

## Trabajo Fin de Grado

A double approach to Emma Tennant's *Two Women of London: The Strange Case of Mrs Jekyll and Mrs Hyde*: literary postmodernism and the postmodernist approach to Mrs Hyde's use of drugs

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## Abstract

This Bachelor's thesis is divided in two sections. The first one provides a study of the postmodernist techniques in Emma Tennant's novel *Two Women of London: The Strange Case of Mrs Jekyll and Mrs Hyde* as a feminist revision of Stevenson's *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*. The essay discusses how Tennant's work criticises the social, political, and economic contexts of 1980s Great Britain, and analyses how middle-class and poor women were oppressed. The second section interprets Tennant's novel as the story of a drug-addict woman. Using as guideline a scientific paper written by Elizabeth Ettorre, it is explained how substances may have altered Mrs Hyde/Mrs Jekyll's self-perception, highlighting the importance of considering gender, class, and other contextual factors in the study of her story.

**Key words:** postmodernist, historiographical metafiction, intertextuality, *Doppelgänger*, drug use, gender, self-image, body, self-control.

## Resumen en español

Esta tesis de fin de grado se divide en dos secciones. La primera estudia las técnicas posmodernistas en la novela de Emma Tennant *Two Women of London: The Strange Case of Mrs Jekyll and Mrs Hyde* como revisión feminista de la obra de Stevenson *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*. El trabajo analiza la forma en la que la novela critica los contextos sociales, políticos y económicos de la Gran Bretaña de los años 80, y analiza la opresión que sufrían las mujeres pobres y de clase obrera como uno de los grupos más vulnerables de la sociedad. La segunda sección interpreta la novela de Tennant como la historia de una mujer adicta a las drogas. Utilizando como guía un artículo científico escrito por Elizabeth Ettorre, se explica cómo los estupefacientes podrían haber alterado la autopercepción de Mrs Hyde/Mrs Jekyll, resaltando la importancia de tener en cuenta el género, la clase y otros factores contextuales a la hora de estudiar su historia.

**Palabras clave:** postmodernista, metaficción historiográfica, intertextualidad, *Doppelgänger*, consumo de drogas, género, autoimagen, cuerpo, autocontrol.

## Thesis presentation

When Emma Tennant wrote *Two Women of London: The Strange Case of Mrs Jekyll and Mrs Hyde*, she believed human nature is more complex than just good or evil, and did not try to demonize wickedness or treat it as a quality only related to the depraved members of society. Instead, the author presents a story of acceptance and studies social, economic and historic reasons that could make a person act in a non-ethical way: if we were constantly mistreated, unheard, left-aside by society... we would all build a rage inside of us that could turn us into a monster and make us do things we would have never imagined. That is how Tennant presents the main character: as a woman who is definitely not a monster but is considered by some to be one.

Therefore, this Bachelor's thesis will analyse the novel *Two Women of London: The Strange Case of Mrs Jekyll and Mrs Hyde*, written by Emma Tennant as a feminist revision of *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*, by Robert Louis Stevenson. The purpose of this essay is to show two different approaches to read the novel: the first way of reading the novel is viewing it as a critique to the social, political and economic contexts of Great Britain in the 80s. For that purpose, we need to understand that *Two Women of London* is a postmodernist novel, thus uses a postmodernist style to achieve its goal. Some of the techniques that will be studied are the focus on "the others" (people whose stories have not been listened throughout History), historiographic metafiction and the roles of parody, intertextuality and self-reflexivity (Hutcheon, 1983). After explaining how Tennant makes use of these postmodernist techniques to achieve her purpose, it will be argued that there is another way of interpreting the novel. In this section, I will debate that the double personality of Mrs Jekyll and Mrs Hyde, her physical changes, and her violent behaviour may have a scientific explanation related to the use and abuse of drugs. This part will use the following journal article written by Elizabeth Ettorre (2004), a Professor of Sociology in the University of Liverpool, as a starting point: *Revisioning Women and Drug Use: Gender Sensitivity, Embodiment and Reducing Harm*.

## Introduction

*Two Women of London: The Strange Case of Mrs Jekyll and Mrs Hyde* is a novel written in 1989 by Emma Tennant, a British author of Scottish extraction. Tennant (20 October 1937 – 21 January 2017) started off as a young, controversial author. When she was 26

years old, she published her first novel, *The Color of Rain*, which was not well received by some critics in the literature field:

[...] the novel was held aloft by the Chairman of the Judges [...] who denounced it as an example of the decadence of the contemporary British novel. Some reports have it that the book was then hurled into a wastepaper basket (Tennant and Indiana, 1992: 12).

