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from "Frankenstein, *Detective Fiction, and* Jekyll and Hyde"

[In this genre-focused reading of *Jekyll and Hyde*, Gordon Hirsch argues that the novella adopts elements of the emerging genre of detective fiction but, through its fundamentally gothic sensibility, ultimately deconstructs both the detective genre and the idea of reason that underlies it.]

II. *JEKYLL AND HYDE* AND DETECTIVE FICTION

[…] Vladimir Nabokov enjoined his Cornell students, "Please completely forget, disremember, obliterate, unlearn, consign to oblivion any notion you may have had that 'Jekyll and Hyde' is some kind of mystery story, a detective story, or movie" (179[1]).[2] But the context of mystery and detective fiction is crucial to the novel, as its full title, *Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*, signals. It must be understood, however, that the most important popularizer of the detective story is just about to publish at the time Stevenson is writing *Jekyll and Hyde* in 1885. Conan Doyle's first Sherlock Holmes book, *A Study in Scarlet*, was published in 1887, and his classic series of Sherlockian tales began to appear in the *Strand* in 1891. Though the form of detective fiction did not spring fully developed from Doyle's head, without antecedents, there are risks in speaking of it before it had, in effect, been codified by Doyle. Indeed, Jacques Barzun and Wendell Hertig Taylor, in trying to define the genre, declare that "detection is a game that must be played according to Doyle."[3] Ian Ousby, a recent historian of detective fiction, suggests, however, that two of Stevenson's early works, *The New Arabian Nights* (1881) and *The Dynamiter* (1885)—because of their interest in crime and detection, their whimsical and lightheartedly fantastic tone, and their development of a

1 [Vladimir Nabokov, "The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde (1885)," in *Lectures on Literature*, ed. Fredson Bowers (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1980).]

2 The rationale for this move is that "today's mystery story is the very negation of style, being, at the best, conventional literature," and Nabokov's intent is to praise *Jekyll and Hyde* as "a phenomenon of style" (179–80). [Unless otherwise indicated, all notes to this article are those of the author.]

3 Jacques Barzun and Wendell Hertig Taylor, *A Catalogue of Crime* (New York: Harper, 1971), 5.

genteel, Holmes-like detective, Prince Florizel—were important influences on Doyle.[1] *The Dynamiter*, indeed, contains this paean to the detective:

> Chance will continually drag before our careless eyes a thousand eloquent clues, not to this mystery only, but to the countless mysteries by which we live surrounded. Then comes the part of the man of the world, of the detective born and bred. This clue, which the whole town beholds without comprehension, swift as a cat, he leaps upon it, and makes it his, follows it with craft and passion, and from one trifling circumstance divines a world.[2]

Before Stevenson and Doyle, of course, there are many precursors of modern detective fiction. In English, the list would include Godwin's *Caleb Williams*, Poe's Dupon stories ("The Murders in the Rue Morgue," "The Mystery of Marie Roget," and "The Purloined Letter"), Dickens's *Bleak House* and *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*, Collins's *The Woman in White* and *The Moonstone*, and lesser works such as the *Recollections of a Detective Police-Officer* (1856) by "Thomas Waters" (William Russell) and the "sensation novels" of the 1860s and 1870s. John Cawelti has shown how mystery and detective fiction descends from the gothic tale, how Poe's Dupin stories are a kind of "benevolent inversion" of his more gothic "The Fall of the House of Usher": the "demonic but benevolent" detective "performs an act of transcendent reason" to penetrate the dark secrets of the mysterious (gothic) room (or psyche) and exorcise the disruptive forces contained within it.[3]

Jekyll and Hyde is very close formally to the classic novel of mystery and detection. Cawelti stresses three elements as making up the formula for the detective story: (1) there is a mystery—certain key facts are concealed; (2) the story is structured around an inquiry into this mystery, usually with the aid of an inquirer-protagonist; and (3)

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1 Ian Ousby, *Bloodhounds of Heaven: The Detective in English Fiction from Godwin to Doyle* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1976), 145–46.

