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Textual Hyde and Seek: “Gentility,” Narrative Play and Proscription in Stevenson’s *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*

Robbie B. H. Goh

In discussing what is perhaps the nineteenth century’s most famous and enduring story of split identities, Robert Louis Stevenson’s 1886 short novel *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*, critics have quite predictably used Dr. Jekyll’s scientific project as an analogue for the narrative itself. Stevenson’s tale, it is argued, offers a plethora of signs split off from their signifieds, voices disembodied and dislocated, and distinctions elided.¹ This in turn is seen as part of Stevenson’s attempt to undermine patriarchy, which—variously, according to different scholarly views—is part of a project to create a “reimagined male bourgeois identity” out of the ashes of the flawed one the text dismantles, or an Oedipal conflict with Thomas Stevenson centering around the pleasure principle and the figure of the mother, or a gesture of deviance (such as the sexual code of homoeroticism) within the constraints of hypocritical Victorian society.²

An extension to this overtly political role ascribed to the text is the view of it as engaging in narrative play intended to frustrate the linear codes of “readerly,” “realist” expectations. Thus Alan Sandison speaks of Stevenson’s pervasive “metafictional structures,” his “subversive, deconstructive undertow” which is part of modernism’s “antagonism towards the literary tradition” of nineteenth-century realism (4–5, 15). Scholars

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like Williams and Arata invoke Stevenson's essays "A Chapter on Dreams," and especially "A Note on Realism," as evidence of the author's predilection for literary experimentation and divergence from "traditional humanist notions of both realism and identity."³

The notion of divergence—literary, sexual or political—does not, however, offer a completely satisfying account of Stevenson's narrative project. In particular, it offers no satisfactory account of instances of the narrative's apparent complicity in moral codes or judgements, of conservative or authoritarian strands in the text—not merely the ironically smug patriarchal voice of characters like Utterson and Lanyon, but also the corroborating voice of the quasi-omniscient narrator. Scholarship on Stevenson has often been troubled by the presence in this novel of what Garrett calls the "strong conservative strain" (60), and Thomas a "plot of exclusion" (73), which in fact contradict the "savage pleasure" of its iconoclastic impulses. The inability to account for this contradictory impulse leads Garrett to conclude that the novella is guilty of "fictional irresponsibility," a "refusal or failure to offer any secure position for its reader or to establish any fixed relation between its voices" (70), and Thomas similarly calls the novel a "schizo-text" (83). Furthermore, the notion of a textual "deviance" (from realist conventions) that echoes a socio-sexual deviance imputes too much teleological purpose and coherence to a narrative which is complexly pre-moral, "plaisir" rather than logical intention; it is to foreground the thematics of the Hydean transgression, while neglecting the narrative performance which contains that transgression at the same time that it repudiates it.

In this novel, narrative itself is the site of meaning, of textual processes that operate prior to narrower thematic concerns and to simplifying social oppositions. This reinforces what might be termed the intentional nature of values and judgements, which do not stand outside of the text (in the seemingly pre-textual referents of "Victorian society" or "history"), but instead find meaning precisely in the acts of interpretative judgement structured and sustained by the narrative. Social criticism is very much secondary, and cannot form the interpretative key, to this form of modernist narrative, whose primary concern is the creation of a semiotic exercise in the act of reading, although of course this exercise is also a social, systemic function.

The central signifying codes, in this as well as other Stevensonian narratives, are those of shame and guilt, kinship and proscriptive banishment, which are played out in an unmistakably Oedipal pattern. This is most apparent in the Scottish (pseudo) romances, *Weir of Hermiston*, *Kidnapped*, and *David Balfour* (or *Catriona*, as the latter was known in England and Scotland).⁴ Characters in these novels struggle literally against the name of the father, either as a repudiation of the biological father's "coarse and cruel" nature (as is the case with Archie Weir in *Weir of Hermiston*, who effectively renounces his kinship with his father the "hanging" judge);⁵ or else as a conflict of emotional and political affiliations in the troubled Jacobite struggles which is the setting of the latter two novels. Naming the protagonist of *Kidnapped* and its sequel *David Balfour* (this being the family name of Stevenson's mother) also allows Stevenson to write elements of his own troubled relationship with his father into this political drama.

The problematics of naming in these novels suggests the fundamental crisis in identity that Stevenson is very much concerned with, not the less because of his fascination with the name and legend of Rob Roy MacGregor:

. . . Stevenson hoped he might be descended from Rob Roy MacGregor or at any rate from the clan. Obviously, he was never able to prove it, and the "perfect evidence" he mentions in a letter . . . amounts only to the fact—if it is a fact—that when the name of MacGregor was proscribed some of the clan called themselves "Stevenson." (Aldington 10)

David's quest might be seen as that of gaining his rightful appellation ("David Balfour of Shaws") after the deceitful disinheritance performed by his uncle Ebenezer, but this can never be made public:⁶ at the end of the first novel, he comes to a compromising agreement in which the shamed uncle is financially penalised, but remains installed at Shaws, to all appearances the Laird still. David, in fact the rightful Laird, spends most of the two novels sans identity and roots, tossed to and fro between different clan affiliations and power factions. David's outlawed Jacobite friend, Alan Breck Stewart, faces a similar plight throughout these novels,

caught between the pride of bearing “a king’s name,” and the shame and guilt of having publically to hide that name in Hanover England (*Kidnapped* 60, 219–220). The eponymous heroine of *Catriona*, too, endures hardship and disgrace under a variety of names—as “the daughter of James More,” the ward of “Mrs. Ogilvy/Lady Allardyce,” and finally as the wife of “David Balfour” (*Catriona* 9, 57).