After this harsh start as a novelist, Tennant spent ten years writing naturalistic fiction, which was at that time preferred in Britain but was not the genre that made her feel comfortable (Tennant and Indiana, 1992). Eventually, Tennant produced a stream of novels that were very different to everything that had been written in England (Tennant and Indiana, 1992). Her style became fresh and innovative, her novels being inspired by “dreams, fairy tales, fables, science fiction, and detective stories, informed by a wicked Swiftian vision of the U.K. in decline” (Tennant and Indiana, 1992: 12). Some of her most famous works that share these features are: *Wild Nights* (1979), *The Adventures of Robina* (1986), *Woman Beware Woman*, and *Two Women of London: The Strange Case of Mrs Jekyll and Mrs Hyde* (Tennant and Indiana, 1992). She also wrote books for children, which include *The Ghost Child* (1984) and scripts for films such as *The Bad Sister* (1983) or *Frankstein's Baby* (1990). Apart from endowing her novels with tale-inspired characteristics, Tennant is well known for rewriting traditional novels from a feminist point of view, what is denominated as *Feminist Revisionism* (Dow and Hanson, 2012). Adrienne Rich was one of the first critics to introduce the notion of *Feminist Revisionism*, which she described as “the act of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of entering an old text from a new critical direction” (Rich, 1972: 18). As Emma Tennant herself explains, *Two Women of London* is a product of this revisionism:

I use existing texts as departure points for my novels - yes, but that's not what seems to happen because I don't feel I'm departing at all really, I'm coming full circle. I seem to have a strong urge to show the unchangingness of many things not perceived by those who think that "classics" like "Confessions of a Justified Sinner"- or Merimee's "Colomba," or Stevenson's "Jekyll and Hyde" - belong to history and literature, and the plots and characters could never bear any relation to reality today (Tennant and Indiana, 1992: 4).

Other famous contemporary female writers in this line are Angela Carter, Jeanette Winterson, A.S. Byatt, or Marina Warner (Dow and Hanson, 2012). What these authors had in common was that they gave voice to people that had been historically muted; that is, women, workers; poor people... they all focused on what we could call ‘the others’.

### ***Two Women of London: The Strange Case of Mrs Jekyll and Mrs Hyde as a postmodernist novel***

The word "postmodern" serves as a general term for a variety of diverse aesthetic theories and practices that took place throughout the second half of the 20th century in the West, and then spread to other parts of the world (McHale, 2015). Postmodernism is not exclusive to literature, but it grew as a literary movement during and after the cultural revolutions that took place in the 1960s (McHale, 2015).

Modernism is a rigorous programme which leads to a predetermined end; it has the pathos of a necessity trajectory. [...] But this narrative continues, not with a simple succession but with a dialectical reversal: having reached the point of absolute aporia, having taken the exploration of the material to its end, the modernist project becomes both complete and irrelevant. The intervention of postmodernism at this point would involve not a linear succession but a change of ground. Losing faith in both the purity and the futility of modernist practice, postmodernism takes up the discarded or marginalized materials of modernism [...] and exploits them with a quite different kind of rigour (Frow, 1991: 142).

A relevant characteristic of postmodernist literature is that it usually focuses on what we could call ‘the others’. “When Hegel spun his epochal story of Universal History, he left little doubt that "History" belonged to some people but not to others” (Klein, 1995: 275). The same happened with literature: not that long ago, there were books that talked about white men, wars and other important events in History, but the protagonists never represented minorities. As Klein argues (1995), “we have replaced Hegel's peoples with and without history by scientific and savage minds, hot and cold societies, and master and local narratives” (p. 277). In opposition to elitist, alienated ‘otherness’ and the homogenizing urge of mainstream culture, postmodernist authors valued what was treated as ‘different’, visualizing issues related to colour, gender, nationality, or sexual orientation (Hutcheon, 1989). Emma Tennant did question the ‘otherness’: rewriting and

re-visioning Stevenson's work, she makes her main character a middle class woman with an ordinary life, not like Stevenson's Dr Jekyll, who was a scientist in pursue of a grand achievement.

