

# A Strange Case of Angry Video Game Nerds: *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* on the Nintendo Entertainment System

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## Abstract:

Regarded by many gamers as one of the worst video games of all time, *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* on the Nintendo Entertainment System is simultaneously a unique adaptation of a Victorian text. The frustrating design of the game is based upon an attempt to translate the relationship between Stevenson's characters into an interactive experience. Ironically, the problems inherent in the game design establish a distinctly immersive adaptation, as the player experiences the repressive frustrations of being Henry Jekyll and the cathartic joys of being Edward Hyde. By 'legitimising' Hyde, and by promoting an active reengagement with the Stevenson text through gameplay, *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* ironically succeeds as a neo-Victorian adaptation by failing as a video game.

**Keywords:** adaptation, gaming, Mr. Hyde, Dr. Jekyll, immersion, ludology, Nintendo, Robert Louis Stevenson, *Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*, video games.

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In 1989, the Japanese toy-company Bandai (in partnership with the motion picture company Toho) released *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* on the Nintendo Entertainment System (NES).<sup>1</sup> This game was largely ignored in its own era and subsequently forgotten. However, *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* achieved both fame and infamy more than a decade later due in part to the ever-increasing presence of gamers on the internet. The steady stream of video game reviews, nostalgic retrospectives, and eventually, vlog postings and video walk-throughs that have since become a staple of *YouTube* prompted a renewed interest in *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*. This interest was uniformly negative. Scathing reviews of *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* not only breathed new life into the game but also launched the careers of iconic fixtures of internet and gamer culture. Video game vlogger James Rolfe, who became one of the most popular internet personalities on *YouTube* when he created

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the persona of the ‘Angry Video Game Nerd’,<sup>2</sup> selected *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* as the subject of his second vlog review, claiming that it was the worst game he had ever played. Rolfe’s humorous tirade earned both himself and the game a cult following. Years later, in an extended follow-up review, Rolfe lamented that his initial critique had the opposite effect to that which he had intended. By ranting against the game, he had inadvertently piqued viewers’ curiosity, thus prompting them to play *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*.

The strange journey of *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* from obscurity to ignominy is a testament to the power of fandom to promote the rediscovery of lost artifacts. However, the hyperbolic discourse surrounding the game has likewise obscured an intriguing analysis of the translation of Robert Louis Stevenson’s novella *Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (1886) into a gaming experience. The negative response of gamers to *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* has centered squarely upon the issue of gameplay, and yet, the underlying frustration that so defines most players’ responses is in keeping with a vital element of the Stevenson text: the frustrations of being Henry Jekyll. The fact that the gameplay embraces the stresses of being Jekyll, and contrasts these stresses with the liberating joys of being Edward Hyde, means that, more than any other adaptation of Stevenson’s novella, the video game creates an opportunity to experience the text’s central conflict. The game’s creators thus succeeded in their roles as adaptors even as they failed in their roles as game designers. This tension seems fitting given the essential “f(r)iction” that Mark Llewellyn perceives in neo-Victorian studies (Llewellyn 2008: 180); ironically, a bad video game can be a successful neo-Victorian adaptation.

In spite of their tendency to deride the very notion of the game as an adaptation, Rolfe and other gamers have wrestled with the difficulty of trying to define this particular game’s relationship to the novella. *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* thus fosters a surprisingly neo-Victorian emphasis on reengagement with the Victorians as framed by the translation of the Stevenson story into an interactive experience. In this article, I assess the design of the NES game and how the ability to play as Edward Hyde allows for a neo-Victorian reassessment of the Stevenson text. I subsequently analyse how Rolfe’s vlog entries inspired other vloggers to engage both with the game and with Stevenson’s text. Despite the educational slant of more recent video games based on the novella, *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* on

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the NES offers a more direct engagement with both the text and the Victorians by way of side-scrolling gameplay.

### 1. **Jekyll and Hyde: The Story vs. the Experience**

In keeping with the basic theme of duality that defines the Stevenson text, there is a clear dichotomy to *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*. It is a unique adaptation that fully embraces its medium's interactive capacities in an attempt to capture the theme of the Stevenson narrative. Simultaneously, it is a poor excuse for a video game. Michael E. Moore observes,

When starting work on a game, the most important question the designer should ask is: What will the player do during the game that is 'fun'? [...] The designer, of course, wants to maximize the fun factor time and minimize the drudgery for players. (Moore 2011: 23-24)

Yet playing *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* is a remarkably frustrating experience. Given that gameplay is the essential factor in the evaluation of a video game, the tendency to ignore the questions of adaptation and focus solely on the drudgery of the gaming experience is understandable.

Equally understandable is the tendency of most reviewers to dismiss the very notion of a relationship between the game and the Stevenson text given the widely divergent mediums. In his extended review, Rolfe notes that virtually nothing that happens in the game can be traced back to the book, “[a]lthough I can say the game is very true to the original title of the book, *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*, because this game is certainly a very strange case indeed!” (Rolfe 2010: 8:30-8:45). The response of many adaptation theorists to such a critique would be that Rolfe and his peers erred in judging the adaptation based upon its relationship to the Stevenson text, doubly so since the unwavering negativity surrounding the game has nothing to do with its status as an adaptation and everything to do with the perceived flaws in the game's playability. Indeed, the hypothetical anti-fidelity-criticism rebuttal is inherently problematic in that it frames the discussion around the Stevenson story, and the issue of story is a controversial topic when analysing video games. Though the debate over whether video games have narratives remains contentious, most ludologists

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agree that playing a video game is *not* about receiving, participating in, or creating a story (Schell 2008: 10).

Certainly, to label *Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* as the *source* of the video game seems an oversimplification of a more complex relationship that is heavily affected by the experiential nature of the video game medium. It is in this context that the aforementioned translation issues become more significant, for the designers of *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* did not seek to retell the story of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, but rather, to create the experience of *being* Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde. As ambitiously noted in the game's instruction booklet, "in this Nintendo game pak version, you can experience firsthand the struggle between Good and Evil for control of the human personality" (*Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* Instruction Booklet 1988: 2).<sup>3</sup> The gameplay revolves around this attempt by the designers to translate the dynamic between the titular characters into an immersive experience.

An ostensible tension exists between the concept of *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* as an adaptation of the Stevenson novella and the concept of *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* as a gaming experience. An adaptation is usually a 'fixed' work (a novel, play, poem, or film) with a clear beginning, middle, and ending; a gaming experience is defined by its variation and instability.<sup>4</sup> The stable element or product – that is, the game – is the conduit to the experience:

When people play games, they have an experience. It is this experience that the designer cares about. Without the experience, the game is worthless [...]. The game is not the experience. The game enables the experience, but it *is not the experience*. (Schell 2008: 10)

Despite the apparent contrast between adaptation and experience, this discourse is evocative of a common thread running through neo-Victorian studies and adaptation studies. In an article published in the inaugural issue of this journal, Llewellyn frames neo-Victorian literature as "a mediator into the *experience* of reading the 'real' thing [nineteenth-century literature]", involving "processes of writing that *act out* the results of reading the Victorians and their literary productions" (Llewellyn 2008: 168, added emphases). Though reading and writing neo-Victorian literature is not the same as playing a game, Llewellyn's quotation underscores the active and

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experiential quality of the field. Much as the Game Pak is the conduit to the larger experience, the literary work is the gateway to a larger experience by which texts from different eras (and diverse contexts) are placed into dialogue with one another. To put it another way, the process – and not the product – is the vital component: the game must be played, and the neo-Victorian work must be read *and* integrated into the larger framework.<sup>5</sup> Given this connection, it is surprising that the discourse on neo-Victorian adaptations has not delved more deeply into the subject of video games, even as it has expanded beyond reading and writing to include more overtly interactive and immersive experiences (museum visits, theme park excursions, etc.).<sup>6</sup>

In regard to adaptation theory, Linda Hutcheon asserts that the very word ‘adaptation’ can “refer to both a product and a process of creation and reception” (Hutcheon 2006: xiv), and her work is based heavily around the idea that any theory of adaptation must consider the experiential component of adaptations. In highlighting the experiential quality of *all* adaptations, Hutcheon runs the risk of undermining the distinctiveness of games. She thus qualifies her comparison by underscoring how the experience of gaming diverges from the experience of watching a film or reading a book, though she likewise tends to bring the issue of story into her discourse on games, for example, by comparing the “three act” structure of films with the three act structure of games based upon films (Hutcheon 2006: 13). Similarly, in the preface to her monograph, Hutcheon claims that all adaptations are immersive, and she uses stories as the common denominator between them, noting that adaptations either tell, show, or interact with stories (Hutcheon 2006: xiv).