In the troubled climate of the Scottish romances, identity is not merely oppositional, but is constantly ambivalent and shifting. Individuals do not merely struggle to choose between two affiliations—the legal and Hanoverian, or the oppositional, outlawed Jacobinical—but continually re-negotiate their plural identities in each different speech-act. David, for example, does not “regress” by “submitting himself to a series of father-figures,” as Sandison (190) suggests; rather, his career (if it has any significance at all) is that of a continual process of acceptance and repudiation of different father-figures. Thus he moves from the authority of his Whig Campbell mentor to the Jacobite intrigues of Alan Breck and James Stewart, from the Stewarts to their enemies the MacGregors, from the petty outlaw escapades to the higher (but also contradictory) realpolitik symbolised by Simon Fraser and Prestongrange.

In the end, he and *Catriona* have not so much resolved these questions of identity and forged their own place, as they have stumbled nolens volens through different, contradictory positions. The romance device of the ending marriage cannot conceal the fact that their union stands in the face of competing claims to their individual loyalties, a point which the reader is reminded of even at the very end, as their two children are named for Alan and for Prestongrange’s (the Lord Advocate who persecutes the Stewarts) daughter. David may well say that he marries *Catriona* “as though there had been no such person as James More” (290), but *Catriona*’s own renunciation of her father is muddled and irresolute: “I am a daughter of Alpin! Shame of the sons of Alpin, begone!” (286), she proclaims, proscribing his name by resorting to the legendary clan of the Alpines, although in so doing she perpetuates her kinship to him under another clan signifier. Yet again, she and David also re-affirm their ties to the MacGregors by seeking the blessing of the exiled chieftain of the clan, who implicitly associates them with James More once again, by refusing (and forbidding them) publicly to repudiate him (much as Ebenezer cannot be publicly denounced): “we are all Scots folk and all Hieland” (290).

These narratives thus accentuate the romance pleasure (the plot structure of growth, marriage and hope) by a perverse, sado-masochistic invocation of the cruelty, shame, and pain of the betrayals (including self-betrayals) upon which the romance ending must be founded.

Oedipal relations are marked by surface affections and (ultimately) deeper betrayals and proscriptions, this narrative *schadenfreude* replacing the promised but undelivered plot structures of the *bildungsroman*. In reading David's relationship with James Stewart, for example, one is compelled to work through a perversely sado-masochistic progression: James is the symbolic father, himself proscribed and persecuted by the Campbells, who provides temporary shelter to David and Alan: "James *carried me* accordingly into the kitchen, and sat down with me at table, smiling and talking at first in a very hospitable manner" (*Catriona*, 186, emphasis added). The peculiarity of this novel is that David moves from a plethora of motives ("justice," "vanity," gentlemanly "essence") urging him to risk his life in James's defence, to a gradual absorption into the affairs and concerns of James's Whig enemies. Yet this betrayal is repeatedly marked by David's own sympathetic sentiments on precisely this betrayal: in his comment on the political machinations which sacrifice James, he observes that "there was only one person that seemed to be forgotten, and that was James of the Glens" (150). Yet David is himself complicit (by his silence) in James's fate:

There was never the least word heard of the memorial, or none by me. Prestongrange and his Grace the Lord President may have heard of it (for what I know) on the deafest sides of their heads; they kept it to themselves, at least—the public was none the wiser; and in the course of time, on November 8th, and in the midst of a prodigious storm of wind and rain, poor James of the Glens was duly hanged at Lettermore by Ballachulish. (187)

David, too, has kept his testimony "on the deafest side," as he puts it. He attempts to dilute this act with the complacent rationalization that "innocent men have perished before James, and are like to keep on perishing (in spite of all our wisdom) till the end of time" (187), and to naturalize his

actions as a young man's spirited rejection of an unfair emotional burden, a lost cause.

Proscription (etymologically "pro scribere")—writing as elision, rejection or banishment—is an inherently paradoxical act, not only in its play of presence/absence (as a declaration which names he who henceforth, by the authority of that declaration, is not to be named), but also in the admixture of pity and cruelty, pain and pleasure, as David shows. Thus the foregrounding of David's feelings of guilt and anxiety are part of the very pleasure of their catharsis, and the reader (whose investment in the titular hero and heroine of these novels finds pleasure in the unfolding of their destinies, even if this denouement necessarily glosses over ethical and affective complexities) is no less complicit in this textual process.

Following Julia Kristeva, we might describe Stevenson's textual pleasure as an instance of "jouissance," which is only in part that covert pleasure which phallogocentric narratives seek to suppress, and which may manifest itself in a delight in deviance or alterity: in primal terms the mother, that "other [who] has no penis, but experiences *jouissance* and bears children" (*About* 26). Beyond this, Kristeva (in her analysis of that most patriarchal of symbolic systems, Christianity) also speaks of "ecstatic" and "melancholic" jouissance, which are "two ways in which a woman may participate in this symbolic Christian order" (27, 28). In such attempts by the other "to gain access to the social order," jouissance comes to assume ambivalent nuances: as the "reward" that the subject acquires from the symbolic order, the "triumph" of "sublimated sadistic attacks" on the other whom the subject now disavows or proscribes, but also as the "tearful" submission which brings the acceptance of self-recrimination (30). Thus the subject on the one hand assumes the position of the undifferentiated entity who is pleasurably accommodated by the patriarchal order (although only at the cost of losing distinctness); and on the other hand, relates to that order as a difference which must submit to punishment (but which punishment also brings the pleasure of acceptance). This complex duality incorporates both the proscription of the self (in the hysteric's "unutterable jouissance") as well as the proscription practised by the self on an other, in the name of the father-law ("True-Real" 230).