One of the most relevant features of postmodernist literature is historiographical metafiction. This concept was coined by the literary scholar Linda Hutcheon in the late 1980s, when she studied postmodernist literature and realized that novels of this genre are usually located within a real historical line but contain fictional elements at the same time (Hutcheon, 1989). However, historiographical metafiction plays so much with reality that reality ends up looking like fiction, which sometimes makes it difficult to differentiate among the invented and the real aspects of these novels (Hutcheon, 1989). A classic example of this playfulness is *One Hundred Years of Solitude* (1967), by Gabriel García Márquez, who makes fantasy look very real and makes us doubt whether the historical facts that are narrated, such as the Banana Massacre that took place in Colombia in 1928, truly happened (Najma, 2020). This is related to what happens in *Two Women of London*. The setting of this novel is London during the time in which Margaret Thatcher was the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom (1979-1990), but the author introduces many fictional elements so we may be inclined to believe that the historical context is fictional too. As it is widely known, Thatcher implemented conservative measures like the privatization of some enterprises owned by the state, the sale of public housing to private holders, or the reduction of funds that were formerly destined to social services, education or health care (Young, 2023). The rich population in the United Kingdom was favoured thank to these measures; but the working class, poor people, immigrants, women and so on were the wronged ones. Tennant makes use of this real context and makes a critique with the help of some fictional features.

Historiographical metafiction goes hand in hand with two other relevant features of postmodernist literature: intertextuality and self-reflexivity. Intertextuality is the reference or allusions to other texts inside a novel. In *Two Women of London*, there is a clear allusion to Robert Louis Stevenson's *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*, since Emma Tennant did a revision of this novel. This revision is achieved not by simply copying aspects or parts of the novel, but by adopting critical distance from the former text using irony. In the postmodernist tradition, the final product of this form of revision is called a parody (Hutcheon, 1989). "To parody is not to destroy the past; in fact, to parody is both to enshrine the past and to question it" (Hutcheon, 1989: 6). In terms of

content, there are important changes in the rewriting of Stevenson's work that Tennant does to adopt critical distance. The main difference is that Tennant turned into women the characters that appear in the former novel as men; that is to say, all the main characters. By doing so, she was able to give voice to a poor and middle class woman that lived during Thatcherism in Great Britain. In postmodernist novels, "it is common to find overtly political narratologies articulated in an identifiably deconstructive vocabulary and bringing distinctly deconstructive approaches to bear on issues in the politics and ideology of narrative" (Currie, 2010: 10). As it was previously argued, Thatcherism had a negative impact on poor or middle-class people, who saw themselves struggling in their everyday lives due to the measures that were implemented. Even though Thatcherism was blamed, let us not forget that capitalism was the main cause of the differences among poor and rich people, and Thatcher's measures were only efficient because that was the economic system that was supporting those actions. "Popular capitalism thus provided the Conservatives with a vehicle for the dissemination of ideas about private ownership, social responsibility and obligation, and citizenship" (Edwards, 2017: 215). Popular capitalism was the strategy of getting the 'normal' person into believing that he or she could become part of the capital-owning classes by proclaiming the efficiency of free market capitalism (Edwards, 2017). Therefore, it permitted the Conservative Party to present these ideals "in the language of aspirational consumption and the pursuit of self-improvement and social mobility" (p. 216) instead of framing wider ownership as a risk to the state (Edwards, 2017). It is then logical that Tennant criticized this political and economic context through irony and a "deconstructive approach" (Currie, 2010: 10). Using this term, the author makes reference to the act of questioning or dismantling the basis of a cultural construction, which is what postmodernist literature tries to do: to make readers question what society tells them is normative or morally correct (Currie, 2010). Examples of this disruptive perspective are the direct critiques to the rich and capitalism in the novel:

'Soon you'll be telling me she's running a Green Investment Trust, where the rich can put their money in wild flowers or butterflies or something' [...] 'Capitalism is the cause of Eliza Jekyll's prosperity. And capitalism will continue to bring her prosperity while others starve' (Tennant, 2011: 25).

Tennant also exposes those women who ignore how gender roles and sexism affect them, condemning the hegemony of sexist ideals in the 80s' British society. The



author is aware of the role that religion plays in normalizing these sexist beliefs, so she uses a pious character (Jean Hastie) to represent it: Mrs Hastie, as many other women, thinks that feminism is a war among men and women, and that fighting for women's rights is harming men in some way. Moreover, she has the puritan beliefs that women are damned since Eve bit the apple in the Garden of Eden, and that personal success is determined by someone's actions and mistakes, not by other causes related to genre discrimination, economic issues or other external problems:

And it frightens me that you – and those such as Monica Purves – don't seem to consider men to belong to the human race any more. This can never be the route to a saner world. And remember: it is always a case of freedom of choice. None of us [...] lacks the opportunity to refuse evil. [...] The message of the story of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden is that we are responsible for the choices we freely make, good or evil, just as Adam was (Tennant, 2011: 73).