Yet *story* remains a naughty word amongst video game theorists, a fact which complicates the discourse on video games like *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* given the literary roots of the work.<sup>7</sup> The anti-narrative slant of many ludologists likewise complicates this neo-Victorian analysis. Until recently, the “most defining studies in the field [of neo-Victorian studies] have focused on fiction [...], and questions around narrative, plot and fictionality have been a driving force for many scholars” (Palmer and Poore 2016: 3). Game theorist Erik Zimmerman has attempted to bridge the ludology-narratology gap through the diplomatic term “game-story” (Zimmerman 2004: 162). Here, Zimmerman focuses heavily on the experience of playing the game, but he also references the various paratextual factors and cultural

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forces that shape that experience and transform it into an unwritten multi-text narrative. Using the example of the arcade game *Ms. Pac-Man*, Zimmerman observes that

there are many story elements to *Ms. Pac-Man* which are not directly related to the gameplay. For instance, the large-scale characters on the physical arcade game cabinet establish a graphical story about the chase between Ms. Pac-Man and the ghosts. (Zimmerman 2004: 162)

Zimmerman broadens the context even further to include such abstract elements as the titular character's gender, the connection between the game and the original *Pac-Man* game, and the status of Pac-Man and Ms. Pac-Man as pop-culture icons, claiming that these elements affect the mindset with which the player approaches the console and the narrative of the player's experience (Zimmerman 2004: 163). As in the case of reading neo-Victorian literature, the synthesis of the different components can greatly enhance the significance of the overall experience.<sup>8</sup>

Zimmerman's idea of a "game-story" is useful for scrutinising *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* due to the various textual/paratextual/cultural elements that surround the game. Like many adaptations of works that have been adapted previously, *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* embraces the notion of intertextuality (a concept that is likewise central to neo-Victorian studies).<sup>9</sup> The game's outcome is based upon the iconic film versions of the novella: the goal is to get Dr. Jekyll to the chapel in time for his wedding. The designers thus eschew the homosocial universe of the Stevenson text in favour of the more domestically oriented Jekyll of the Frederic March and Spencer Tracy films.<sup>10</sup> Still, in the case of an iconic novella that has become ingrained in our culture, intertextuality continues to be influenced by the more abstract cultural perception of the "tracer text", Brian Rose's less hierarchical designation for the source (Rose 1996: 2). Discussing the legacy of *Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*, Rose notes how

[a] group text (or a body of adaptations extended over time) that has grown from a tracer has the potential of becoming a larger, reflexive body of narratological, performative and cultural elements: a culture text. A culture-text is located

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between text, group-text and the popular-cultural body of images, icons and meanings that have some reference to the original. (Rose 1996: 2)

What is striking about the culture-text of Stevenson's novella is that the one permanent and enduring "reference to the original" revolves around the fact that Jekyll and Hyde are the same person.<sup>11</sup> The shocking solution to the mystery that defines the original text is thus taken for granted.

Nevertheless, the dichotomy between the two title characters is more pronounced than ever. Hyde is now perceived as "the antithetical evil to Jekyll's good", despite the fact that "[h]is cruelty derives from his association with Jekyll, not from any inherent motivation toward destruction" (Saposnik 1971: 727). If Hyde is frequently represented as an "antithetical evil", it is not surprising that the cultural Jekyll is a milquetoast representation of goodness as opposed to a complicated and flawed individual who covers up his own guilt by ascribing a separate persona to his own dark impulses.<sup>12</sup> This sense of exaggerated contrasts hints toward an almost parodic quality in the representation of the two characters, which is not surprising given the inherently parodic qualities of Gothic literature and the countless parodies that *Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* has inspired (see Elliott 2008: 24, 25, 32). Still, in contrast to Kamilla Elliott's argument that parodies of the Gothic tend to question "binary oppositions [that Gothic criticism] has refused to deconstruct" (Elliott 2008: 24), the culture text has strengthened Jekyll and Hyde's binary by way of a reductive formula: Jekyll = good; Hyde = evil.

To criticise the representations of Jekyll and Hyde in adaptations (and, more generally, in popular culture) as reductive or simplistic is to risk adopting the outmoded dogmas of fidelity criticism. Still, given the regularity with which Jekyll and Hyde have been adapted for other media, finding a suitable approach to assessing adaptations is uniquely challenging. Thomas Leitch explores four such approaches in detail, acknowledging the complex intertextuality of each of these models; though he ultimately gravitates toward Rose's theories of tracer texts and culture texts, he likewise notes that Rose frequently fails to consider the full scope of Stevenson adaptations due to his unwillingness to acknowledge 'unofficial' adaptations (Leitch 2010: 39-42). Rose's definition of the culture text accounts for the earlier cited "popular-cultural body of images, icons and

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meanings that have some reference to the original”, but Leitch asserts that Rose does not give adequate consideration to how this broad spectrum of “images” and “icons” may have altered the definition of what details are most integral to Jekyll and Hyde’s story (Leitch 2010: 40).

Certainly, the failure to acknowledge the more subtle and internal ambiguities noted by Saposnik provides one example of how certain nuances can get lost in the more expansive culture text, though it also exemplifies how mediums invariably affect and alter meanings. While consistently preserving the key ‘Jekyll is Hyde, Hyde is Jekyll’ paradigm, the culture text – due in large part to its emphasis on visual adaptations, including animated media, a format which lends itself to exaggeration and caricature<sup>13</sup> – has amplified the distinctions between the two characters. In the video game, the effect of the culture-text is felt most pronouncedly in this hyperbolic depiction of the difference between Jekyll and Hyde: Jekyll is an average-sized human, while Hyde is a lumbering monster.<sup>14</sup> What is ironic about this portrayal is that although the game’s representation of the titular characters is influenced heavily by the group-text and culture-text, the game, as a medium, translates key elements of the Stevenson novella that are difficult or impossible to replicate in other mediums such as film, theatre, or cartoons. Indeed, though the caricature-like portrayal of the Jekyll and Hyde relationship is integral to the game, the successful immersion of the player in the psyches of Stevenson’s characters allows for a more nuanced assessment of the *interconnections* rather than oppositions between Jekyll and Hyde – which are grounded heavily in the themes of the literary text.

What is likewise noteworthy is the fact that, despite the aforementioned emphasis on the group and culture texts, the game designers allude directly to the Stevenson novella in the game’s instruction booklet. As implied in the previously quoted section from the *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* instruction booklet, the creative team behind the game was genuinely interested in incorporating the Stevenson text into the gaming experience, but they astutely framed the issue as precisely that: an experience. The repeated use of the word ‘experience’ within the instruction booklet implies that the game is designed to create something participatory as opposed to its simply recounting the Stevenson narrative:



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The story ‘The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde’ was written by the famous Scottish author Robert Louis Stevenson. ‘Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde’ became a best seller as soon as it was published in England in 1886, and is now famous throughout the world. [...] Dr. Jekyll succeeds in creating a potion which separates [the] two elements of his personality [...]. The good Dr. Jekyll soon has difficulty controlling his transformations into the evil Mr. Hyde, and he finds that the two sides of his personality are in conflict for control of his mind. This Nintendo Entertainment Systems [sic] game allows you to experience this conflict. (*Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* Instruction Booklet 1988: 2)

*Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* clearly places the firsthand facets of gaming over the narrative aspects, both in regard to the game’s relationship with the original text (the player is not playing as John Utterson as he struggles to solve the mystery of Henry Jekyll’s relationship with Edward Hyde) and in regard to the general gameplay (the absence of cutscenes or interludes ensures that the playing of the game is the foremost element of the gaming experience). Still, the very fact that the game’s manual includes descriptions of the Stevenson text is remarkable; there are countless Dracula and Frankenstein video games, but references to Stoker and Shelley are nonexistent. The only exceptions in this regard are the games based on the feature films *Bram Stoker’s Dracula* (dir. Francis Ford Coppola) and *Mary Shelley’s Frankenstein* (dir. Kenneth Branagh). Like the filmmakers behind these adaptations, perhaps the game designers for *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* simply sought to endow their adaptation with an air of legitimacy through allusions to a literary figure, and yet, the overt references to the literary source hint toward a deeper aspiration to translate, transpose, and transform. Furthermore, while a viewer passively processes these films, the experience of the game creates the potential for achieving that aspiration.<sup>15</sup>

Ultimately, the various components that define the overall experience of the game can be divided into three categories: story, object, and gameplay. ‘Story’ refers to the narrative elements that frame the game for the player (including the characters, settings, and events), and the larger para-textual or cultural elements that constitute the game-story. Understanding the story can enrich and enhance the gaming experience, but

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the story contributes little to the actions that define the experience: e.g., knowing that the avatar is named Mario and that he is on an adventure in the Mushroom Kingdom to rescue a princess might enhance the player's enthusiasm for the game; furthermore, appreciating the pop-cultural prominence of Mario can make the gaming experience more enjoyable. However, neither element is likely to fundamentally change the way in which the player plays.