This ambivalent union of ecstatic sadism and melancholic masochism is not, of course, confined to the daughter whose symbolic lack is so evident; Freud describes a similar ambivalence in the process of ego forma-

tion which he describes in the Oedipal terms of the son-father relationship. According to Freud, the self ultimately “absorbs into itself the invulnerable authority” (superego) and consequently enters into the dual role of authority and rebel (*Civilization* 115). The boy’s discourses assume their own characteristics—recurring in Freud’s accounts as tropes of hostility and symbolic violence towards the father (murder, castration) confirmed by acts of proscription (guilt feelings, displacement, jokes, the taboo). For Freud, the locus classicus of these tropes is totemism and taboos among the “primitive” aboriginal and Polynesian tribes, a primitivist ethnology reflected in some ways in Stevenson’s view of the Pacific Islanders—and thus, by association, with the Scottish highlanders Stevenson frequently compared to the Polynesians.⁷ For both Freud and Stevenson, totems and taboos were only the “ambivalent emotional attitude” of the father-complex in modern society writ in large and savage letters (*Totem* 141). The totemic symbols and related discourses of “avoidance,” taboo laws and religions are thus essentially narrative devices to negotiate the self’s anxious and pleasurable relationship with authority.⁸

Jouissance and proscription are even more complexly interwoven in *Jekyll and Hyde*, where a number of complex narrative signs and (mis)directions take the place of the historical drama and action of the Scottish novels. Despite its evasive fragmentation—Sandison says that it is “not one story but ten enigmatic stories” (219), and Thomas speaks of the “fragmenting of the self into distinct pieces with distinct voices” (73)—the novella nevertheless reads at some levels like a moral, cautionary tale. Andrew Lang calls it “Poe with the addition of a moral sense,” and Stevenson himself insisted quite heatedly on a particular way of reading *Jekyll*, “because he was a hypocrite—not because he was fond of women,” and for his “cruelty and malice, and selfishness and cowardice.”⁹ However, this moral indictment (if it ever appears clearly in the narrative) is more problematic in respect of *Jekyll*’s peers—Utterson, Lanyon, Enfield, Carew—and the whole patriarchal society they represent. This is certainly a form of modernist “janiformity” wherein “organic” and conservative views of society can be preserved covertly, in the performance of the narrative, to create a critical project mounted in some bad faith.¹⁰ However, what distinguishes Stevenson’s narrative from, say, the hesitant imperialism and racism of Kipling and Conrad, or the divided Anglo-Irish political consciousness of Yeats—modernism in its mode of melancholic, identifica-

tory social criticism—is that the contradiction exists, not as a statement or vision within (what Roland Barthes would call) the “cultural code,” but as a clash within/between “hermeneutic,” “semic” and “symbolic” codes (55–60).¹¹ There is thus no organic, re-visioned model of society and history to be uncovered (as a set of clues to the informed reader), but rather a moral goal through a textual performance into which the reader is interpellated. That goal is no less ideologically-fraught than modernism’s other visions; however, it consists, not in articulation or statement, but rather in narrative as a function of the social system.

Such a view of *Jekyll and Hyde* poses one kind of answer to the many problems of the text, one of the most vexing being the role of the shadowy, quasi-omniscient narrator (henceforth, for convenience, called the Stevensonian narrator), who at times suggests the role of moral commentary performed by the omniscient realist narrator of nineteenth-century and modern fiction, and at other times more closely resembles the non- (or pre) moral role of the narrator in metafiction. This Stevensonian narrator is elusive, variously present and authoritative, then closely aligned with the perspective of a narrating character, then elsewhere seemingly absent and giving way to disparate voices. It is thus hardly surprising that the existence of such a narrator is not usually recognised or conceded. In arguing his claim for the “disappearance of the author,” Ronald Thomas names the major narrators in the novella: Jekyll, who possibly has the least control over what is ostensibly his own story, Utterson, and Enfield. We should add to this list the shadowy narrative voice whose textual presence is perhaps most clearly seen at the beginning of the novella:

Mr Utterson the lawyer was a man of a rugged countenance, that was never lighted by a smile; cold, scanty and embarrassed in discourse; backward in sentiment; lean, long, dusty, dreary and yet somehow lovable. At friendly meetings, and when the wine was to his taste, something eminently human beaconed from his eye; something indeed which never found its way into his talk, but which spoke not only in these silent symbols of the after-dinner face, but more often and loudly in the acts of his life. He was austere with himself; drank gin when he was alone, to mortify a

taste for vintages; and though he enjoyed the theatre, had not crossed the doors of one for twenty years. (7)

A number of details which will prove ironic are established in this opening passage: Utterson's self-despised "taste for vintages" is one of the prominent links between him and Jekyll's social circle, "all judges of good wine" (22), but his gin drinking identifies himself with the social other he encounters in Hyde's domain of Soho, with its "gin palace" and women addicted to their "morning glass" (27).¹² The seemingly irrelevant point about his long absence from the theatre anticipates the significant scene when Utterson passes through the doors of Jekyll's "surgical theatre," a liminal space which marks the boundary between Utterson's rational society and the irrational alterity of Hyde's world (43). Perhaps significantly, that long-disused theatre is surreally cluttered with "crates and bottles," a hint of the public house and the lower appetites to which it caters. In Jekyll's defensive statement at the end of the novel, he compares his condition to that "when a drunkard reasons with himself upon his vice" (69). This suggestion of uncontrollable appetite is reinforced in the same chapter when Utterson reads Jekyll/Hyde's desperate letters to the chemists, who are called "Messrs. Maw"—once again suggesting consumption and appetite, in particular that of a "voracious animal."¹³ Jekyll's addiction to the drug is of course highly suggestive of another Victorian anxiety, the base appetite for opium.

That prevalent fin de siècle trope—the hypocrisy of the respectable middle class—is almost lost in these subtle—one might even say over-subtle—hints. This playful subtlety seems to be the point: what is created is a sly, teasing, and provocatively confidential narrative voice, which suggests its intimate knowledge of Utterson and his world, while suggesting at the same time that some of those particulars should not be articulated. It is a narrative which seems to proscribe while it describes—Utterson, we are told, is not the most emotionally expressive person, and has qualities which "never found [their] way into his talk," so that it devolves upon a close confidante like the narrator to reveal his secret, "eminently human" aspect. However, this intention is not followed through, and the reader is instead referred enigmatically to "these silent symbols of the after-dinner face," seemingly interpolated into a scene of affectionate and intimate community, but one which is continually deferred. The closest one comes

to penetrating into such a scene is at the beginning of the chapter “Dr Jekyll Was Quite at Ease,” but once again Utterson’s mysterious human qualities are teasingly elided under phrases like “his unobtrusive company,” “practising for solitude,” “the man’s rich silence” (22). At any rate, his humanity and solicitude, such as it is, can only emerge after the moment of intimate companionship—after the dinner is over and the “old cronies” have departed. Here, as elsewhere in the depiction of Utterson, the uncertain tone oscillates between affection and irony, between a warmth which invites the reader’s moral identification with the lawyer, and a contrary invitation to read more sinister (albeit equally cryptic) aspects into this characterization.