The narrator is not trying to justify the murder committed by Mrs Hyde, but is trying to break with the belief that people are completely responsible for their disgrace: "You speak of compassion for such as she. But she is where she is as a result of choices freely made by none other than herself" (p. 73). People do have responsibility for their actions, but there are many other causes that scape one's control, such as being discriminated for their genre, being poor in a system that does not allow poor people to thrive, or suffering any other kind of violence. As another character in *Two Women of London* argues about Mrs Hyde: "Carol sees a woman hounded to the limits of her sanity by the brutality of everyday life" (p. 32).

However, it is not an easy task to understand the whole story behind Mrs Hyde, since Tennant's narrative reflects the postmodernist belief that meaning is unstable and that reality is naturally fragmented and open to interpretation (Hutcheon, 1989). As Hutcheon argued (1983), "postmodernist metafiction tends to play with the possibilities of meaning (from degree zero to plurisignification) and of form (from minimalist narrative to galloping diegesis)" (p. 35). Applying this statement to *Two Women of London*, the story is told through the observations of numerous characters, frequently leaving the reader to piece together the overarching narrative (Dunn, 2006). In *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*, there is a heterodiegetic narrator, even though the last two chapters are narrated by two characters of the story: Doctor Lanyon

and Henry Jekyll respectively, which makes them homodiegetic narrators. That way, the narrative is mostly linear and the events follow a chronological order, except for those passages. Tennant's work, on the other side, is not chronological. The story is first narrated in present tense, *in medias res*: "A man lies dead in the gardens of Rudyard and Nightingale Crescents" (Tennant, 2011: 1). We are presented with a crime scene and a narrator who knows what will happen in the near future: "In the morning, the residents will decide to complain about Mrs Hyde's light..." (p. 1). Then, Tennant's novel continues with a note of someone called "the editor". This person explains that the story about to be told is a compilation of characters' testimonies such as "journals, taped interviews and even [...] video film of witnesses and participants in the crime..." (p. 5), in order to "reconstruct the terrible history of that summer in West London, the summer of '88" (p. 5). Therefore, the narrator is homodiegetic and is reconstructing in the present a story that has already happened. The fact that the story has several narrative voices without a clear chronological order, summed to the jumps from past to present and vice versa, creates a sense of disorientation in the readers and continually challenges their expectations. All these features make *Two Women of London* a complex text, but that is the nature of the postmodernist novel. As Hutcheon (1983) argued, the complexity of postmodernist texts comes, in part, from a deep self-consciousness about the act of artistic creation itself, which in many cases involved giving the reader a part as "co-creator or at least as collaborator" (Hutcheon, 1983: 35). In *Two Women of London*, one of the tasks Tennant leaves to the reader is interpreting what the figure of the double really means, and grasping the real story behind Mrs Jekyll and Mrs Hyde. For that reason, the next section will briefly analyse the figure of the double or *Doppelgänger* in Tennant's novel.

In Stevenson's novel, Mr Jekyll is a scientist who wants to separate his evil side from his good side. To do so, he creates a potion that allows him to split into two different persons: Mr Jekyll, who represents virtuousness, and Mr Hyde, who is the embodiment of wickedness. At first, he is able to control when he turns into his *alter ego*, but this task becomes more and more difficult as Mr Hyde grows stronger and starts to take control. After many attempts of creating a new potion that helps him, Mr Jekyll realizes that the only solution of eliminating Mr Hyde and his evilness is committing suicide. In *Two Women of London*, the main difference is that Mrs Hyde is her true self and Mrs Jekyll is her *alter ego*, so we have a reversal of roles. Mrs Hyde is a poor woman whose life is full of pain and abuse, and her body starts to somatise this by transforming her into a violent