In *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, the story of the game is put forth almost entirely through descriptions in the instruction booklet, and the instruction booklet connects the story of the game back to the original Stevenson text. Though the limited technology of the NES precluded the cinematic cutscenes that define contemporary video games, *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* also features two brief interludes during the game startup: before the player presses the start key, a cutscene depicts Jekyll in his laboratory experimenting with his chemistry equipment. Upon pressing the start key, a second cutscene traces the doctor's departure from the lab and the start of his journey through London. Such brief interludes lend the game a narrative – perhaps even literary – air.

As noted, the larger group-text and culture-text clearly informed the game's designers and can likewise influence the player's perspective. In keeping with the critical issue of intertextuality, Hutcheon argues that gamers will invariably experience film adaptations of games that they have played in a different manner than moviegoers who have never taken up the game (Hutcheon 2006: 8). Though the reverse is also true (a person who has seen a movie upon which a video game is based will experience the game in a different way than a person who simply plays the game), that experience is, as Zimmerman intimates, independent of the essential kernel, the "artificial conflict with a quantifiable outcome" (Zimmerman 2004: 163). What is striking in the case of *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* is not how knowledge of the text, the group-text, and the culture-text shapes the player's playing of the game, but rather, how the playing of the game shapes the player's understanding of the text (and his or her understanding of how different media can or cannot capture diverse elements of Stevenson's characters). Certainly, a viewer could watch Frederic March's captivating performance in the 1931 film (dir. Rouben Mamoulian and find himself or herself empathising with Jekyll or gravitating toward Hyde, but this experience remains essentially passive:

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[N]one of the telling or performing media can likely beat the degree of the active physical involvement of interactive art and especially videogames. The *Die Hard* films (1988, 1989, 1995), no matter how intense their ‘extremely dynamic sequences,’ would find it hard to beat the game versions’ participator excitement, intense concentration, engagement of kinesthetic skills, competitive energy, and provoking of often involuntary physical reactions. (Hutcheon 2006: 131)

As will be discussed in the next section, the kinesthetic contrasts between the two avatars is essential to helping the player understand Stevenson’s creations in ways that non-participatory media cannot.

‘Object’ refers to the goal of playing the game. Reaching this goal marks the end of the gameplay experience, but it also brings the story to a conclusion. To an extent, the object thus bridges the gap between story and gameplay, for although the player controls the experience based on his or her skill level, strategy, and gameplay choices, he or she can only win the game by accomplishing the goal specified by the designers (Frasca 2003: 232). In *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, the object of the game is to get Dr. Jekyll safely across London and to the chapel. Furthermore, given the paradoxical idea of winning the game as Hyde, the designers created two separate endings for the two characters, based on which character first reaches the church.<sup>16</sup>

Though the paratextual elements described by Zimmerman (like the culture-text of Stevenson’s novella) exert an abstract effect on the player, the ‘gameplay’, or the experience of playing the game, is perhaps the most abstract element of the three categories, for it is defined by the exchange between the game and the player. Not only does the gaming experience depend upon the skill level of the player, but different aspects of the game will provoke different responses from players. The way in which the player reacts will further affect how the game unfolds.

To label *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* a bad game is therefore an oversimplification. Certainly, the design of the game does not set up the sort of positive, fun, and satisfying experience that all gamers seek when playing video games. This situation is the result of several factors, as will be discussed below. Nevertheless, the overwhelmingly negative response of reviewers and players to the experience of playing *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*

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does *not* indicate that the designers failed in their attempt to translate the experience of the novella's characters into a new medium.

**2. “Unfortunately, the good doctor meets with many accidents...”**

Before proceeding with an analysis of the video game, it is helpful to draw a distinction between two terms that I used in the previous section: interactive and immersive. While these terms are frequently used in conjunction with one another, they are not synonyms. Hutcheon argues that any work can potentially be described as immersive so long as it prompts an imaginative break from reality, though she claims that “participatory modes in which we also engage physically with the story and its world” (Hutcheon 2006: 23), as in the case of video games, are uniquely interactive. As noted, ludologists would likely object to Hutcheon's focus on stories, and her definition of immersive seems broad. Marie-Laure Ryan has written extensively on narrative and the immersive aspirations of virtual reality (VR), and she offers a more specific contrast between immersion and interaction. Ryan has noted how descriptions of virtual reality typically draw a metaphorical comparison between VR and reading based upon the notion that VR seeks to fully absorb people into a fictional world (Ryan 2015: 61). In her early writings on the subject, Ryan notes that “VR is not so much a medium in itself, as a technology for the synthesis of all media toward a total experience” (Ryan 1999: 112). This analysis seems to indicate that traditional video games – like *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* – create an interactive rather than an immersive experience. (Certainly, the limited technology of the NES does not conduce to the type of synthesis described above.)<sup>17</sup>

Nevertheless, Ryan's scholarship revolves around the tendency of VR theorists to compare the immersive experience of virtual reality to the immersive (yet imaginative) experience of losing oneself in a literary narrative (see Ryan 2015: 61). In scrutinising the different ways in which immersion in a literary text can unfold, Ryan notes the importance of emotion:

The emotions experienced in make-believe in the fictional world may carry over to the real world, causing physical reactions such as crying or tensing up in fear. The affinity of Walton's theory of fiction with virtual reality and its concept

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of immersion resides in his insistence on the participation of the appreciator in the fictional world. (Ryan 1999: 116)

Ryan pushes the matter further in her monograph, assessing “the paradox of empathy for fictional characters” (Ryan 2015: 108). Though reading a work of fiction may trigger intense emotions, the emotions themselves are not fictional; moreover, “[o]nce we develop empathy, it does not have to be limited to people we know nor to real people” (Ryan 2015: 109).

As noted, the technology of *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* is not immersive, and the frustrating experience that is the gameplay seems antithetical to immersion: how could one possibly lose oneself in a game that is nearly impossible to play?<sup>18</sup> Furthermore, while empathy for video game avatars is difficult to achieve even in the case of a fun side-scrolling NES game (I have never wept for Mario, Simon Belmont, Mega Man, or Samus), the probability of empathising with an avatar in an unpleasant game like *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* is virtually non-existent. Thus, immersion via either technology or emotion is unlikely. However, as I will discuss in this section, the emotions roused by *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* take the player out of the game and immerse that player in the Stevenson narrative by way of empathy for the *story’s* (rather than the *game’s*) titular characters: empathy for the repressed and frustrated Jekyll, and empathy for the liberated and energetic Hyde.

Despite the technological limitations of the NES in comparison to the gaming systems that exist today, the complexities of the concept behind *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* are surprising. The player alternates between playing as the doctor and playing as his alter-ego, and the game thus alternates between two different worlds designed to reflect

the double personality of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde. When Dr. Jekyll walks down the street, he sees jolly old England, with its charming buildings and parks. When he transforms into Mr. Hyde, however, the landscape becomes distorted and the beautiful city changes into an eerie world of demons. This contrast between the worlds of Good and Evil is one of the most important features of this game. (*Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* Instruction Booklet 1988: 3)

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The gameplay changes entirely upon Jekyll's becoming Hyde; in the "world of demons", the player must defeat various demonic antagonists in the hope of transforming back into Dr. Jekyll. Hence Jekyll must *literally* overcome his inner demons.