2 *The Works of Robert Louis Stevenson*, South Seas Edition (New York: Scribner's, 1925), 8:10.

3 John Cawelti, *Adventure, Mystery, and Romance: Formula Stories as Art and Popular Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976), 100–1. Poe was a particular favorite with Stevenson, who had already adapted elements from Poe's stories in *Treasure Island* (published 1883) and "Markheim" (written 1884–85). In the 2 January 1875 issue of *The Academy*, Stevenson published a review of an edition of Poe's *Works* in which he especially recommended "the three stories about C. August Dupin, the philosophical detective," to prospective readers (*Works of Stevenson, 5*:329).

the concealed facts are made known at the end (132). Though Cawelti quite reasonably insists that not everything that fits the formula ought to be considered a detective story, these elements are worth thinking about in relation to *Jekyll and Hyde*, for the sake of what they illuminate.

The text of *Jekyll and Hyde* itself alludes at least twice to the need for clearing up its various mysteries (38, 73). The fundamental mystery, introduced early on, involves the question of what precisely Hyde's relation to Jekyll is. [...]

[...] Practically each encounter with Jekyll or Hyde, each incident, raises further questions and provokes speculative answers. Detective fiction is quintessentially the genre of mystery, impedence, delay, supposition, and false supposition, and these elements structure Stevenson's book.

Cawelti's formula for classic detective fiction also includes the notion of an investigator, an inquirer-protagonist. Already in Stevenson's time, the tradition of the ratiocinative detective, the detective who uses his great powers of reason to catch the criminal, has come into play, although this will be further developed and emphasized by Doyle. Poe's archetypal detective Dupin insists on the importance of reason (to be coupled with great imaginative powers as well: in "The Purloined Letter" Poe makes clear that the detective ought to be a poet as well as a mathematician). And Dickens's Inspector Bucket in *Bleak House* proves to be masterful not only in the exercise of social power (exemplified by his omnipresent thrusting forefinger) but also in his rational skills: when everyone else is taken in by the ruse Lady Dedlock uses to throw off all pursuit, Bucket grasps that she and the working-class Jenny have exchanged garments. He also sees through the deceptions of Hortense, Lady Dedlock's maid and the real murderer. Dickens extols Bucket, imagining him as "he mounts a high tower in his mind, and looks out far and wide" to penetrate the mysteries about him.[1]

At the center of *Jekyll and Hyde* there is in fact a violent crime—the murder of Sir Danvers Carew and the apparent escape of the murderer—and in this context an Inspector Newcomen of Scotland Yard is introduced into the book.[2] Like many another police detective in fiction before and since, he is remarkable for his power over others—

1 Charles Dickens, *Bleak House*, ed. Norman Page (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1981), 824.

2 Stevenson seems at his most Dickensian during the morning cab ride that Utterson and the police inspector take into the fog-shrouded quarter of Soho where Hyde lives, describing "its muddy ways, and slatternly passengers, and its lamps, which had never been extinguished or had been kindled afresh to combat this mournful reinvasion of darkness"; its twilight glow (*continued*)

manifested in this case by his ability to gain entry to the rooms of the suspect, Hyde. The opposition of Hyde's housekeeper to Utterson's bid to inspect the flat melts away when the police inspector is identified. In Hyde's rooms, Newcomen discovers half of Dr. Jekyll's walking stick, the weapon used in the attack on Carew, and when he recovers Hyde's partially burned checkbook from the ashes of Hyde's burned papers, he expresses his confidence that it will be only a matter of time before he has his man:

> You may depend upon it, sir.... I have him in my hand. He must have lost his head, or he never would have ... burned the cheque book. Why, money's life to the man. We have nothing to do but wait for him at the bank, and get out the handbills. [49–50[1]]