One of the consequences of this narrative poise is an ontological uncertainty where the boundaries of narrative zones (in Bakhtin’s sense) blur and meld. On the one hand, this narrator at times shares so much of Utterson’s consciousness, point of view, and even more idiosyncratic characteristics, that he seems to fade into non-existence, leaving Utterson as the dominant narrative presence. Thus, for example, where Utterson begins to suspect something amiss in Jekyll’s affairs:

And the lawyer, scared by the thought, brooded awhile on his own past, groping in all the corners of memory, lest by chance some Jack-in-the-Box of an old iniquity should leap to light there. His past was fairly blameless; few men could read the rolls of their life with less apprehension; yet he was humbled to the dust by the many ill things he had done, and raised up again into a sober and fearful gratitude by the many that he had come so near to doing, yet avoided. (20–21)

This is grammatically the same third-person narrative which opens the novella, and shares too the insight into Utterson’s state of mind, the “sober and fearful” (self-) scrutiny, and something of the irony (in Utterson’s utter misconception of Hyde’s relationship to Jekyll) of the earlier passage. At the same time, however, the text is at pains to establish a narrative voice and perspective that is characteristically Utterson’s, distinct from the Stevensonian narrator as such: the self-deprecating and dry Utterson in this passage and elsewhere never describes himself in the affectionate and

approving terms (“somehow lovable,” “an approved tolerance for others,” “the last good influence”) that the voice at the opening of the novella uses. Moreover, Utterson’s perspective lacks the playfulness of the Stevensonian narrator, and is the “sober and fearful” victim of the text’s ironies rather than their master; in particular, his misplaced concern and sympathy for Jekyll create a distinctive note of ironic anxiety in his perspective and voice. In contrast, the Stevensonian narrator expressly lacks this note of anxiety, and is never a victim of textual ironies; if he does not speak to reveal foreknowledge or insight, neither is he taken by surprise as are Utterson and other narrators.

What is created is a narratorial equivalent of the ontological questions posed by the Jekyll/Hyde conundrum—the confusion of the pronouns “he/I” in Jekyll’s statement (73), the “community of memory” between the two personalities that Frederick Myers insisted on (Maixner 221). In a similar way, the ghostly movement from presence to absence, distinctiveness to similarity on the part of the Stevensonian narrator calls into question the very basis of narrative being—even that transient, actantial existence which enables the process of reading. Certainly Utterson has no grammatical ontology or person, no formal linguistic markers to designate his separation from the unnamed, “omniscient” narrator, who is given neither the pronoun “I” nor a name as the mark of his locus or identity. Yet in what other sense can it be said that Utterson is a narrator at all, than that the reader is taken so closely and intimately into his perspective and state of mind, and that he is given a greater centrality and presence than other speakers? The final two chapters in the novella embody this paradox: Utterson has retired from the physical drama by the end of the eighth chapter, and indeed does not intrude his perspective, tone and personality into the final two chapters. However, a chronological anomaly persists at the end, to maintain Utterson’s narrative centrality: the reader encounters the two final statements as if they were on sufferance, only because Utterson (in his act of reading the letters) continues as a notional consciousness and narrative device in the novella.¹⁴

The ontological puzzle deepens elsewhere, as narrative voices quite distinct and separate from that of the Stevensonian narrator are offered. Thus, for example, the beginning of the chapter entitled “The Carew Murder Case”:

Nearly a year later, in the month of October 18-, London was startled by a crime of singular ferocity and rendered all the more notable by the high position of the victim. The details were few and startling. A maid servant living alone in a house not far from the river, had gone upstairs to bed about eleven. . . . It seems she was romantically given, for she sat down upon her box, which stood immediately under the window, and fell into a dream of musing. Never (she used to say, with streaming tears, when she narrated that experience) never had she felt more at peace with all men or thought more kindly of the world. (25)

This passage is distinctive in several ways: its tone is the detached and sensationalistically irresponsible voice of the yellow press, and its perspective is speculative and tentative when compared to the certainty of the omniscient narrator. Although the narrative here has decided opinions, these are couched frankly as speculations or hearsay: thus the maid's chancing to witness the murder is embellished with a theory of her being "romantically given" (which is more suggestive than precise or explanatory), this in turn qualified with "it seems." Her feelings are not intuited by the narrator (as Utterson's are), but deliberately specified as her reported statement in the parenthesis "(she used to say . . . when she narrated that experience"). Yet this narrative distance does not stop the reporting voice from indulging in a kind of disparaging sexism, which imputes to the maid all the tropes of a foolish sentimentalism and weakness ("full moon," "tears," "pretty manner," "fainted")—an element of sexual attitude (however negative) which has no place in the dry bachelor atmosphere surrounding Utterson and his circle.

The change to Utterson's point of view (in the third paragraph of the chapter) is marked and significant, although there are no explicit chapter or section breaks. It establishes that Utterson is not privy to the perspective and knowledge contained in the first two paragraphs: indeed, the narrative places him in an altogether separate space, so that the news (together with the envelope bearing Utterson's name) must be physically conveyed to him at a specific time ("the next morning, before he was out of bed"). Utterson's mind and feelings, too, are contained: on receiving the information, he "shot out a solemn lip," carries himself with the enigmati-

cally “same grave countenance,” and insists that he “shall say nothing” until he has seen the body (26). This may simply be (juris) prudence on the part of the lawyer, but it has a distinct narrative effect as well: the reader is suddenly denied access to Utterson’s inner state, an access quite freely given in much of the novel, through the omniscient narrator or through Utterson himself. This unusual denial thus serves to segregate two distinct narrative voices and the social registers they imply: the reader is inducted into the sensationalism and commonness of the initial paragraphs, only to encounter the social and narratorial proscription that Utterson’s consciousness brings to the episode.