The fact that the game is divided between a real world and a demonic world evokes a compelling neo-Victorian concept. The Hyde/demon stages are a mirror-image of the Jekyll/Victorian stages; Jekyll's stage scrolls right, Hyde's stage scrolls left, and though everything is reversed, the screen layouts are identical. This concept of a 'mirror-verse' is noteworthy, and not simply because of the culture text's traditional good vs. evil binary in discussions of Jekyll and Hyde. In their chapter on 'Spectrality and S(p)ecularity' in *Neo-Victorianism*, Ann Heilmann and Mark Llewellyn address the pervasiveness of glass and mirrors in neo-Victorian texts (and in theories of how to read neo-Victorian works): "Although the mirror or glass sets up the difference between states (reality, mirage) and the spiritualism of the Victorians provides a similar binary (living, dead) these are nevertheless permeable barriers" (Heilmann and Llewellyn 2010: 146). Barriers are indeed permeable in the video game, as the player alternates between Jekyll and Hyde and jumps back and forth between the two worlds. Moreover, the binaries described in the previous quotation are relevant to discussions of the video game's two worlds: Hyde's world of demons seems illusory in comparison to Jekyll's reality, and the zombie-like creatures that populate this world reinforce a living vs. dead binary. Heilmann and Llewellyn describe neo-Victorianism as "spectral and specular" in that it "haunts by its very presence in and dislocation from the real" (Heilmann and Llewellyn 2010: 146), and all of the structures in the Hyde stage are present in the Jekyll stage, even though the Hyde stage feels displaced from "the real" world of Jekyll's London. This unique blend of familiarity and displacement is integral to the neo-Victorian commentary produced by the Hyde stages in relation to the Jekyll stages. However, the spectral Hyde stages are ultimately – and ironically – the only moments in the game that seem *real* to the player, for the Hyde stages are the only stages in which the player can engage in authentic side-scrolling gameplay by destroying onscreen enemies. Jekyll's stage may scroll, but as will be discussed in detail below, his utter passivity is diametrically opposed to traditional side-scrolling gameplay.

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The player begins the game as Jekyll and proceeds to walk through London in the hope of reaching the chapel in time for his wedding, but “[u]nfortunately, the good doctor meets with many accidents and obstacles on his way to the church” (*Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* Instruction Booklet 1988: 4). These accidents and obstacles include thoughtless passers-by who knock into him, a mischievous child armed with a slingshot, various stray animals, armed assailants, arsonists, and even defecating birds. Unlike most games, which assign the player a health bar that monitors his or her energy level, *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* includes two separate life bars: the first tracks the character’s health, and the second tracks his stress level. Each encounter with one of the aforementioned enemies or accidents lowers his stress threshold and pushes him closer and closer toward becoming Hyde. If the stress bar depletes completely, the doctor transforms into Hyde and enters the world of demons. The total depletion of Hyde’s health bar results in the character’s death and the proverbial Game Over. Conversely, destroying the demonic assailants gradually raises the stress bar to a safe level and allows the player to turn back into Jekyll.

What is most striking about the gameplay is the utter helplessness of Jekyll. Whereas the avatars in Nintendo’s side-scrolling games are traditionally granted abilities to help them defeat enemies (e.g. Mario’s ability to jump upon the heads of Goombas and Koopa Troopas) or armed with weapons to fight back against their computer-generated foes (e.g. Mega Man’s and Samus’s arm cannons in *Mega Man* and *Metroid*, or Simon Belmont’s bullwhip in *Castlevania*), Jekyll is granted no offensive maneuvers and is thus unable to thwart any of his assailants. Intriguingly, Jekyll carries a heavy cane (an object which serves as the murder weapon in the Stevenson text when Hyde uses it to bludgeon Sir Danvers Carew). However, in keeping with the sharp distinction that the game designers seek to draw between Jekyll’s levels and Hyde’s levels, the weapon is of no use in Jekyll’s hands; it cannot kill, defeat, or even repel his enemies, which begs the question of why the item was even included. Reviews of *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* unfailingly cite the cane as the most bizarre and frustrating element of the game:

When you’re Dr. Jekyll you walk as slow as a desert turtle and have a cane. The problem with this is that the cane is absolutely useless. [...] If you try to hit an enemy with it, the

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enemy walks right through it and the proceeds to hurt you. [...] So we can safely assume that the cane was just a decoration and has no real value or point for being in the game. (Hannya 2000: n.p.)

Still, despite its decorative status, the game designers assigned one of the Nintendo controller's two buttons to the cane: pressing the A-button allows Jekyll to jump, while pressing the B-button allows him to "use the cane" (*Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* Instruction Booklet 1988: 7).

Conversely, Hyde can (and must) strike back at his enemies: he can fight the demonic assailants in the world of demons by throwing punches and by firing an erratic projectile weapon. The vanquishing of demons facilitates the transformation back into Jekyll so that the journey to the chapel (and to the game's conclusion) can proceed. However, rather than let the player perceive the Jekyll and Hyde relationship as a successful working partnership, the game designers frame the gameplay in such a way that it is virtually impossible to win as Hyde. Upon transforming into Hyde, the player has a limited amount of time to transform back into Jekyll; failure to meet this time requirement results in Hyde's being struck down by a bolt of lightning. As per the instruction booklet: "If Hyde gains the lead, Evil will triumph over Good! If this happens, the Powers That Be will intervene" (*Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* Instruction Booklet 1988: 5).

This is one of the essential difficulties of the game: given Jekyll's helplessness, it is virtually impossible to prevent the transformation into Hyde, and the limited time to affect the transformation back into Jekyll severely reduces the player's probability of success. What is perhaps even more significant than the issue of the player's minimal chances of winning the game is the inescapable frustration of playing as Jekyll; in fact, the instruction booklet uses the word '*frustration*' numerous times to describe Dr. Jekyll's situation, and the overwhelmingly negative reviews suggest that this sense of frustration defines the general gaming experience of those players who opt to play the game. How could a player possibly avoid feeling frustrated given that he or she is expected to control a helpless avatar who possesses no abilities, moves slowly, and is incapable of fighting back against the enemies who populate the screen? In addition to Jekyll's helplessness, there is the general tedium of the London stages. The gameplay revolves entirely around Jekyll's slowly walking to the chapel. In



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short, every element of the Jekyll stage – from the dull movements of the avatar, to the sense of impotence and vulnerability that defines the gameplay experience, to the inclusion of a useless weapon – seems intended to exasperate the player.

Conversely, the gameplay experience becomes infinitely more enjoyable when the player transforms into Hyde, as the player can actually engage in the activities that define side-scrolling gameplay: fighting enemies, defeating assailants, and earning points toward a clear goal. Indeed, the very objective of the Hyde stage proves more engaging than that of the Jekyll stage, for Hyde's objective can only be accomplished by fighting off enemies, whereas Jekyll's objective is accomplished by merely walking.<sup>19</sup> Still, the player will inevitably lose by spending too much time playing as Hyde, and a player who is enjoying the game as Hyde will probably find himself or herself struck down due to the failure to transform back into Jekyll. The Hyde stage thus presents a false sense of enjoyment by granting the player a chance to experience genuine side-scrolling gameplay, until he or she is struck down by the Powers that Be.

It is tempting to assert that the failure of *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* as a game is due to the designers allowing the story to trump the gameplay experience. Ironically, such an assertion is a direct rebuttal to the claims made by various critics that the game has nothing to do with the Stevenson text. As in the case of movies that are overly faithful to their sources (and thus fail to break new ground in the translation of the material to another medium), the video game may be overly committed to the theme of the Stevenson text. Still, the assertion that the game designers prioritised story over gameplay seems problematic considering that the game does not necessarily aspire toward a story outcome, but rather, toward a character-based experience grounded in a literary theme.

Consider the existence of the two life-bars. While playing as Jekyll, the stress bar seems to take priority over the health bar; Jekyll can be injured by his assailants, but the stress bar depletes far more quickly than the health bar. In essence, the worst fate that can befall the doctor is to transform into Hyde as his stress meter reaches the critical level. While playing as Hyde, the worst fate that can befall the character is to die as his health bar reaches the critical level (or as he is struck down by the Powers that Be). In the Stevenson text, Jekyll's confessional narrative explains that his greatest fear is permanently transforming into Hyde:

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Under the strain of this continually-impending doom and by the sleeplessness to which I now condemned myself, ay, even beyond what I had thought possible to man, I became, in my own person, a creature eaten up and emptied by fever, languidly weak both in body and mind, and solely occupied by one thought: the horror of my other self. (Stevenson 2000: 70)

Conversely, Hyde's greatest fear is death itself. Jekyll describes how his alter-ego's "terror of the gallows drove him continually to commit temporary suicide, and return to his subordinate station of a part instead of a person" (Stevenson 2000: 70). In the game, however, the two men's positions are reversed, with the passive Jekyll rather than Hyde assuming a "subordinate station", and the player feeling more fully "a person" in the role of Hyde. The gaming experience thus replicates what Stevenson's Jekyll terms Hyde's intense "love of life", which the doctor calls "wonderful", the sole appealing characteristic he discerns in his double:

I go further: I, who sicken and freeze at the mere thought of him, when I recall the abjection and passion of this attachment, and when I know how he fears my power to cut him off by suicide, I find it in my heart to pity him. (Stevenson 2000: 71)

The game's inclusion of the two separate health bars, and its uncompromising position that Hyde must not win the game, is a creative translation of the defining issues of the Jekyll/Hyde relationship. Still, as the dark passage quoted above implies, seeking to capture the experience of this lost soul should hardly promote joyous gameplay. More concretely, the stress of monitoring one's health bar is one of the least enjoyable aspects of playing video games, and *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* compounds that stress by adding yet another health bar that (ironically and fittingly) monitors Dr. Jekyll's stress.