He *sounds* the part, but his optimism is unfounded and the conclusions he draws quite erroneous. Newcomen proves to be like the bumbling official (or provincial) policeman of the detective story—Poe's prefect of police, Collins's Superintendent Seegrave, or Doyle's Lestrade. And there is no private, consulting detective here to exhibit a constrasting brilliance. Instead, we get as the story's principal investigator, Jekyll's lawyer and old friend, Gabriel Utterson.[2]

Throughout the book, it is really Utterson who strives to penetrate the mystery represented by Mr. Hyde. At first, Utterson displays some of the acumen of the detective-hero. In the book's first chapter, he pounces on Enfield's story with a confidence in his powers of observation and deduction, and with a one-upmanship worthy of Cuff or Dupin, declaring that he does not need to be told the name of the signatory of the check Hyde presented, "because I know it already," and admonishing his kinsman, "If you have been inexact in any point, you

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of "a rich, lurid brown, like the light of some strange conflagration"; and the momentary intrusions of "a haggard shaft of daylight" (48). There are a number of echoes of *Bleak House* here, ranging from Krook's spontaneous combustion (certainly, a "strange conflagration") to the mud, the "slipping and sliding" foot passengers, the expression of doubt whether "this day ever broke," and the "haggard and unwilling look" of the gas lamps "lighted two hours before their time"—all of which may be found in the opening three paragraphs of Dickens's novel. The motif of the police detective's penetration of one of London's less reputable districts may have prompted this virtuoso Dickensian performance by Stevenson.

1 [Page references to *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* refer to the text edited by Jenni Calder (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1979).]

2 William Patrick Day briefly notes that Utterson is a kind of detective, but dismisses the idea because he is unsuccessful and baffled (58). The point is a helpful one, though, and worth the fuller discussion here.

had better correct it" (34). Soon thereafter, he begins his "search for Mr. Hyde," uttering his most frequently cited line, "If he be Mr. Hyde, … I shall be Mr. Seek" (28). Seeking to learn who Mr. Hyde is and precisely what hold he has over the respectable Dr. Jekyll, Utterson, like many another ratiocinative detective, thinks that the suspicious and odd things he has been looking into must have a simple explanation:

> If he could but once set eyes on [Hyde], he thought the mystery would lighten, and perhaps roll altogether away, as was the habit of mysterious things when well examined. [38]

Unfortunately, however, a meeting with Hyde in the street does little to clarify matters for Utterson. But it also fails to slake his appetite for rational explanation. Throughout the novel, Utterson offers dozens of guesses aimed at explaining the book's various mysteries. He at first believes, for example, that Hyde must be blackmailing Jekyll, or that Hyde has dictated the terms of Jekyll's will and plans to murder him in order to inherit. After Jekyll has presented Hyde's "parting" letter to Utterson, Utterson is informed by Poole that the letter was *not* handed in at the front door, despite Jekyll's assertions to the contrary. His deduction is, "Plainly the letter had come by the laboratory door" (53). His faith in the explanatory power of the letter—that it will "put that mystery [of Jekyll's friendship with Hyde] to rights" (54)—must remain unshaken. When Guest compares the handwriting of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde and declares them virtually identical, Utterson leaps to the conclusion that Henry Jekyll has "forge[d] for a murderer" (55). Later, Poole comes to him to suggest that Hyde has murdered Jekyll and is ensconced in Jekyll's laboratory building, but Utterson dismsses the idea: "What could induce the murderer to stay? That won't hold water; it doesn't commend itself to reason" (65). Perhaps the finest example of Utterson's ability to rationalize and deny at the same time that he is "seeking" answers comes as he and Poole are poised to break down the door to Jekyll's locked apartment, after Poole has seen a strange figure who seems to be wearing a "mask upon his face … cry out like a rat and run from" him when discovered (66). Here is Utterson's response:

> These are all very strange circumstances, … but I think I begin to see daylight. Your master, Poole, is plainly seized with one of those maladies that both torture and deform the sufferer; hence the mask and the avoidance of friends; … hence his eagerness to find this drug, by means of which the poor soul retains some hope of ultimate recovery…. There is my explanation; it is sad enough,

> Poole, ay, and appalling to consider; but it is plain and natural, hangs well together and delivers us from all exorbitant alarms. [66]

A "plain and natural" explanation, certainly, my dear Utterson, but, as it turns out, quite a mistaken one. When Poole and Utterson discover the body of Hyde in Jekyll's cabinet, the lawyer concludes that they must now search for Henry Jekyll's body. When no body can be found, but a note from Jekyll dated that very day is discovered near Hyde's corpse, Utterson, in one of the book's more bitterly ironic turns, is led to suspect that Jekyll has murdered Hyde (72)!

Why do Utterson's rationalist inquiries seem to fall short so consistently? The explanation is to be found partly in Utterson's character, partly in the nature of his society, and partly in Stevenson's resistance to the rationalist assumptions of the emergent detective genre.

First, consider Stevenson's characterization of Utterson. Like many another fictional detective, Utterson turns out to be something of a psychological eccentric. Although Utterson is presented as the calm, rational investigator, Stevenson also makes it clear that he is as deeply divided as Dr. Jekyll, or as any person. Masao Miyoshi notes that Utterson's association with such people as his kinsman Richard Enfield, "the well-known man about town" who can be found "coming home from some place at the end of the world, about three o'clock of a black winter morning" (29, 31), "looks suspiciously [like] … vicarious pleasure" (Miyoshi, *Divided Self*, 296[1]). Both Peter Garrett and William Veeder, in this volume,[2] write of Utterson's obsession and identification with Hyde. Although the narrator describes Utterson as "a lover of the sane and customary sides of life, to whom the fanciful was the immodest" (35), he is from the very start of his "search for Mr. Hyde" immersed in a world of nightmare and prevarication, experiencing "a nausea and distaste of life" (41).

The novel's chief investigator and rational guide, in other words, has his own buried life. He shares more than he knows with Jekyll/Hyde. It is just that Utterson's division will not be owned by himself in this text. As the central consciousness for much of the narrative, and as the reader's stand-in while information and understanding are being sought, this detective figure is manifestly as divided as Henry Jekyll, but his contradictions can only be glimpsed behind and

1 [Masao Miyoshi, *The Divided Self* (New York: New York University Press, 1969).]

2 [Veeder's, Garrett's, and Hirsch's essays originally appeared in *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde after One Hundred Years*, edited by Veeder and Hirsch. Portions of all three essays are also provided on this site.]

beneath layers of repression. If Henry Jekyll's mode of dealing with his division is to *project* aspects of himself onto another (Hyde), Utterson employs voyeuristic fantasies to participate vicariously in "the lives of downgoing men" (29). He is an inquiring detective who really does not want to know, a Mr. Seek who does not in fact wish to find.

Stevenson is making a point, too, about the way his society places its faith in rationality, in the rational solution of mysteries, at the same time that it keeps so much suppressed that it refuses to acknowledge. William Veeder discusses the bourgeois "professionalism" of Utterson's circle and sees it as the expression of a patriarchal social order in his essay "Children of the Night," in this volume. The interests of this class are also manifested by its absolute reliance on the rationalism of nineteenth-century science and its image in fiction, the scientific gathering of clues. Both Lanyon and Utterson are satirized for this naive faith. Lanyon's dismissal of Jekyll's "fanciful" research and "unscientific balderdash" (36) is made to sound very like Utterson's dismissal of Poole's theory that Hyde has returned to Jekyll's cabinet: "That won't hold water; it doesn't commend itself to reason" (65). Lanyon is, after all, "the great Dr. Lanyon," and his house on Cavendish Square is "that citadel of medicine" (36). When Jekyll requests that Lanyon go to Jekyll's house and bring away some of his chemicals, the request seems so odd to Lanyon as to persuade him of Jekyll's insanity—an absolute kind of dismissal (75). The rational and scientific are identified in this way with the respectable and with the *self-satisfaction* that accompanies respectability. Stevenson insists that Utterson and Lanyon are "thorough respectors of themselves and each other" (36), just as Sir Danvers Carew has a look of "well-founded self-content" (46). It is no accident that Jekyll's most frightening transformation into Hyde occurs on the park bench in a moment of "vainglorious thought," when he is full of the sense of his being "safe of all men's respect, wealthy, beloved" (92, 93). It is part of the respectability of these men and, finally, part of their "self-content" to insist on the value of science and rational explanation—the kind of rational account, closure, and formal structure that a detective story characteristically provides. It is also part of their vulnerability, however. There is no such thing as a disinterested rationalism, Stevenson insists; these men have an interest in seeing their kind of rationality triumphant, an interest that is intimated by their feelings of "self-content."