being that looks like a monster: “For Mrs Hyde [...] was as alarming and repellent in appearance as a ghost” (Tennant, 2011: 40). When she realizes she cannot show her true self in society, she starts using a drug that makes her metamorphose into the young and beautiful Eliza Jekyll. As it happens in Stevenson’s work, the drug is less efficient as time passes by, hampering Mrs Hyde not only to look like Eliza, but also to act like her. When the double is openly addressed in fiction, it is usually “written by authors who are suspended between languages and cultures” (Coates, 1988: 2, as cited in Aliaga-Lavrijsen, 2019: 35). In that sense, the figure of the double in literature has been related to the loss and search of personal identity that usually comes with a traumatic background (Aliaga-Lavrijsen, 2019). Specifically, the *Doppelgänger* has historically been used in Scottish Gothic fiction as the embodiment of national anxieties (Sienkiewicz-Charlish, 2011). As a result, “the figure of the Double — or *Doppelgänger* — became a *topoi* symbolising this Scottish fracture or split self” (Aliaga-Lavrijsen, 2019: 35). This would be the case in Robert Louis Stevenson’s *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* and other contemporary works like Emma Tennant’s *Two Women of London: The Strange Case of Ms Jekyll and Mrs Hyde* (Aliaga-Lavrijsen, 2019). It is then safe to say that the split personality of the main character in *Two Women of London* might be a consequence of national trauma, since the traumatic Scottish past “would not only have affected the fictions of Hogg and Stevenson, but also the writing of contemporary authors” of Scottish extraction like Emma Tennant (Aliaga Lavrijsen, 2013: 6).

However, there have been other interpretations of what the double may symbolize. Calvente García (2022) argues that *Two Women of London* uses the figure of the *Doppelgänger* with the aim of making a social and cultural critique to the historical context (Great Britain in the 80s). Therefore, the split personality of Ms Jekyll and Mrs Hyde comes from the oppression by a capitalist and patriarchal society that not only harms women but also condemns any signs of their suffering: “we’re familiar with men rhapsodising the idea of a beast within them, yet still it seems that women are not quite ‘meant’ to have such feelings, much less exult in them” (Tennant, 2011: ix). Mrs Hyde is rejected by other middle-class women because she forces them to confront their own rejection by a socio-political system that claims to be a meritocracy but does not acknowledge the contributions of these working class women (Calvente García, 2022). Moreover, the protagonist questions social beauty standards by confronting “good-looking women with their own “ugly” double” (p. 9). Mrs Hyde, feeling obliged to

comply with feminine beauty standards, opposes the physical changes that she undergoes with the passing of time, so she creates her own double to be able to fit into society as someone younger, more beautiful, less aching (Falchi et al., 2015, as cited in Calvente García, 2022).

### **Interpreting *Two Women of London: The Strange Case of Mrs Jekyll and Mrs Hyde* as the story of a drug addict woman**

This hypothesis regards Mrs Jekyll and Mrs Hyde's story as the life trajectory of a drug addict. In the previous section of the essay, it was argued that Mrs Hyde was the real version of the woman: someone considered a monster because society does not want to deal with pain and condemns the ones whose lives are not beautiful or successful enough. Mrs Hyde, who is doomed to poorness and oblivion by Thatcherism, the Capitalist system and society per se, tries to survive by taking a drug that transforms her into the beautiful and successful Eliza Jekyll. However, this new perspective will argue that Mrs Jekyll is indeed her true self. In other words, Mrs Jekyll represents her younger version: when she was beautiful and successful and did not take drugs; but she transformed into Mrs Hyde because of all the substances she has consumed. The protagonist believes that taking drugs makes her true side (the wretched one) hide away, but maybe it is just the contrary and she is unable to see it. If that would be the case, she would appear as Mrs Jekyll when she is using drugs, and as Mrs Hyde when she is not using. One of the reasons why I thought of this theory is because the drug Mrs Hyde is consuming is none other than ecstasy: "my brain reeled at the thought of the composed and beautiful Eliza a secret addict of the most destructive [...] substance on the black market: by name, Ecstasy" (Tennant, 2011: 103). It would make sense if she thought this substance helped her deal with everyday tasks, since drug addicts' reality can be distorted: "Acute confusional states may arise during intoxication with a range of drugs [...]. Features include fragmentary hallucinosis, paranoid ideas, agitation, clouding of consciousness and marked fluctuation of symptoms over the 24-hour period". (Poole and Brabbins, 1996: 136).