Veeder (119) argues that a note of dubiousness clings, not only to Carew’s encounter with Hyde (which suggests the anonymity of a homosexual solicitation), but also to the maid who mysteriously has the means and necessity to live “alone in a house.” More than the suggestions of sexual vice, however (which are indeterminate), the note of moral dubiousness is struck by the narrative liberties and improprieties in this passage. The journalistic voice and its chauvinistic trivialization of the maid’s character and perspective, is repeated by the policeman who reports the murder to Utterson: asked by the lawyer (with characteristic understatement and periphrasis) if Hyde is a “person of small stature,” the policeman’s reply is crudely conjectural: ““Particularly small and particularly wicked-looking, is what the maid calls him”” (27). The tone of narrative intrusion spreads throughout this chapter, like the fog which unites the environs of Hyde and the maid, Utterson, and finally Soho, where Hyde’s landlady is described as “an ivory-faced” woman, having “an evil face, smoothed by hypocrisy” (27). The blankness of the ivory face is overwritten by the curious semiotic contradiction wherein the narrative voice reads “evil” simultaneously with signs of its erasure (“smoothed by hypocrisy”). Other crudely intrusive interpretations which distinguish the narrative of this chapter include the description of the “blackguardly surroundings” of the neighbourhood, and the crass detail of Jekyll’s fortune (“a quarter of a million sterling”). Narrative cruelty here is less blunt, and even more overdetermined, than in the Scottish romances, but it manifests itself quite clearly both in these gleeful accusatory voices, as well as the implied judgement against them.

The ontological uncertainty surrounding the Stevensonian narrator thus destabilizes expectations at the level of codes such as the hermeneutic and

symbolic: firstly, because the slippage between narratorial perspectives is also a slippage of moral perspectives and thus of judgement. The potential shame and guilt of Utterson's "many ill things he had done" are diluted by the absence/presence of the omniscient narrator, who simultaneously enforces the external, objective criticism (which is also a quasi-objective exoneration—"His past was fairly blameless"), but also offers the possibility that these are no more than Utterson's own alarmist and baseless fears, or hypocritical and baseless self-exoneration. Symbolic clusters—gin and wine, the front door and the back, professionalism and dilettantism, physical markers such as the tall/fair versus the short/dusky—accordingly never progress beyond the merely (but also problematically) suggestive, since it is never clear if they are always contained within the same signifying code or perspective. Furthermore, the primary hermeneutic code concerned with Jekyll's motives and means is likewise also subverted: to reach the "full statement" at the end of the novel is not to move from fragmented "outside" perspectives to a unified "inside" one, but rather to encounter the further conundrum of the Jekyll-Hyde identity conflation ("He, I say—I cannot say, I," 73; and later when even Jekyll is referred to in the third person, 74), the moral equivocations (the quibble involved in terms like "double-dealer," "duplicity," and "hypocrite," 60) and the inexplicable nature and source of Jekyll's motivating "morbid sense of shame."

Denied the bases of identity and individual character upon which to make any moral judgement, the reader encounters the hermeneutic code—the enigma which, in Barthes's view, is teasingly proffered, but deferred right to the end of the narrative—not (or not merely) as the expected moral reversal, the patriarchal figure brought low and conflated with his degenerate self, but elsewhere, in the significance of narrative acts themselves. This simultaneously ecstatic and melancholic *jouissance*—the selective location of the narrative consciousness, now outside the transgressive other and delighting in his punishment, and elsewhere within and sharing in the other's shame and guilt—has as its corollary the creation of a code of "gentility" in the narrative acts of other characters. This functions in similar ways to the romance elements Stevenson uses elsewhere, as a code which provides for the reader the pleasure of identification (in both senses, of deciphering the code, as well as of a positive affiliation and investment of interest), which is nevertheless troubled by the narrative cruelty and

proscription upon which it is based. Utterson's (juris)prudential silence in the case of the Carew murder, and its glaring contrast to surrounding instances of narrative and interpretation coarseness, is only one example. A similar class distinction seems to be at work in the Utterson/Enfield relationship, which is governed by tacit and complex codes of narrative avoidance, transgression, guilt, and tolerant inclusion.

Thus in the "Story of the Door," Utterson listens to Enfield's story with a companionable, seemingly casual silence, without betraying with any immoderate interruptions the fact that he too knows something connected with the door. The only indication of his private knowledge is the Stevensonian narrator's hint, "with a slight change of voice" (9), when Enfield begins his story. Enfield's "touch of sullenness" at the end, when Utterson reveals his knowledge, would seem at first to be a break from this gentlemanly code of narrative tolerance: Utterson comes close to challenging Enfield's veracity, and this hint of impoliteness seems to sound the death-knell to their companionable exchange, as they "make a bargain never to refer to this again" (12).

However, the bargain itself turns out to be ironic, and understood as such by both gentlemen: in the chapter "Incident at the Window," Utterson and Enfield are once again at their companionable walk, and refer quite casually and without heat to the taboo subject of Jekyll's door (39). This renewal of the ostensibly taboo subject thus becomes an occasion for confirming the tacit understanding and shared values of this community of gentlemen: Utterson is quick to point out to Enfield that he too has seen Hyde, and "shared your feeling of repulsion" (39); and in the earlier exchange, Enfield's discretionary attitude to scandal ("the more it looks like Queer Street, the less I ask," 11), is echoed in Utterson's tolerant and discrete treatment of Jekyll's scandalous affairs. Both gentlemen-narrators are also caught in compromising moments, and both share "shame" at being compelled to break (however temporarily) the professional code of discretion: Enfield declares himself "ashamed of [his] long tongue," not (it would seem) for narrating the affair of Hyde's brutality, but for the fact that it has unintentionally compromised a gentleman whom Utterson knows. Utterson is placed in a similar situation after his encounter with Hyde: while he seems not at all ashamed (and even a little defiant) about lying to Hyde that Jekyll had mentioned him, he is unaccountably "ashamed of his relief" when Jekyll's absence from home postpones the

lawyer's painful task of confronting him with the latter's encounter with Hyde (18–20).