Utterson, in particular, is not at all averse to managing and suppressing the information he gathers if by doing so he can protect those in his social circle. Although he is by no means alone in his pleas for silence and suppression, it is a recurrent topic with him throughout the book, whether addressed to his clerk ("I shouldn't speak of this

note, you know," [55]), or offered in support of his cousin's renewed resolve to censor his speech:

> "Here is another lesson to say nothing," said [Enfield]. "I am ashamed of my long tongue. Let us make a bargain never to refer to this again."
>
> "With all my heart," said the lawyer. [34]

Utterson expresses the hope that Hyde will *not* be brought to trial for Carew's murder for the sake of his friend and client, Henry Jekyll; after all, "if it came to a trial, your name might appear" (52). And he tells Poole to say nothing of Jekyll's "Full Statement," so that "if your master has fled or is dead, we may at least save his credit" (73). Above all, the reputations of those in one's social class must be protected.

One last reason the ratiocinative methods of detective fiction fall so woefully short can be attributed to this novel's fundamental ambivalence toward the genre itself. Utterson cannot reasonably deduce anything, and his logic consistently fails him in a nearly laughable way because the mystery he seeks to solve is at its core a supernatural one, a gothic one—namely, that Dr. Jekyll has divided himself by means of a chemical potion, that Hyde *is* Jekyll, transmogrified. Ordinarily, in detective stories the supernatural mode of the gothic has no place. What looks to be supernatural isn't. A classic instance of this is the mysteriously glowing hound in Conan Doyle's "The Hound of the Baskervilles" (1901–2), which turns out to be an ordinary, though savage, dog treated with phosphorescent paint. *Jekyll and Hyde*, however, has an irreducibly gothic premise. Most of the mysteries of the novel would be solved if Utterson knew that Jekyll and Hyde were not two but one. Utterson is, in a sense, in the wrong book, or at least in a book of the wrong genre. This narrative employs the ratiocinative methods and formal structure of the detective story, but also offers a satiric critique of those devices,[1] just as it supplies an ironic commentary on the self-contented, repressive modes favored by this society. [...]

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1 A.E. Murch shows how Stevenson, in subsequent books such as *The Wrong Box* (1888) and *The Wrecker* (1892), alludes to, and employs some of the devices of, detective fiction, but Murch argues that Stevenson's attitudes toward that genre remain divided (*The Development of the Detective Novel* [New York: Philosophical Library, 1958], 142–44). In *The Wrecker*, Stevenson describes "the police novel or mystery story" as "enthralling, but insignificant, like a game of chess, not a work of human art" (*Works of Stevenson* [n. 2, p. 2], 21: 422)—expressing some of the same ambivalence he felt generally toward literature written for mass audiences. This ambivalence toward popular fiction is the subject of the essay by Brantlinger and Boyle in this volume.