According to Ettorre (2004), there are two main approaches to drug studies: the classical and the postmodern. The classical approach is focused on the consequences of drug use and the misuse of these substances (Ettorre, 2004). Experts that defend this approach refer to addiction as a "disease" (p. 328), and use individualistic explanations

to understand its spread. Moreover, drug addicts are stigmatized and blamed for their condition, while “issues such as class, sex, age, ethnicity or racial differences tend to be overlooked” (Littlewood, 2002, as cited in Ettorre, 2004: 328). The main reason why the context of the drug user is not taken into account is to maintain the hegemony of the “West over the rest” (Littlewood, 2002, as cited in Ettorre, 2004: 328). This hegemony concedes superiority to white males from middle class families, allowing them to dissociate themselves from the drug addict profile (Ettorre, 2004). However, this approach has proven to be obsolete by sociologists and criminologists like Elizabeth Ettorre, Fiona Measham, or Judith Aldridge, who realized that drug studies were leaving aside contextual factors that were relevant for the understanding of substance addictions. In that order, Ettorre released the book *Women and Substance Use* in 1992 arguing, for the first time, that women were being marginalized in drug studies. She also proposed a new approach in which “social differences based on class, gender and ethnicity, ability are recognised [...] as a theoretical category” (p. 328). She called it the Postmodern approach, and is the most suitable one for the analysis of Mrs Jekyll and Mrs Hyde in *Two Women of London*. Maybe unbeknownst to her, Emma Tennant studied through a Postmodern approach how gender affects female drug addicts: instead of stigmatizing this woman, she made her the main character and provided context and causes for her situation: “Capitalism is the cause of Eliza Jekyll’s prosperity. And capitalism will continue to bring her prosperity while others starve” (Tennant, 2011: 25). “Carol sees a woman hounded to the limits of her sanity by the brutality of everyday life” (p. 32).

First of all, Ettorre argues that gender should be considered an institution, just like other cultural components “such as symbols, language, mores, norms, values and so on” (Ettorre, 2004: 329). According to her, we still need to do specific research on women because gender is not globally recognized as a factor that helps to explain why women and men experience everyday situations in very different ways (Ettorre, 2004). Gender brings to society a system of interconnected rules based on individual actions, in which people are distinguished by differences in gender, and masculine and feminine traits (Ettorre, 2004). Moreover, gender differences overlap with other forms of inequity like class or ethnicity, which makes gender discrimination even more complicated (Ettorre, 2004). Secondly, she proposes several connections between women drug users and their bodies. I will make use of the paper’s headings to relate Ettorre’s ideas to Mrs Jekyll and Mrs Hyde.

### **“The body: drug use as embodied deviance” (Ettorre, 2004: 330)**

The anthropologists Terry and Urla (1995) described embodied deviance as a condition in which people who are considered to be atypical are exposed by their bodies because they are marked in some way. According to them, any definition of deviant social behaviour always shows up, no matter how hard people try to cover it (Terry and Urla, 1995). In addition, these persons that depart from the norm are considered morally and socially inferior (Ettorre, 2004). Drug use is an example of embodied deviance: it marks individual bodies and “determines their low social status and lack of moral agency” (Ettorre, 2004: 330). In this sense, Mrs Hyde’s body is clearly marked as deviant: “Quite honestly, if there was or had been, necrophilia would have been the only word for it. For Mrs Hyde [...] was as alarming and repellent in appearance as a ghost [...] And she looked like death” (Tennant, 2011: 40). The consequences of using drugs are not only physical: being in society also becomes a problem for Mrs Hyde, who is now perceived in a different way, thus treated in a different way. Scott and Morgan (1993) argued that bodies have certain societal tasks they must accomplish, called the four Rs’: Representation, Regulation, Reproduction and Restraint. However, these societal tasks may become a problem for drug using people (Turner, 1996, as cited in Ettorre, 2004).

### **“The body task of self-image” (Ettorre, 2004: 330)**

In this section, I will talk about the first R: representation. According to Ettorre (p. 330), “a body must deal with one’s self-image by presenting oneself in an acceptable way in society”. For Mrs Hyde, this is clearly the most difficult task. On the one hand, this is difficult because she believes that she needs to take ecstasy in order to appear as Mrs Jekyll, and when the effect of the drug fades away, she feels herself turning into Mrs Hyde: “I was Mrs Hyde... unexpectedly and terrifyingly... more and more often...” (Tennant, 2011: 116). This belief makes her dependent on ecstasy in order to present herself in society, and every time she consumes, she needs a higher dose of ecstasy to feel the same she used to feel with a lower dose: “as the fear grew, so did the rapidity with which the drug wore off” (p.115). That is to say, she needs a higher dose to feel like Mrs Jekyll. On the other hand, presenting herself in an acceptable way is difficult because, as a woman, Mrs Hyde is required to meet society’s expectations regarding women’s physical appearance. When a woman does not fit in the norm of beauty, she is usually blamed and criticized:

Her view is that women like Mrs Hyde could easily support themselves ‘if they really wanted to’: that ‘making an exhibition of yourself’ by parading in cheap and common clothing on a night such as this is done to draw attention to your straitened circumstances (pp. 31-32).