Notions of gentility, professionalism and patriarchy sit uneasily in this novel, of course, and I am aware that the novel's ironic thrust serves to break down many of those careful social distinctions cherished by Victorian middle-class society, and that the figure of Hyde serves to transgress boundaries and distinctions. This is what Peter Garrett (69) describes as a "contamination," and Veeder as the "dissolution of distinctions" which subvert Victorian society's stratifications (121). On a slightly different tack, Sandison (taking exception to Veeder) insists that Utterson and Enfield not only do not belong to the same professional middle class, but also exist in a relationship of social inequality with an almost Oedipal tension (232–236). Arata points out that Hyde's "stigmata" are overdetermined to the extent that he could equally be the "degenerate prole" or the "bourgeois male" (236, 238). It is too simple, however, to say (with Arata) that a "homosocial bonding" takes place as the middle-class professional men "close ranks around him" to "protect him from harm" (239). Moral confusion and the dissolution of social boundaries cannot hide the obvious repulsion that Hyde generates throughout the novel, and the moral imperative which condemns both Hyde and his middle-class creator and alter-ego.

However, if the closing of ranks does not obey the expected class logic, and thus problematizes the reading of social meanings in the novel, it does sketch a logic of narrative gentility. Jekyll, with his immodest disclosures and interpretative excesses, is an obvious example of the transgression of this code, but so is Hastie Lanyon, whose first name, "boisterous and decided manner," and summary judgement of Jekyll as "wrong in mind" (15), already suggest something of his indecent interpretative haste and carelessness. This is displayed most clearly in his response to Jekyll's written plea for help: Jekyll expressly asks that Lanyon "draw out, *with all its contents as they stand*," the fourth drawer of his cabinet (53, original emphasis). Lanyon exceeds his instructions, and makes a detailed examination of those contents, speculating on the nature and purpose of the powders and of Jekyll's experiments. Jekyll does indeed list in vague terms the contents of the drawer—"some powders, a phial and a paper book"—but it is not solicitous concern and a desire to close ranks which prompts Lanyon's excessive curiosity. Lanyon makes no attempt at

Jekyll's rooms to verify that he has the correct drawer, stuffing it with straw and sealing it unseen; it is only when it is too late, after he returns to the privacy of his own home, that he violates Jekyll's privacy. The investigation leads to "little that was definite," by Lanyon's own admission, but this inconclusive set of signs does not prevent him from forcing a prejudiced conclusion: the whole affair speaks, "(like too many of Jekyll's investigations) to no end of practical usefulness," and Jekyll consequently must be suffering from "cerebral disease" (55).

Lanyon's career in this novella thus becomes a moral tale cautioning against narrative indiscretion and hasty interpretation. It is his semiotic arrogance, in a sense, that dooms him. Having satisfied his curiosity and confirmed his derisory opinion of Jekyll's affairs, he declines the option to allow Hyde to take the potion and leave "without further parley" (58). The transformation he witnesses, accordingly, is an encounter with the ineffable (from Lanyon's point of view), described in terms of indeterminable signs and blurred categories: "he seemed to swell—his face became suddenly black and the features seemed to melt and alter" (59). As a proper recompense for his lack of discretion, Lanyon is told and shown everything by Jekyll, which finally brings about the collapse of his narratorial assuredness: "What he told me in the next hour, I cannot bring my mind to set on paper." This call for a discretionary narrative, he conveys (belatedly) in his instructions for his posthumous statement, which is "for the hands of J. G. Utterson ALONE and in case of his predecease *to be destroyed unread*" (37).

It is a similar lack of narrative gentility which (no less than his transformation into the social other, Hyde) condemns Jekyll. In his final statement, Jekyll begins by declaring himself "endowed . . . with excellent parts," and indeed his narrative is constantly marked by excess: he aims at a "more than commonly grave countenance before the public," his shame is "almost morbid" (unlike the shame shared by Utterson and Enfield, which is felt on behalf of other people, and quickly dismissed), he waxes panygerically on his own life ("I laboured to relieve suffering"; "much was done for others," 71). It is not only Hyde, Jekyll's physical "devil" within, who lacks restraint from the normal moral checks and balances; Jekyll in his full statement also reveals himself to be lacking in narrative restraint, in the habits of decorous perception and articulation upon which social order seems to rest.

The novel's dominant symbolic code is thus not the "contamination" of the middle-class, although this is figured in the architectural degentrification and the urban sprawl which links respectable neighbourhoods with the slums of Soho; beyond this predictable semic level, the reader's attention is directed to symbols of a threatening conflagration, which must be contained by avoidance and discretion. This often takes place on the verge of a revelation, as when the street on which Enfield and Utterson ramble is described as being "like a fire in a forest," just prior to Enfield's scandal-tinged story (8), or the atmosphere in Soho "like the light of some strange conflagration" (27) when Utterson struggles to keep his own counsel in the Carew Murder case. Utterson's well-intentioned but inquisitive interrogation of Jekyll takes place with the two men on opposite sides of the fire, and is punctuated by a pause in which Jekyll urges a discretionary silence ("I beg of you to let it sleep") and Utterson "reflected a little looking in the fire" (22, 23). The fire is also, of course, an image of primitive, libidinal energy, as when Hyde kills Carew in a "great flame of anger" (25), and running throughout Jekyll's final self-justification, with its mention of the two "incongruous faggots" of human nature, the "hellish" energies, and the image of Jekyll as "a creature eaten up and emptied by fever" (69, 74), to name just a few instances. The fire interacts with the image of the fog, a conjunction which Conrad puts to very different effect in *Heart of Darkness*, where meaning in Marlow's tales is as ephemeral as the way in which "a glow brings out a haze" (30). In *Jekyll and Hyde*, the two symbols interact to suggest opposing forces: where the fog is associated with the spillage which seeps across ostensible class dividers, and with the obfuscating lack of self-knowledge which results in error and excess, the flame is defined in opposition to these qualities:

. . . and there would be a glow of a rich, lurid brown, like the light of some strange conflagration; and here, for a moment, the fog would be quite broken up, and a haggard shaft of daylight would glance in between the swirling wreaths. (27)

The fire burned in the grate; a lamp was set lighted on the chimney shelf, for even in the houses the fog began to lie thickly;. . . (30)

Between a revelation which consumes narrative proprieties, and this obfuscation which denies enlightening (self) knowledge altogether, the reader is directed to find the significance of right social conduct at the symbolic level.

This is a deliberate “poetics of misdirection,” in which the reader’s interpretative energies are turned away from the hermeneutic, semic and symbolic patterns which would be expected to sustain a “cultural” code (in Barthes’s sense of a social referent or message) of fin de siècle social decay and hypocrisy. Instead, the play of narrative identities and code manipulation compel the reader’s interpretative energies and attention elsewhere, in a continual seeking of the moral flaw proscribed by the narrative’s over-subtle but persistently suggestive signs, and of an “abstract” gentility whose basis is no known or recognizable social grouping or category, but rather is sustained by a shadowy procedure of “right” interpretative behaviour. The autotelic moral—the coincidence of the moral hermeneutic (narrative discretion and epistemological humility) with the reading process (which structures for the reader a position of continual wariness and the need to make precise distinctions)—is reinforced by the plaisir involved in the proscription of an imprecise dread. The closer the call, the nearer the reader’s own resemblance to and avoidance of this interpretative arrogance, the greater is the imperative in the reading process to proscribe the near-sin of the nameless narrator, and the more obvious sins of Jekyll and Lanyon.

The narratorial gentility suggested in *Jekyll and Hyde* might in some ways be compared to Stevenson’s articulation of an aesthetic gentility in his critical essays. When he cautions, in his essay “A Note on Realism,” that the good writer “must . . . suppress much and omit more,” he adumbrates the good taste which characterises the narratives of decent professional men like Utterson, Enfield and the omniscient narrator (72). Stevenson’s essay advocates in writing a certain degree of “abstraction” or “idealism” against the tyranny of contemporary “realism,” by which he means the “merely technical and decorative” reliance on external “detail” which has risen in late nineteenth-century letters (69). His fragmentary essay, “A Chapter on Dreams,” similarly suggests that the unconscious, condensed and enigmatic narrative structure of the dream-work is aesthetically superior to the moral elaborations and embellishments of the “conscious ego” (“Chapter” 202, 206–208).

This aesthetic anxiety is not confined to Stevenson, and is also expressed in the essays of his friend and fellow novelist Henry James. James's 1884 essay "The Art of Fiction" was, like Stevenson's "A Note on Realism," a reaction to Walter Besant's lecture on fiction; like Stevenson's essay, it was an act of repudiation, entering into the "New Grub Street"¹⁵ wars by delineating an aesthetic class position. James describes Besant's form of literary professionalism as a type of snobbery and hypocrisy, clothing Besant in Jekyll-like clothes. Among Besant's strictures are that "a writer whose friends and personal experiences belong to the lower middle-class should carefully avoid introducing his characters into society." James finds this both "chilling," as an act of social superiority and prescription, as well as ironic: Besant's sweeping remarks are "not exact," "so beautiful and so vague," and thus lack the "precision and exactness" which Besant himself holds to be a key quality of the novelist ("Art" 55). Beneath Besant's vision of a proper literary professionalism, according to James, lies a journeyman style which resembles the plebeian models it disparages—an imputed social transgression, Jekyll-like, which on James's part marks the close relationship between the aesthetic will and social anxiety.

It is also quite clear that beneath James's own thinly-veiled courtesies to Besant lies his own act of proscription, subtly defining James's code of aesthetic gentility by contrasting itself to the heavy-handed crudeness of Besant's strictures. In place of the "vagueness" and "unguarded" aims of lower orders of writing, James advocates "precision," which consists of being the most true to "experience." Here his departure from Stevenson becomes clear: where Stevenson fears the dominance of realism's "local dexterity," "facts," the artist "with scientific thoroughness, steadily to communicate matter which is not worth learning" (74), James strongly approves of "exactness" and "truth of detail," even agreeing with Besant's suggestion that the author's novel should be stocked with facts from his notebook (55). For James, the "freedom" of the novel did not mean a retreat into ellipsis and unconscious signification, but was equivalent with "history" and life itself. Whatever his reservations about the "vulgarity, the crudity, the stupidity" ("Criticism" 134) of base reviewers and readers, James's moral goals, like his aesthetic gentility, ultimately take the form of a broad humanism which attempted to present the "real" aspect of human experience to modern society. This aesthetic of human "experience" and

the “real,” despite its stylistic quarrel with the nineteenth century, retained its preoccupation with the social and political, and thus constituted (as Fredric Jameson and others have pointed out) a utopian and idealist vision.¹⁶ In this respect the modernism of the Conradian artist’s “descent into himself” to reveal human experience, aligns itself with James’s aesthetic: in particular, Conrad’s incessant concern with the ethics of European racism,¹⁷ as well as with the material bases of social decay (ivory in *Heart of Darkness*, silver in *Nostramo*, the larger economy of imperialist capitalism in which these signs function), and his quest for an implicit social and moral order that will offer an alternative to this, characterizes the romantic organicism of his modernism no less than that of James and Yeats.¹⁸