III. DETECTION, TEXT, AND IDENTITY

The third element in Cawelti's formula for the classic detective novel—a feature as old as Edgar Allan Poe's stories, though, again, Doyle's use of this device is critical—is the way that the story moves toward a final narrative that will explain the mysteries. Detective fiction characteristically ends with a retelling of its story—from a more informed point of view.

The book's final chapter, "Henry Jekyll's Full Statement of the Case," is such a retelling. It is Jekyll's posthumous "confession" (72, 97); up to this point relatively little has been heard from him, and that little has hardly been candid or forthcoming.[1] One *does* read here about Jekyll's sense of his divided existence, about his use of chemicals to effect the "tranformation" into Hyde, and about the ascendancy of Hyde. An important shortcoming, however, of this "full statement of the case" is that it is presented from Henry Jekyll's point of view.[2] As readers move through it, they are likely to grow increasingly aware that they still lack Edward Hyde's account, *his* full statement of the case, even though Henry Jekyll, who after all shares "some of the phenomena of consciousness" with Hyde (95), will occasionally report some-

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1 Stevenson has Jekyll characteristically adopt the rhetoric of concealment and evasion in his earlier exchanges with his friends. Notice the emphasis on goodness and amity, the formality of the constructions, the exaggerated expressions of politeness and deference, and the repetitive circularity of these two examples of Jekyll's conversation:

> My good Utterson, … this is very good of you, this is downright good of you, and I cannot find words to thank you in. I believe you fully; I would trust you before any man alive, ay, before myself, if I could make the choice; but indeed it isn't what you fancy; it is not so bad as that; and just to put your good heart at rest, I will tell you one thing: the moment I choose, I can be rid of Mr. Hyde. I give you my hand upon that; and I thank you again and again; and I will just add one little word, Utterson, that I'm sure you'll take in good part: this is a private matter, and I beg of you to let it sleep. [44]

> You are very good…. I should like to [take a quick turn with you] very much; but no, no, no, it is quite impossible; I dare not. But indeed, Utterson, I am very glad to see you; this is really a great pleasure. I would ask you and Mr. Enfield up, but the place is really not fit. [60–61]

2 In keeping with the punning manner of this book, Jekyll's statement of the "case" is truly an argument made from a specific point of view, as well as an exposition of a matter requiring an investigation by the police, and even the record of a medical case history. The novel uses the word "case" variously throughout, as in the chapter title, "The Carew Murder Case," the book's full title (*Strange Case* …), and Dr. Lanyon's belief that with Jekyll he is "dealing with a case of cerebral disease" (77).

thing of what Hyde is feeling. Readers have, for example, been curious to know what, specifically, has motivated Hyde to commit the most heinous of his crimes, the murder of the conspicuously innocent and benevolent-looking "aged beautiful gentleman with white hair" (46), Sir Danvers Carew.[1] And Dr. Jekyll refrains from describing the "undignified" and "monstrous" pleasures that Hyde has pursued (86), a reticence that Hyde presumably would not share.

Despite Jekyll's statement, other mysteries remain as well, particularly about his last moments. How can it be *Hyde's* voice that seems, so uncharacteristically, to plead with Utterson before the lawyer breaks down the door: "Utterson, … for God's sake, have mercy!" (69)? How does Jekyll's manuscript survive when the doctor so fears that "Hyde will tear it in pieces" (97) if he becomes aware of it?

Finally, who commits suicide, Jekyll or Hyde? […]

Certainly much is clarified by Jekyll's statement, but questions remain. The book seems to back away from its detective fiction premise that a detective's masterly exposition of the true story of the crime, or a series of narratives from different perspectives fitting together like a jigsaw puzzle, or the culprit's "confession" at the end, will enable the reader to feel mastery over the book's mysteries and permit the reader to work back to some absolute truth, presence, or sense of closure. The book's emphasis throughout on the problematics of both textuality and identity ought to give pause to the reader.