Equally striking is the game's success in highlighting the temptations of becoming Hyde. Despite the countless allusions to Hyde's abhorrence in the Stevenson text, and despite Jekyll's insistence that he "preferred [to be] the elderly and discontented doctor, surrounded by friends

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and cherishing honest hopes”, there is something alluring about “the liberty, the comparative youth, the light step, leaping impulses and secret pleasures” (Stevenson 2000: 64) that define Hyde’s existence. As Susan Wolfson and Barry Qualls argue,

Hyde seems less a monster than a more human, more lively self seeking liberation [...]. Life in the public eye is a life of moral surveillance and supervision, with its boon of respectability feeling like a slow killing burden, one that turns the pace to dull plodding under a crushing load. Jekyll’s life as Hyde is a liberation from what had come to seem a fundamentally false existence, composed only of artificial lendings. (Wolfson and Qualls 2000: xxxii-xxxiii, added emphasis)

As indicated in this quotation, Stevenson’s depiction of the relationship between Jekyll and Hyde (and moreover, his characterisation of Hyde) is highly complicated, despite the tendency to reduce that relationship to a simplistic good vs. evil binary. That same complexity pervades the gaming experience, with the player, as already noted, likewise feeling “more human, more lively” and *more alive* when playing as Hyde.

While the Stevenson text subtly hints at these nuances regarding Hyde, the character rarely speaks and, unlike Jekyll, he is not granted a narratorial confession. However, by playing as Hyde, the player comes to a clearer understanding of both Hyde and Jekyll. This constitutes a unique variation on the various neo-Victorian tendencies toward revision and reassessment (see Yates 2009/2010: 187; Bowler and Cox 2009/2010: 5). The game does not “re-writ[e] the historical narrative of that period by representing marginalized voices” (Llewellyn 2008: 165), as does, for instance, Valerie Martin’s neo-Victorian novel *Mary Reilly* (1990).<sup>20</sup> Hyde still does not speak his piece, but the nature of the gameplay, and the fun of playing as Hyde in comparison to playing as Jekyll, arguably provide a more potent “critique, transformation, revision, or destabilisation of [the] antecedent(s) and/or the ideas and ideologies [...] represented” (Bowler and Cox 2009/2010: 2) in the novella than, say, a novelistic adaptation written from Hyde’s point of view. The player who is having fun playing as Hyde finally understands the allure of *being* Hyde.

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Wolfson and Qualls's emphasis on the stifling respectability that defines Jekyll's existence is likewise noteworthy, as it draws our attention to yet another instance of neo-Victorian reassessment in the video game. The game presents Jekyll's staid respectability in the form of an oppressive helplessness. The aforementioned surveillance manifests itself in the avatar's inability to lash out at the onscreen enemies during the Jekyll stage; to do so would compromise the doctor's reputation (hence the worthless weapon, which serves only as a symbol of Jekyll's respectability and his corresponding powerlessness). The game pushes the matter even further in the case of Jekyll's interactions with one of the most frustrating onscreen enemies, Elena McCowen. Described in the instruction booklet as a tone-deaf singer, she instantly raises Jekyll's stress meter through her off-key singing. Unlike all of the other enemies in the game, Jekyll can in fact strike her with the cane, but doing so automatically lowers his stress level to zero, thus transforming him into Hyde. Jekyll must never compromise his reputation.

In her insightful assessment of the topic of surveillance in *Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* and the BBC series *Jekyll* (2007), Anna Lepine argues that the small, tight-knit community of characters in the Stevenson story ignore or conceal suspicious activities, thus indirectly fostering Hyde's criminal acts (Lepine 2008/2009: 81-88). Conversely, the neo-Victorian BBC series sympathises with Hyde and "suggests that trust, love, and community might form a viable antidote to our world of [...] rampant surveillance" (Lepine 2008/2009: 90). The video game – like the novella – offers a small collection of characters; the instruction booklet assigns a name and brief bio to each of the onscreen antagonists, and even offers an explanation for why the character poses a danger to Jekyll. However, the surveillance that defines Jekyll's role in the game is much more evocative of the BBC series. As noted above, Jekyll's helplessness is directly connected to the preservation of his respectability. Moreover, given Jekyll's profound limitations as an avatar, the player ironically finds himself or herself in the position of 'observer' rather than player: Jekyll can move, dodge, and jump about, but his inability to fight back transforms the active experience of the game into a largely passive exercise in observation and avoidance. The fact that Hyde is more dynamic not only reinforces the fun of his stages, but simultaneously reinforces his neo-Victorian role in the game. Jekyll can offer a passive encounter with a Victorian cityscape, an

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encounter defined by a paralysing preservation of decorum. Hyde offers kinesthetic catharsis; he also offers an opportunity to question the novella's social order by fostering an understanding of how the stifling conformity that defines that order incapacitates people (or avatars as the case may be).

Though the culture text of the Stevenson story invariably prompts reflections on the dichotomy between good and evil, *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* steers the player toward a more subversive reassessment at odds with the instruction booklet's framing of the game as the earlier cited straightforward conflict between "Good and Evil". The Jekyll/Hyde dichotomy is not simply about good and evil "more than a moral issue, what is at stake is the maintenance of the established social order" (Plate 1998: 171). The primary concerns of nearly all of the novella's characters are reputation and social standing. (Even Hyde briefly seeks to avoid scandal in the opening chapters, though his casual exploitation of Jekyll's money and name is in keeping with his overall recklessness and freedom.) The game underscores these concerns, not only through the emphasis on Jekyll's helpless conformity, but also through the moral neutrality of Hyde: Hyde is not committing immoral actions in the demon stages; he is merely fighting for his life – fighting in a way that Jekyll cannot, because order and respectability trump every other concern, even one's safety/health.

In an intriguing deviation from the traditional projection of the player onto the avatar, the player and Dr. Jekyll seem bound together by a shared sense of increasing stress, as the frustrations of the game prove exhausting and the desire to strike back at the assailants becomes overwhelming. The liberation that comes from playing as Mr. Hyde is significant, as the player can finally put his or her gaming skills to use. However, as already noted, the joy of playing as Hyde must be transitory or the game is over. Much as Jekyll risks losing himself in the novella by playing as Hyde, the player risks losing the game by playing as Hyde. Indeed, the fact that the game can only truly be won as Jekyll (despite the fact that game only feels like a game when one plays as Hyde) is one of the many notable contradictions in a game defined by paradoxes.

Although frequently dismissed in discussions of video game characters, the issue of character psychology underlines the significance of the game as an adaptation. As Schell points out,

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game characters are involved in conflicts that are almost entirely physical. Since these characters mostly have no thoughts (the player does the thinking for them) and are only occasionally able to speak, this again makes perfect sense. (Schell 2008: 311)

In the case of *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, the player too does the thinking, but his or her train of thought is heavily influenced by the constraints imposed by the gameplay, and, as noted above, those constraints are evocative of the psychological struggles of Stevenson's characters. Though Hutcheon observes that video game avatars frequently come across as blank slates, upon which players can project "their own motives, desires, hopes, and fears in the context of the game" (Hutcheon 2006: 63), *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* effectively projects the motives, desires, hopes, and fears of Stevenson's characters onto the player. Moreover, the fact that the game promotes active identification with Hyde (while simultaneously illuminating why Jekyll would want to become Hyde) underscores the neo-Victorian "f(r)iction" of the adaptation, generated by the experience of necessarily playing as both characters.