This impulse of veracity—a conviction of the larger world or reality which it is literature’s duty to accurately copy—is conspicuously absent from Stevenson’s poetic model. Stevenson’s novel is sometimes reluctantly called into being by “financial fluctuations,” and it will often have a dose of “morality” superadded (“Dreams” 208); but the “real” figures only as the hovering “evil angel” fighting for the soul of the text (“Realism” 72). This was also an alternative theory of narrative’s possible negotiation of power: romantic modernism’s response was to meet it with the opposed power of the impressionistic statement (epitomised by Lily Briscoe’s momentary, intense “vision,” Marlow’s “Buddha”-like story). Stevenson’s narrative, in contrast, responds to modernism’s anxiety about social power by a continual exercising (and exorcising) of the shame and guilty pleasure involved in the textual process. The reader’s engagement with narrative elements, as a form of language-power, becomes a ritual performance which displaces and defers the force of the actual, social and historical. In repudiating the realist and social utopian codes of romantic modernist narrative, Stevenson resorted to a narrative model which (in its anti-romantic conception of the “sublime” as a constant deferral, and in its reliance on profoundly self-conscious “language games”)¹⁹ more closely resembles and anticipates postmodernity.

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Notes

1. More recent examples of such readings include essays by Peter K. Garrett, Ronald R. Thomas, and M. Kellen Williams.
2. The phrase is Stephen D. Arata's (248). One of the most persuasive and comprehensive accounts of the role of patriarchy in this novella is William Veeder's essay "Children of the Night."
3. The phrase is Arata's (253), although he does usefully problematize Stevenson's anti-realist poetics.
4. It was Cassell, the English publisher, which coined the alternative title, fearing that Stevenson's original title (the one by which it was known in America), would be confused with *Kidnapped*. For a detailed account of the publishing history of these romances, see Barry Menikoff.
5. The unfinished romance *Weir of Hermiston* is included in the World's Classic's edition of *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (115).
6. Ebenezer is himself ironically named, a shameful betrayal of the Biblical memorial stones and their function of public testimony and declaration; see, e.g., 1 Samuel 7:12, King James Version.
7. Thus Stevenson in *In The South Seas* claims understanding of Marquesa Islanders because of his "knowledge of our Scots folk of the Highlands and the Islands." Stevenson felt the similarity especially in terms of the structures of power governing the two societies: "an alien authority enforced, the clans disarmed, the chiefs deposed, new customs introduced" (*Island* 34).
8. Terry Eagleton (262) reminds us that for Freud, libidinal processes are essentially aesthetic devices, the unconscious working "by a kind of 'aesthetic' logic."
9. Andrew Lang wrote a review of *Jekyll and Hyde* in the *Saturday Review* of 9 January 1886, reprinted in *Critical Heritage* (199). This view of the "moral sense" of the novella was echoed by James Ashcroft Noble, the anonymous reviewer in the *Rock* of 2 April 1886, and others (203–205, 224–227). Stevenson's insistence is found in his letter to John Paul Boccock in November 1887, reacting angrily to an unnamed critic's account of Richard Mansfield's production of *Jekyll and Hyde* (231).
10. The term "janiformity" is taken from Watts (*Deceptive*). "Organic" modernist projects have their origins in romanticism's championing of an underlying, "living" social

value against the degrading aspects of industrial and commercial forms—thus, for example, John Storey’s characterisation of Matthew Arnold’s “organic” intellectual conservatism.

11. Barthes’ fifth code, the “proiaretic”—associated with plot patterns, “action,” and consumerist reading, is of less direct relevance to *Jekyll and Hyde*.
12. This ostensible social distinction based on choice of drink seems to be part of what Robert Mighall identifies as an “urban anthropology,” associated with Victorian social commentators such as Henry Mayhew. The irony of Utterson’s mixed tastes depends upon the knowledge of such an anthropology, even as it ultimately confuses its distinctions.
13. “Voracity” is not a usual part of the definition of “maw,” but it is insisted on by the *Oxford Study Dictionary*; most definitions do, however, suggest the feral, with its connotations of savagery and base appetites.
14. A similarly abrupt narrative legerdemain occurs at the end of *Catriona*, where in the final two paragraphs, David for the first time addresses his two children, who are suddenly revealed as the auditors of his extended, two-novel story, although they are never even hinted at, at any earlier point. This creates a retroactive narrative instability, where the reader is urged to re-read the entire preceding narrative in light of the different intent, consciousness and function this change in the audience suggests, while at the same time the belatedness of this revelation also suggests that this revision is impractical and unnecessary.
15. George Gissing’s phrase is slightly anachronistic, of course (since his novel of that title is published in 1891), but eloquently relevant
16. Fredric Jameson, following modernists like Habermas, characterizes modernism as an attempt to think “about the thing itself, substantively, in Utopian or essential fashion” (ix). Even Habermas’s disputant, Jean-Francois Lyotard, defines modernism as a “nostalgia” or “solace,” a refusal to embrace the lack that constitutes the true sublime (“Answering the Question” 149). This is true of modernism’s imperialist project as well: Benita Parry (10) points out that the ambivalent textual processes in Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* serve a political goal, that of reinvigorating a “latent idealism” within the British colonial project.
17. This is no less a cultural referent for its being deeply controversial: see Chinua Achebe’s “An Image of Africa,” and opposing views offered by Cedric Watts and Hunt Hawkins.

18. Yeats saw himself as one of the “last romantics” (his phrase in “Coole Park and Ballylee, 1931”), of course, and his attempt to envision an enspirited, aristocratic Ireland (in opposition to the materialistic coarseness of “Paudeen’s pence”) stands in clear contrast to Stevenson’s profound unease with the modernist social vision. See Denis Donoghue’s “Romantic Ireland,” and Allen Tate’s “Yeats’s Romanticism.”
19. These, once again, are Lyotard’s terms and characteristics, raised in “Answering the Question” (146–149) and “Discussions” (366–369).

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