Consider first the book's attitude toward texts. *Jekyll and Hyde* centers on writings of various sorts, beyond the narratives that constitute its last chapters. The novel records a large number of letters, for example—both Lanyon's narrative chapter and Jekyll's full statement are letters—letters enclosed within letters. But there are many other letters back and forth throughout the book—ranging from dinner invitations, through polite requests to do one thing or another, to impassioned cries for help.[2] The detective plot is even generated from a written document, a will, "the startling clauses" (38) of which initially persuade Utterson that he must play "Mr. Seek" to Mr. Hyde. The story begins, in other words, with an odd, unfathomable document and never retreats from its focus on reading and interpreting.

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1 This question has prompted Jerome Charyn, in his afterward to *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (New York: Bantam Books, 1981) to indulge in two pages of speculation. One explanation he offers is this: "Isn't it possible that the kind old man is attempting to 'proposition' Hyde, and that Hyde trampled him out of rage?" As Charyn acknowledges, "We'll never know" (113).

2 One of the more curious of these letters is the one addressed to Utterson that Sir Danvers Carew is said to be out to mail when he is murdered. Its purpose and contents remain a mystery, even at the book's close.

Utterson is prompted to become a reader not only of wills and written texts but also of faces: "And still the figure had no face by which he might know it.... There sprang up and grew apace in the lawyer's mind a singularly strong, almost an inordinate, curiosity to behold the features of the real Mr. Hyde" (38–39). When he encounters Hyde, Utterson's question is, "Will you let me see your face?" (39), and he concludes that he has "read Satan's signature" there (40). Later, when he visits Dr. Lanyon, he finds the latter's "death-warrant written legibly upon his face" (57). Dr. Jekyll, too, peruses his two faces in the cheval glass: "Even as good shone upon the countenance of [Jekyll], evil was written broadly and plainly on the face of [Hyde]" (84). Indeed, the very first sentences in the book force the reader to try to read Utterson's face: "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 ... in these silent symbols of the after-dinner face" (29). [...]

Reading goes on everywhere in the book, then, as a fundamental activity of life. Yet despite the search for voice, identity, explanation, and presence in these various kinds of inscription, the book insists on a kind of plasticity, absence, deferral, *différance*.[1] [...]

The clearest indication of the refusal of words to be unambiguous, however, and the one most relevant to the genre of detective fiction, comes in the one link between Jekyll and Hyde in their different personalities, their handwriting. Jekyll invents a handwriting for his double "by sloping my own hand backwards" (87), so that Hyde can have his own checking account. The hands, in other words, both are and are not distinctly different. Utterson's clerk, Guest, quickly notices the resemblance between the two: "The two hands are in many points identical; only differently sloped" (55).[2] Stevenson stresses, however, that Jekyll and Hyde can write in either hand (93). Thus Hyde can write a note in Jekyll's hand to Lanyon, begging his assistance in obtaining more of the transforming chemical, or sign a check with Jekyll's signature, or annotate "a copy of a pious work, for which Jekyll had several times expressed a great esteem, ... in his [Jekyll's] own hand, with startling blasphemies" (71). In this last instance, Hyde clearly becomes a mocking, demonic voice within Jekyll. Utterson frequently worries about handwriting in the text in order to draw a dis-

1 See Jacques Derrida, "Différance," *Margins of Philosophy*, tr. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 1–27.

2 It is interesting that this identification is made by one who himself belongs and yet does not belong, whose name, Guest, itself suggests a primal kind of alienation and "différance."

tinction between Jekyll and Hyde, but it turns out to be a distinction without a difference:

> "This is unquestionably the doctor's hand, do you know?" resumed the lawyer.
>
> "I thought it looked like it," said the servant [Poole]….
>
> "But what matters hand of write? … I've seen him [i.e., Hyde]." [66]

Writing lacks the univocality and authority that an Utterson would wish. In an age before fingerprints, handwriting ought to be distinctive, unique, proof of identity, but in this book it isn't. Enfield's great concern, too, about the validity of Jekyll's signature on the check offered by Hyde is misplaced. It is counterfeit only in the sense that all signatures are "counterfeit," as Derrida has argued. That is, they presuppose the absence of the signer, the irrecoverable nature of his or her intentions, and a resistance to any constraints of meaning that the context may seem to impose.[1] The fact that the name of the signatory on the check is "very well known and often printed" (32) ought to give Enfield pause rather than reassure him, in a book that explores the equivocal nature of writing.