This extract shows exactly how Ettorre’s approaches to drug use work. As it was argued, the classical approach is based on individualistic explanations, and drug users are usually blamed for their condition (Ettorre, 2004). The character who judges Mrs Hyde does not take into account her life conditions, but she still blames her for her situation. In addition, this fault is mostly related to Mrs Hyde’s unkempt appearance, as if that were the biggest mistake she could make. Fredrickson and Roberts’ (1997) Objectification Theory studied the cultural environment in which women's physical attractiveness is constantly scrutinized, causing the persistent objectification of women. The knowledge that women's attractiveness is their ‘main medium of exchange’ increases their obsession with appearance (Fredrickson and Roberts, 1997, as cited in Engeln-Maddox, 2006). That way, Mrs Hyde does not only have to fear being stigmatized by society because of being a drug addict, but also because she does not look attractive anymore.

**“The body task of self-control” (Ettorre, 2004: 330)**

Most ‘normal’ bodies can resolve self-control within the confines of the culture they are living in, since they control their desires, passions, and needs as they navigate through society (Ettorre, 2004). However, it is widely held that drug users are unable to do so because their drug usage comes with the loss of self-control (Room, 1985, as cited in Ettorre, 2004). This lack of control, or embodied deviance, grows in Mrs Hyde as something unstoppable. Rage comes first: “All the talk of rapist was getting on my nerves – especially as “I” in my persona as Mrs Hyde (who was unable to prevent myself from running naked in her terrible anger in the gale-lashed gardens), was actually a heroine now...” (Tennant, 2011: 117). However, the summit of Mrs Hyde being unable of controlling her impulses is when she killed the rapist: “against my will and with all the will in the world [...] I nipped sideways and behind him and hooked him round the collarbone with that parrot on a stick with nylon wings” (p. 118).

In addition to losing control, one of the most dangerous consequences that drug addiction in women can have is that they might find themselves enacting feminine

conformity standards -for instance, being sexually desirable or even deadening the pain of abusive relationships (Broom, 1994, as cited in Ettorre, 2004). In *Two Women of London*, Mrs Hyde discovers that, after taking drugs, men find her attractive again because she feels like Mrs Jekyll: young and beautiful: “You can’t imagine what it’s like when your youth comes back – and beauty, and more – and the figure and the quick step to go with it” (Tennant, 2011: 113). That way, she realizes she can take advantage of that power by having men do things for her: “It was long time since anyone had fancied me...” (p. 113). “I loved the power. Men would do anything for me” (p. 114). What this shows is that being liked by men was another reason why she kept using drugs and justifying it. Being under the effect of drugs, she could have felt powerful and beautiful, able of getting men to do everything for her, while in reality she was enacting feminine conformity standards, only provoked by her addiction.

**“The body task of reproduction”** (Ettorre, 2004: 331)

Bodies face the problem of reproduction, and society creates the conditions for this reproduction as bodies give birth (Rothman, 1989, as cited in Ettorre, 2004). Since drug users are not perceived as favourable to having children or even supportive of family life, reproduction becomes a problematic task for drug users (Fortney, 1990, as cited in Ettorre, 2004). Making the decision to reproduce can be challenged by the beliefs that determine what kinds of bodies should do it (Ettorre, 2004). Drug-using bodies are not considered highly fertile because the abuse of substances during pregnancy can cause health problems in the foetus, apart from being ethically punished (Curet & Hsi, 2002). Mrs Hyde had two children: “By this time I had two babies, eighteen months apart” (Tennant, 2011: 111). It is stated that Mrs Hyde could not take care of her children: “I went on Social Security because there was no way at all that I could bring up these two young children and go out to a demanding job” (p. 111). Even though there is no evidence in the novel that she started taking drugs after her children were born, this might have had something to do with Mrs Hyde’s addiction. Her situation of extreme poverty, being unable of finding a job and having no one to help her with the kids were reasons that could have led her into drug consumption, regarded by her as an escape route. As she confessed, taking care of the kids became harder and harder as they grew: “I began to cry and lose my temper with the children” (p. 112). Mrs Hyde thought ecstasy was helping her, while it was in reality worsening her anger issues and hindering the task of being a