Ryan has argued that the essential myth of VR is that it revolves around "the personification of the computer as an autonomous mind", while in actuality, VR is the exact opposite, since the immersive experience of VR depends upon "[t]he disappearance of the computer" altogether (Ryan 1999: 113). For Jekyll, becoming Hyde seems like the ultimate immersive experience due to the freedom that it provides him, yet if Hyde creates something of a virtual reality for Jekyll, the experience unfolds in a way that contradicts Ryan's theories. VR is supposed to render the computer invisible, so as to maximise the immersive experience, but in the Stevenson text, it is Jekyll who is rendered invisible by physically transforming into Hyde; this is the only way to achieve the freedom of virtual reality. Moreover, Jekyll does in fact "personif[y] the computer [i.e. Hyde] as an autonomous mind" in as much as he assigns Hyde a completely separate identity. Unlike Stevenson's Jekyll, the gamer playing *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* cannot immerse himself or herself in the game, even during the more liberating Hyde stages. This "f(r)iction" between the inability to immerse oneself in the game and the subsequent ability to immerse oneself in the text

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(by way of a newfound empathy for the characters) is perhaps the most noteworthy of the game's numerous neo-Victorian paradoxes.

### 3. "It's more than a game!"

The underlying contradiction in this reading is that the successful translation of the novella hinges upon a generally unpleasant gaming experience. The negative reviews of *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* are hardly surprising. What is surprising is the sheer hyperbole of these reviews, and one gets the sense that the game has developed a group-text of its own to which gamers and vloggers have sought to contribute by posting their own over-the-top commentaries. Much of this discourse can be traced back to Rolfe, whose first video review of the game was essentially the tracer text to the current group-text; the *YouTube* comments under many *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* videos invariably refer back to the Rolfe videos. Rolfe is well aware of this game's centrality to his vlogging career, for he has continuously returned to *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*: in addition to the two AVGN reviews, Rolfe's website, *Cinemassacre*, has posted multiple reaction videos and walk-throughs. More recently, Rolfe put his skills as a filmmaker to work by creating a mock trailer for a film based on the video game; the satirical video accentuates the absurd elements of the game, including the useless cane, the lack of logic behind the townspeople's attacks on Jekyll, etc. Even in the case of video reviews of an obscure video game, the process of adaptation remains cyclical and intertextual.

Given this ever-evolving 'text', it is not surprising that the discourse on *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* has evolved. Rolfe's first review of the game made no attempt to engage or evaluate the game as an adaptation of the Stevenson novella, but his second review revolved heavily around the relationship between the two works. As noted in the introductory section of this article, the early tendency was to dismiss the notion of a relationship due to the narrative divergences of the two works, but vloggers who have since engaged the game in greater depth (or who, like Rolfe, have returned to it numerous times) have delved more deeply into the designers' attempts to translate the literary theme. Other reviewers have sought to utilise the Stevenson text in their assessment of the game; still others have mockingly undertaken similar approaches so as to deride the literary aspirations of the game designers as futile.

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Two of the most noteworthy contrasting examples in this regard are Rolfe's second *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* review and a similar review by *YouTube* user and blogger DXFan619. Both Rolfe and DXFan619 criticise the game, but the latter couches his review in a surprisingly in-depth engagement with the Stevenson text. The video begins in a documentary style, as DXFan619 displays pictures of Stevenson, his wife Fanny, the house in Bournemouth where Stevenson wrote the story, and the original title page for *Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*. He then narrates Fanny's story of how Stevenson allegedly conceived of the Jekyll/Hyde transformation scenes during a vivid nightmare. Though this introduction is somewhat sardonic in that it sets up his scathing review of the nightmarish game, the vlogger seems eager to demonstrate his insights into the novella. He even puts forth some of the theoretical readings of the text in the hope of illuminating the game. After summarising a queer reading of the novella, in which the homosexual Jekyll is granted the opportunity to explore London's gay subcultures through the persona of Hyde, the vlogger theorises that this reading could be used to answer one of the game's enduring questions: why are the townspeople in *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* constantly mistreating the benevolent Jekyll? – "I also mentioned that in the book, Dr. Jekyll is implied to be homosexual. It's possible that these people are attacking him because he's gay" (DXFan619 2014: 7:55-8:03). The vlogger is not being facetious, even though he admits that he is reaching in the hope of explicating the absurd hostility toward Jekyll. He concludes his analysis by scrutinising the game in the context of the literary text, specifically, by focusing on the relationship between the Nintendo port of the game and the original, more difficult version released on the Famicom console in Japan.<sup>21</sup> "So I guess in a sense, [*Strange Case of*] *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* is mirrored through the NES and the Famicom, the same console divided by different versions of the same game" (DXFan619 2014: 15:15-15:27).

Rolfe's approach is antithetical. Though he acknowledges some of the interesting facts regarding the novel and its cultural legacy – including the fact that Jekyll's name has been mispronounced for the past several decades, and that the March film is the only prominent adaptation to get it right – he mocks any attempt to find literary significance in the gameplay and any endeavor to illuminate the game by means of the novella (or vice versa). He concludes his review with an utter rejection of the literary



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elements of the game in the form of a sarcastic analysis of the game's 'brilliance':

I think I get it. Why, it's the best game ever made! It's more than a game! It exposes the dual nature of the human spirit. [...] You see, it's a constant battle between good and evil. [...] And to deny the evil completely would only force it into the subconscious mind, like a city broken into different social classes. People don't want to step outside their own boundaries, like Jekyll wandering into the wrong section of town. He's unwelcome. Nevertheless, he must abide by his own good nature. No wonder the cane doesn't work! The game does not reward you for acting upon your malevolent intentions. It's a proposed guideline for a set of morality rules to be programmed into real life. It uses the Victorian Era as a fundamental depiction of outward respectability and inward lust. It's a metaphor for social and geographical fragmentation. It alludes to the Freud theory of repression, in which unacceptable desires or impulses are excluded from the conscious mind and left to operate from their own in the unconscious! (Rolfe 2010: 15:04-16:27)

Rolfe then deflates his own over-the-top and pretentious reading with the final line of the review: "Or you could just say the game f\*cking sucks" (Rolfe 2010: 16:28-16:31). While DXFan619 engages the literary source on a serious level, Rolfe does so facetiously, mocking both the literary aspirations of the game and the general pretensions that are stereotypically associated with literary analysis.

Still, the vloggers' exploration of the game in relation to the Stevenson text adds yet another dimension to the inescapable issue of adaptation, though the contrast between the two vloggers' approaches is ultimately less evocative of debates over fidelity and more suggestive of debates over cultural capital. DXFan619 seeks to preserve the legitimacy of the Stevenson text and to demonstrate his own insights into that text and its history. Rolfe unhesitatingly satirises both the game and the text. He even includes a scene in which he is so traumatised by playing the game that he transforms into a Hyde-like version of himself, digs up Robert Louis

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Stevenson's skeleton, and proceeds to attack it – unsuccessfully – with his cane.

This contrast is reminiscent of a similar contrast explored by Jeffrey Sconce in his essay 'Dickens, Selznick, and *Southpark* [sic]'. Sconce analyses the dichotomy between David Selznick's meticulous approach to adapting *David Copperfield* (1849-1850) for MGM Studios and the parodic approach that Matt Stone and Trey Parker took to adapting *Great Expectations* (1860-1861) in an episode of *South Park* (an episode in which Miss Havisham plans to take over the world with an army of robot monkeys): "The joke (if it actually needs explaining) is in the irreversible confusion and collapse of all cultural hierarchies in post-studio, post-network (and yes) postmodern entertainment" (Sconce 2003: 186). In this sense, even as Rolfe disparages the game, he refuses to create a hierarchical relationship between *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* and *Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*, or to view the game as a disgrace to the novella. Both the text and the game are equally worthy of satire, and the joke in Rolfe's video (if it actually needs explaining) is that Rolfe traces the frustrations of the game back to its literary source, labelling Stevenson's novella as the ultimate source of his own frustrations regarding this terrible gaming experience: had Stevenson never written the book, Bandai would never have created the game, and that is all that matters to an Angry Video Game Nerd. The larger literary legacy of the novella and the canonical status of Stevenson and his works are inconsequential.

As Sconce indicates, this breaking down of hierarchies is in keeping with essential tenets of postmodernism; it is also in keeping with Hutcheon's thesis regarding adaptations and her rejection of the privileging of sources (Hutcheon 2006: xiii). Rolfe subtly elevates the game that he is denigrating by refusing to treat the literary work that inspired it with greater respect. Yet his sardonically pretentious reading of the game is purely literary: he 'reads' the game independent of any other texts. (Ironically, nearly all of his analytical claims regarding the meaning of the game could be applied to the novella itself.) Conversely, the neo-Victorian approach outlined in this article has emphasised the importance of actively putting texts into dialogue with one another. In the case of a less respectable medium such as a side-scrolling game, breaking down the hierarchies between texts is an essential step. The question is not whether the game can live up to the novella, but how the experiential medium that is the game can

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promote reassessment of the text and its context; to frame the matter in Llewellyn's terms, playing the game is a way of "act[ing] out the results of reading the Victorians" (Llewellyn 2008: 168).

