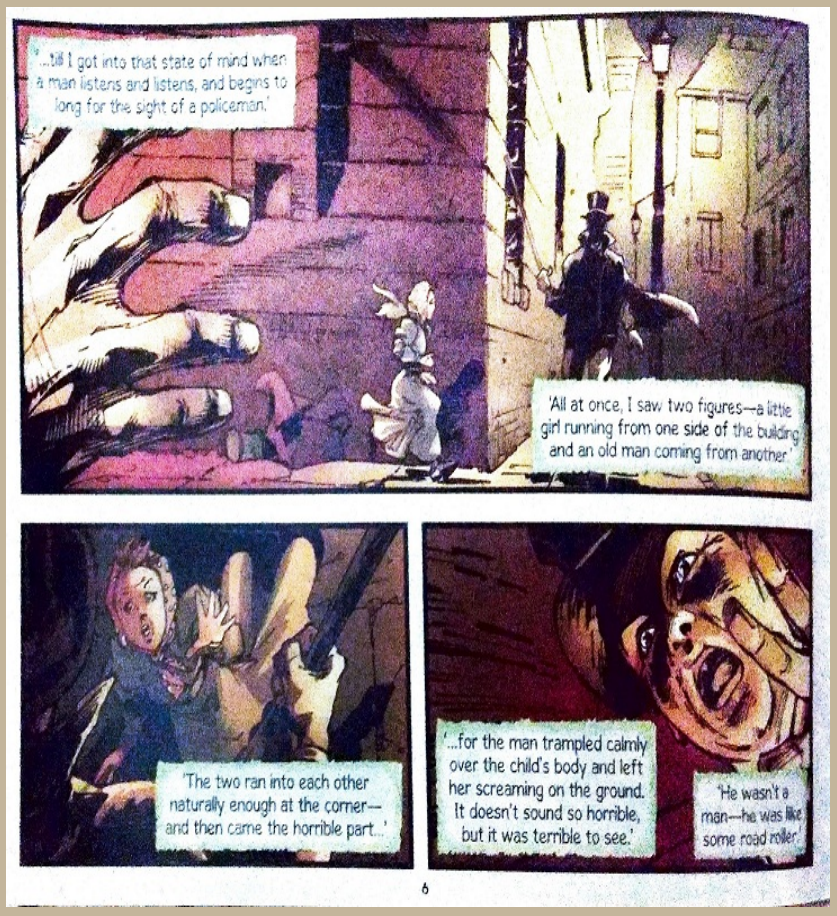

fig. 4: Mr. Hyde trampling over a poor girl with utmost cruelty (Sharma 6)

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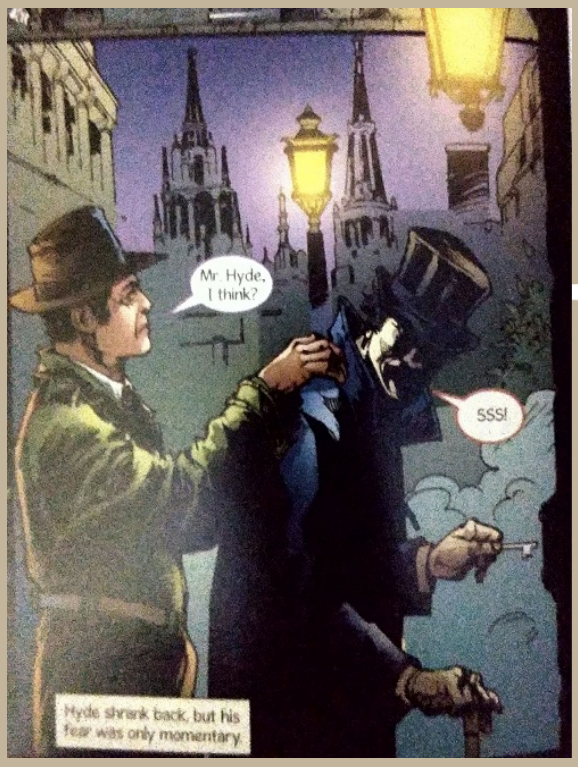

Fig. 5 and Fig. 6: The shadowy figure of Mr. Hyde (Sharma 9, 14).

fig. 7: Cruel and cunning look of Mr. Hyde (Sharma 10).

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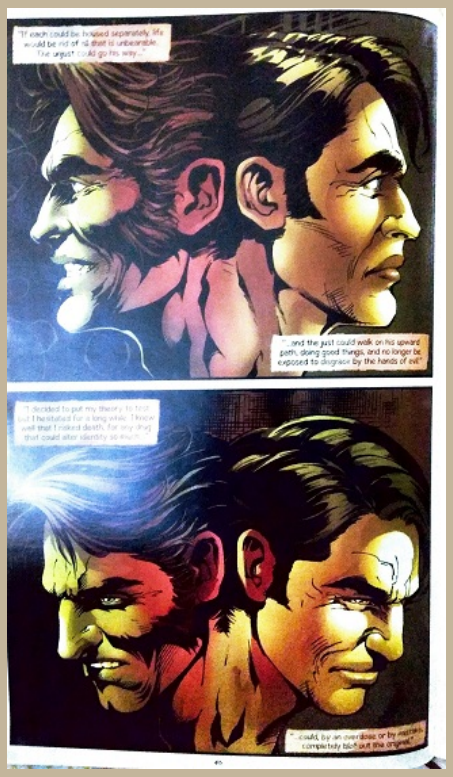

fig. 8: Differences in the facial features of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde (Sharma 46).

fig. 9: Dr. Jekyll's experiments in his lab (Shamra 47).

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fig. 10 and fig. 11: The Jekyll-Hyde transformation, shown as a physical metamorphosis (Sharma 48 and 49).

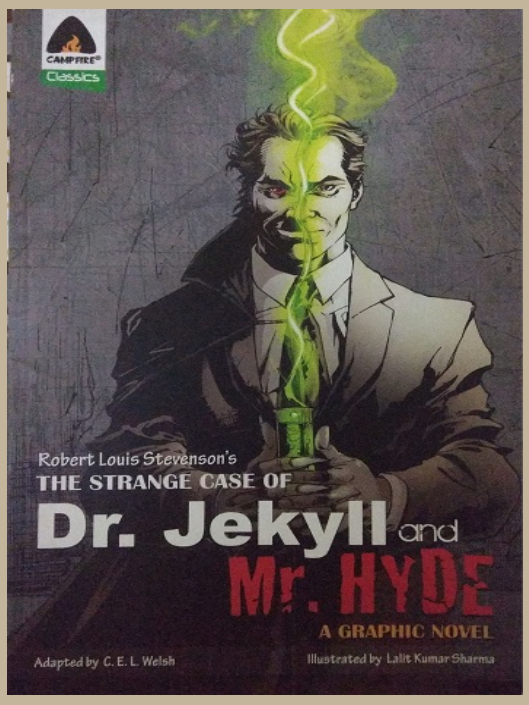

fig. 12: The front cover of *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde: A Graphic Novel*, by Campfire Classics

End Note: All the reference images used in this paper are from *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde: A Graphic Novel*, by Campfire Classics (2010), illustrated by Lalit Kumar Sharma, and adapted by C. E. L. Welsh from R. L. Steveson's 1886 novella.

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