mother to her kids: “When I’d been hitting the kids so much I knew there might be a real battering in the night...” (p.112). Murphy & Rosenbaum (1999) argued that pregnant women who are drug users are usually a big concern for social policies, and their children are often taken away. As it happened with Mrs Hyde, social workers were alerted of the situation and finally took away her children: “The more I cried, the more the kids screamed. I tied them in their cots, but the social worker came again – and Dr Crane said they’d have to go” (Tennant, 2011: 113). This is another example demonstrating that ecstasy was probably harming Mrs Hyde more than it was helping her, even if she justified its use. However, let us not call Mrs Hyde a monster, since she is not the only one responsible for her situation. Following Ettorre’s postmodern approach to drug use, there are other contextual factors that should be taken into account:

I kept the kids clean and I cooked for them. They played in the communal gardens, but as the posh people moved in, their children threw stones at mine. Soon they were too frightened to go out there and we were all cooped up together in the flat. (p. 111).

This passage demonstrates that class belonging is important. It does not matter if Mrs Hyde was taking drugs, what matters is that she was poor, and her kids looked poor. The children from the posh neighbours could see they were different and considered them so inferior they had to throw stones at them. Afterwards, Mrs Hyde explains there was no space for all of them to live comfortably, since she could not afford a bigger flat. This facts must have had affected her behaviour, making her more violent and causing the loss of her patience. Through this hypothesis, I am not trying to excuse her aggressiveness with her kids, rather trying to explain there were external factors that were silently shattering Mrs Hyde until she could not bear it anymore. Poverty and classism were some of these factors, and she really cannot be blamed for them.

## **Conclusion**

To conclude, this Bachelor’s thesis has debated two different approaches to interpret Emma Tennant’s work *Two Women of London: The Strange Case of Mrs Jekyll and Mrs Hyde*. The first hypothesis has viewed it is a critique to the societal, economic and political contexts of the 80s’ Great Britain. In this section, it has been stated that the novel is postmodernist, and that it achieves its goal using the common techniques of that literary

movement. The first characteristics that have been discussed were intertextuality and historiographical metafiction, since *Two Women of London* is a feminist rewriting of Stevenson's *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* and uses a real historical context to tell the story. In order to adopt critical distance from Stevenson's work, Emma Tennant's protagonist is a person 'that had no voice in History' to shift away from the exclusivity of mainstream culture and portray how gender discrimination affects women's everyday lives. Self-reflexivity, or the consciousness about the process of writing has also been studied. The story, as it was discussed, is told through the observations of numerous characters, frequently leaving the reader confused and obliged to piece together the overarching narrative:

A Tennant novel is often a frustrating read, since its polyvocal structure creates a lack of closure and a complete suspension of authority. Tennant's narrators are always unreliable, not just because they are mad or morally compromised, or because they are children, but because reliability is always destabilized by the text itself (Dunn, 2006: 1).

After explaining how Tennant makes use of postmodernist techniques in her novel, the second section of this thesis argued there is another way of interpreting the novel. Using a journal article written by Elizabeth Ettorre (2004), it was debated that the double personality of Mrs Jekyll/Mrs Hyde, her physical changes, and her violent behaviour could have been a consequence of the abuse of drugs. It was stated that drug abuse in Mrs Jekyll/Mrs Hyde should be studied through a gender perspective that takes into consideration "social differences based on class, gender and ethnicity" (Ettorre, 2004: 328), which Ettorre denominates the postmodernist approach. In that order, this essay studied the difficulties that Mrs Hyde experienced accomplishing the societal tasks known as the four Rs': Representation, Regulation, Reproduction and Restraint (Scott and Morgan, 1993), since these duties usually become a problem for drug using people (Turner, 1996, as cited in Ettorre, 2004). -Two different approaches have been presented, but none of them is intended to be the 'correct' one. As Linda Hutcheon (1983) argued, we should stop believing there is always a single path to follow, or a single interpretation to choose when reading a postmodernist text. Authors may want to play with 'both' at the same time, and we have to be ready for that.

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