A revealing sense of the irrepressibly multivocal quality of texts emerges from the letter that Hyde prepares for the chemist in Jekyll's handwriting:

> "Dr. Jekyll presents his compliments to Messrs. Maw. He assures them that their last sample is impure and quite useless for his present purpose. In the year 18—, Dr. J. purchased a somewhat large quantity from Messrs. M. He now begs them to search with most sedulous care, and should any of the same quality be left, to forward it to him at once. Expense is no consideration. The importance of this to Dr. J. can hardly be exaggerated." So far the letter had run composedly enough; but here with a sudden splutter of the pen, the writer's emotion had broken loose. "For God's sake," he added, "find me some of the old." [66]

The "sudden splutter of the pen," where the writer's emotion erupts from the civilized veneer of Jekyll's style, is reminiscent of "Exterminate all the brutes!"—the terrible postscript of Kurtz's report to the Society for the Suppression of Savage Customs in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, an addendum that effectively undermines all the high-minded rhetoric that has preceded it. Writing, speech, language have this deconstructive power in *Jekyll and Hyde* as well. Jekyll's piety prompts Hyde's blas-

1 See Jacques Derrida, "Signature Event Context," *Margins*, 307–30.

phemous commentary in the margin; handwriting slanted one way implies the possibility of the same words in the same hand slanted another way. Signatures, wills, letters, texts—or, for that matter, faces, houses, footsteps, and voices—ask to be read and invite interpretation, but they may equivocate. Like Jekyll's white salt, they tend to be mixed in nature and impure. Similarly, the detective fiction form of *Jekyll and Hyde*, with its concluding statements coming in nested series of envelopes, offering "two narratives in which this mystery was now to be explained" (73), promises more than it can deliver. […]

Stevenson's novel, then, explodes the genre of detective fiction just at that point when, with Doyle, it is about to develop its essential form. The rationalist, bourgeois assumptions of the genre are challenged by the Romantic gothic attitudes that are inscribed in its origins. The psychological focus and epistemological skepticism of the gothic deconstructs the detective genre as Stevenson explores it. For one thing, personality is so riddled and divided that the detective himself is prey to his own repressions and contradictions. He is implicated in the "crimes" and mysteries he is investigating, though he has no awareness of this. As a result he becomes an object of some sport to the third-person narrator—a "Mr Utterson," who can be treated formally, distantly, ironically. Because there is no disinterested, objective, rational ground on which the detective might stand, there is no possibility of a response to Dr. Jekyll's "confession"; there is no return to the presumed recipient of that statement, Utterson, for an evaluation of it. He vanishes from the end of the book in an unexpected and inexplicable way, just as he presumably attempts to grasp the significance of his investigations.

[…] Sherlock Holmes, the rationalist detective, and all he stands for, are put under a kind of Derridean erasure at the very moment of origin by Stevenson's story; the figure of the detective is present, yet also strangely cancelled through. If the criminal is fragmented and the detective implicated in his crimes, and if reason itself, the essential tool of the detective, is tainted through its alliance with a particular class and distorted by the prism of individual psychology through which it must pass in order to be applied, then the gothic epistemology of Stevenson's book threatens the very method of detection and puts in question the effectiveness of the new, idealized type of ratiocinative detective who will debut in 1887, one year after *Jekyll and Hyde*.[1]

(1988)

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1 I wish to thank Michael Hanchor, Elizabeth Hirsch, Marty Roth, and William Veeder for their helpful criticism of the drafts of this essay.