The potential educational benefits of doing so remain ambiguous, particularly when one considers how immersion and interaction can either support or undermine education. Patrick Fleming's article on the failure of Dickens World in Chatham addresses this issue in depth. Initially, the park created an immersive experience by which patrons could freely navigate "an immersive environment themed around Dickens's novels, supplemented by live actors" (Fleming 2016: 13). The subsequent restructuring of the park around a guided tour granted patrons far less freedom in navigating and reacting to the Dickensian world (Fleming 2016: 19). While one could argue that the tour created a more linear and educational experience, it did so by moving away from the immersive Dickensian element and emphasising the historical period in which Dickens wrote: "[T]he newly introduced guided tour took guests not *into* the fictional world of Dickens's novels but *back* to a moment of England's history" (Fleming 2016: 19).

The notion of replacing an unstructured immersive experience with a more linear interactive experience that potentially conduces to greater learning finds it parallel in regard to subsequent video games based on *Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*. Contemporary educational puzzle games set in the Victorian period, such as *The Mysterious Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (2011) or *Real Crimes: Jack the Ripper* (2010) (both PC games that were subsequently ported to the Nintendo DSi and DS, respectively), stand in sharp contrast to the 1989 NES game. Whereas *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* is a side-scrolling game, in which the player manipulates an avatar using a remote control, *The Mysterious Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* and *Real Crimes: Jack the Ripper* are hidden object games, in which a player uses a stylus to click on various pictures and find clues for solving the titular mysteries. *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, like most side-scrollers, emphasises the gameplay and includes few cut scenes, but *The Mysterious Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* and *Real Crimes: Jack the Ripper* include cutscenes and blocks of textual exposition, several of which provide educational information about the Victorian age and/or the Stevenson text.<sup>22</sup> Ultimately, these later games not only create more linear and coherent gaming experiences but simultaneously promote learning about the Victorians, Robert Louis Stevenson, and the nineteenth century.<sup>23</sup>

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The different means and methods of play facilitate these different experiences and disparate outcomes.<sup>24</sup> Nevertheless, to argue that the two DS games facilitate a more *neo-Victorian* experience than the earlier NES game is to ignore *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*'s inadvertently immersive engagement with Victorianism. The DS games are undoubtedly informative and interactive (in the sense that all games are interactive), but they provide a museum-like encounter with the Victorian age, guiding the player through history but never immersing him or her in that history. Though the player is expected to contribute, the method of gameplay is more passive, and the educational outcome of both games is steeped in overviews as opposed to active encounters that facilitate re-interpretation (re-interpretation such as the newfound empathy for the Stevenson characters described in the previous section). Like the pictures that the player must search in the DS games, the encounter with the Victorians is ultimately static.

Conversely, *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, with all of its flaws, allows not only for a more active engagement with the themes of Stevenson text, but also with the Victorian component. Indeed, the very existence of this component is one of the more intriguing elements of the game. Certainly, the permeability between Jekyll and Hyde's world (Victorian London and the world of demons) is essential. Still, the designers could have opted to embrace the transcendent Universal Monsters quality of the Jekyll/Hyde character as defined by the culture-text and thus set the Jekyll stages in a vague unidentifiable digital world with no distinguishable cultural or historical elements. NES games like *Frankenstein: The Monster Returns* (1991) or the *Castlevania* (1986) series (which employs Count Dracula as the central antagonist) utilise this technique of creating abstract historical settings that establish a generalised sense of mythic periodicity. In *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, the amount of detail in the towns and cities that constitute the background and the Victorian garb of the various avatars – *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* must be the only video game in existence in which the onscreen enemies include careless ladies clad in nineteenth-century dresses – indicates the centrality of the Victorian setting to the designers' vision. As noted in the previous section, the gameplay creates a new appreciation of some of the key themes of the Stevenson text, and given the Victorian detail that defines the game, these new appreciations extend to the cultural and historical elements as well.

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One could argue that the game ultimately promotes a trite depiction of Victorian repression through the helpless Jekyll avatar as opposed to promoting the nuanced analysis that characterises neo-Victorianism. Heilmann and Llewellyn warn that many texts which may seem neo-Victorian “lack imaginative re-engagement with the period, and instead recycle and deliver a stereotypical and unnuanced reading of the Victorians and their literature and culture” (Heilmann and Llewellyn 2010: 6). Nevertheless, the game engages and critiques the repressiveness of respectability through the tedium of the Jekyll stages and through the celebration of Hyde. Indeed, the medium lends itself to such a critique. In her landmark text *Hamlet on the Holodeck: The Future of Narrative Cyberspace*, Janet H. Murray reflects on the experience of playing a first-person Western shooter game at the arcade and the Hyde-like transformation that she felt take place within her:

I was lost in a state of deep reverie. Eventually my son and daughter ran out of quarters and came to find me. As I turned toward them, I was conscious of being two very different people: the fervently pacifist mother who had taken them on peace marches and forbidden all military toys and guns and the six-shooting cowgirl who had grown up identifying with Annie Oakley and Wyatt Earp. I would not claim that *Mad Dog McCree*, the game I was playing, was a masterful piece of storytelling. But the moment of self-confrontation it provoked, the moment in which I was suddenly aware of an authentic but disquieting side of myself, seems to me to be the mark of a new kind of dramatic experience. (Murray 1998: 54)

Murray’s immersive engagement with the beloved arcade shoot-em-up *Mad Dog McCree* (1990) seems the opposite of most players’ negative experiences with *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*. And yet, the moment when a player invariably throws down the NES controller and quits playing due to the tediousness and frustrations of the Jekyll stages is a similar moment of authentic self-awareness. It underscores the validity of playing as Hyde, and by extension, the validity of the literary Hyde – a validity that is oftentimes ignored in favour of the exaggerated caricature in the culture-text, or in

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favour of the simplistic reading in which ‘Hyde = evil’. It likewise underscores the more general authenticity of the infinitely human desires, drives, and urges that are shunned or ignored due to self-surveillance and social codes. Finally, it reinforces the gamer’s empathy for the wretched literary Jekyll, whose desire to “spring headlong into the sea of liberty” (Stevenson 2000: 61) by casting off the trappings of respectability speaks to the universal appeal of the freedom that oftentimes defines immersive experiences. Though *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* has earned its infamous reputation, the opportunity to experience the struggles of Stevenson’s characters – and the analogous neo-Victorian struggle to reengage and reassess the Victorian past – should be celebrated by both readers and video game nerds alike. It is an opportunity that is uniquely immersive.

### Notes

1. Like numerous games on the NES, *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* was an American port of a game designed for the NES’s Japanese predecessor/counterpart, the Family Computer (more commonly known as the Famicom). Bandai released the Famicom game the year before the Nintendo version: 1988.
2. In his early videos, including the original *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* video, Rolfe called himself the Angry Nintendo Nerd and focused primarily on NES games.
3. The term ‘Game Pak’ refers to Nintendo’s game cartridge or software storage medium.
4. It is worthwhile to note that this alleged stability can be questioned in the post-Barthes literary age, in as much as the reader is now understood to be a ‘co-producer’ of the text. The reading experience can thus be compared in part to the game-playing experience: the reading experience can vary substantially for the same reader on different occasions, thus introducing a degree of unpredictability into the resulting ‘text’ (or, to frame it in gamer terms, ‘outcome’).
5. The issue of product is important to consider in neo-Victorian studies from another perspective given “the unavoidable fact that there is a neo-Victorian market sales corollary [...]. Historical fiction sells, and Victorian historical fiction sells better than most” (Heilmann and Llewellyn 2010: 27). Heilmann and Llewellyn draw a distinction between self-consciously neo-Victorian texts and texts that merely reuse Victorian tropes with little or no regard for the

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complexities of Victorian literature and Victorian society (Heilmann and Llewellyn 2010: 6). To frame the matter more squarely in the context of the previously described issues, the true neo-Victorian text promotes a more active consumer experience, while the more traditional work of historical fiction allows for a more passive experience.

6. In the introductory article to the *Neo-Victorian Studies* special issue on *Adapting the Nineteenth Century*, Alexia Bowler and Jessica Cox address literary adaptations, cinematic interpretations, and unconventional mashups (Bowler and Cox 2010: 5-8), but they do not include video games. In a more recent issue on *Performing the Nineteenth Century*, Beth Palmer and Benjamin Poore celebrate “[t]he idea that neo-Victorian scholars might be open to any ‘potential media’ [as] an exciting one”, and though they include non-traditional neo-Victorian “performance texts”, such as “theme parks, cosplay, and music” (Palmer and Poore 2016: 3), they do not mention video games or the more performance-oriented RPGs.
7. The enduring debate over whether video games should be studied from a narratological perspective is characterised by territoriality. Many ludologists are determined to defend their province from encroachment by misguided literary or film theorists who instinctively gravitate toward narrative-based analysis. As Markku Eskelinen quipped, “if you actually know your narrative theory [...] you won’t argue that games are (interactive or procedural) narratives or anything even remotely similar. [...] If I throw a ball at you, I don’t expect you to drop it and wait until it starts telling stories” (Eskelinen 2004: 36). Eskelinen’s glib interpretation is in keeping with the general frustration that ludologists feel toward narratologists, though the issue is obviously more nuanced than he implies.
8. While such elements can impact the player’s overall investment in the game, they do not necessarily influence the player’s methodology: “But at the center of this expansive game experience is the game of *Ms. Pac-Man* – that artificial conflict with a quantifiable outcome. The gameplay of *Ms. Pac-Man* is in some sense the kernel at the center of the machine, the engine that drives all of the other elements, putting the *game* in the game-story” (Zimmerman 2004: 163). The concept of a “kernel at the center of the machine” reinforces the notion that the narrative elements are peripheral to the gameplay – such elements can enhance players’ overall gaming experience, but they are divorced from the pushing of the buttons, the toggling of the joystick, the strategizing, etc.

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9. It is also central to adaptation studies and to Hutcheon's basic definition of what constitutes an adaptation; in the opening pages of her monograph, Hutcheon asserts that "adaptation is a form of intertextuality" (Hutcheon 2006: 8).
  10. In the March film (1931, dir. Rouben Mamoulian), Jekyll is engaged to Danvers Carew's daughter, though he develops a complicated relationship with a poor girl who is a victim of the lascivious and abusive Hyde. The Tracy film (1941, dir. Victor Fleming), which is essentially a remake of the earlier movie, depicts the same 'love rectangle' between Jekyll, Hyde, and the two women. Decades later, this plot point would be reused in the Broadway mega-musical *Jekyll & Hyde* (1997, Frank Wildhorn, Steve Cuden, and Leslie Bricusse). The recycling of the 'Dr. Jekyll is engaged to be married' subplot in adaptations – even obscure adaptations like the video game – underscores the power of landmark adaptations like the March film to shape the cultural legacy of the work.
  11. Thomas Leitch makes a similar observation in his essay on intertextuality in adaptations of *Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*, noting that adaptations invariably reject Stevenson's mystery narrative in favour of a "linear" narrative (Leitch 2011: 30).
  12. Jekyll himself describes Hyde as "pure evil" in his confession (Stevenson 2000: 60), though he likewise makes certain not to describe himself – Henry Jekyll – as purely good, which results in an imbalance (purely evil vs. morally ambiguous) that does not exist in the more 'balanced' culture text depiction (purely evil vs. purely good). As Irving Saposkni notes, "[a]s Hyde has grown, Jekyll has been overshadowed so that his role has shifted from culprit to victim" (Saposnik 1971: 731).
  13. Elliott references two noteworthy animated parodies of Jekyll and Hyde featuring Warner Brothers cartoon characters Sylvester and Tweety, and MGM cartoon characters Tom and Jerry (Elliott 2008: 35).
  14. The word *hulking* may be more appropriate than *lumbering* given the game's emphasis on stress as the catalyst for the transformation into Hyde.
  15. *Potential* is a fitting term given that games offer no guarantees. The goal of getting Jekyll to the chapel is in keeping with the broad and flexible goals of many side-scrolling video games (e.g. Mario has to rescue the princess in order to win *Super Mario Bros.*, but the player is free to accomplish this goal at a pace and through a process of his or her choosing.) The happy ending to the gaming experience need not be reached through one particular method of



- gameplay. Conversely, while a reader can approach Stevenson's novella (or a film adaptation of that novella) in a variety of ways, the text remains concrete.
16. As noted in the description of the gameplay (specifically, the description of how the Powers That Be intervene during the Hyde stage), playing as Hyde for an extended amount of time will likely result in an automatic Game Over. However, should the player manage to survive as Hyde and reach the church – Jekyll's intended destination – in the world of demons, he must face off against the only "boss" villain in the game, a demon called Letule. Upon defeating this final demon, Hyde can transform back into Jekyll and reach the church. Paradoxically but perhaps fittingly given the extra work involved, reaching the church as Hyde and defeating Letule results in a longer and more satisfying ending: whereas Jekyll's ending simply features the doctor and his fiancée entering the church, Hyde's ending features an extended shot of the couple inside the church and a delightfully horrific final screen-shot of Mr. Hyde's shadow juxtaposed against a cross (the implication being that Dr. Jekyll may not have triumphed over his inner demons completely).
  17. Though most known for its side-scrolling games, the NES library consisted of various types of games, including more potentially immersive games such as 1<sup>st</sup>-person shooter games or role-playing games. Still, Ryan draws a distinction between VR and more traditional computers (like the NES): "Computers have always been interactive; but until now the power to create a sense of immersion was a prerogative of art" (Ryan 1999: 114).
  18. Ryan addresses how the "depth of information" in a fictional narrative directly impacts the probability of achieving immersion: "It is obvious that detailed descriptions lead to a greater sense of belonging than sketch narration. This explains why it is easier to be caught up in a fictional story than in a newspaper report" (Ryan 1999: 118). Though Ryan does not directly address the issue of enjoyment here, she hints that more in-depth narratives with well-drawn characters are more engaging and therefore more immersive, which parallels the issue raised by Moore regarding the "fun factor" when playing video games. The more fun the game, the more likely the player's interaction with the game will translate into an immersive experience.
  19. It may be counterintuitive (and perhaps even inaccurate) to use the term *objective* in relation to the Hyde stage, for the ostensible objective of the Hyde stage is to transform back into Jekyll. This objective is the precise opposite of the literary character's objective of achieving total freedom from all constraints, including those imposed by Jekyll. Transforming back into Jekyll is the bane of Hyde's existence. Nevertheless, as noted in the Stevenson

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quotations on the subject of Hyde's potent survival instinct, Hyde's ultimate fear is permanent death, which means he is more willing to accept temporary death by transforming back into Jekyll. One could argue that the same is true in the video game, as Hyde fights for his very survival; to achieve this objective, he must transform back into Jekyll.

20. There are nevertheless some intriguing parallels between the two works. In her analysis of *Mary Reilly* as a work of neo-Victorian fiction, Marta Miquel-Baldellou cites "Henry Jekyll's inability to move around such surroundings [the slums of Soho] so as to avoid putting his status in jeopardy. In this respect, Mary possesses more freedom of movement than Jekyll" (Miquel-Baldellou 2010: 125). As noted in my analysis of the game, Hyde possesses infinitely more kinesthetic freedom than Jekyll, and unlike the helpless doctor, he can fight back against his onscreen enemies without "putting his status in jeopardy".
21. Though the two versions of the game are similar, the original Famicom version is regarded as more challenging; it includes two additional levels. What is striking about the missing levels is the artistry of the backgrounds. The Victorian settings are remarkably well-designed given the limitations of gaming technology in the 1980s.
22. *The Mysterious Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, unlike its predecessor, also includes numerous characters from the Stevenson text, such as Enfield, Sir Danvers, and Poole. However, rather than play as Utterson, the player assumes the persona of a London police inspector assigned to the Carew murder case.
23. While a traditional gamer who dislikes puzzle games might not gravitate toward hidden object games such as these, that gamer would be hard-pressed to argue that the gameplay of *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* is more fun or more coherent. The passivity of the Jekyll avatar not only frustrates the player but creates an inherent disconnect, as a side-scrolling game with a helpless avatar is unprecedented.
24. What is likewise noteworthy is the detective motif running through these two DS games, both of which cast the player in the role of a Victorian police inspector and both of which focus on the gathering of clues. This element is in keeping with the emphasis on detection in numerous neo-Victorian texts. As Heilmann and Llewellyn observe, detection is "a genre in which much neo-Victorianism locates itself [...]. The association between detection and historical fiction *per se* inevitably rests in the similarities in the gathering of evidence and the search for the new (and hopefully correct) interpretation of

that material. It also allows the narrative to stray into the deeper and darker recesses of Victorian society” (Heilmann and Llewellyn 2010: 16).

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