

SCHOLARLY ARTICLE

Clues in the Mirror: The Detective Structure of *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*

Priyam Biswas

Abstract

Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde is tinged with prominent detective elements. The supposed detective of the novel, Utterson navigates through the incidents of the crime, the investigation, and the unravelling of the truth. In doing so he embodies some traits of the detective but ultimately fails to be an ideal one. This article argues that the failure of Utterson as a detective is the result of the conflicting interests of Utterson the detective and Utterson the lawyer. The article also questions the notion of whether the author intended to write a detective story in the first place.

Keywords: detective element, investigation, suspense, conflicting interests

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Priyam Biswas

Any detective story, either short or long, follows a triadic pattern: the commencement of a crime, the investigation of the crime, and ultimately the revelation of the truth. While different authors may enrich the plot by adding various other elements, these three remain the fundamental backbone of a detective story. When a crime is committed, the moral and judicial balance of society is disturbed, and the only way to restore order is to rectify or remove the cause of the disruption: the criminal. The detective in the story is tasked with uncovering the hidden truths that remain obscured from public view and identifying the perpetrator of the crime. This role requires a diligent pursuit of evidence and a keen analytical mind to reveal the underlying realities that others may overlook. By piecing together clues and scrutinizing details, the detective aims to bring to light the complexities of the case, ultimately capturing the criminal and restoring a sense of justice. He can be an extraordinary being possessing astonishing deductive and observational faculty or a meticulous individual hard-bent on revealing the truth or bringing the criminal to justice. In both types, the one common aspect is the effort to discover the truth, which can be, more often than not, multi-faceted. In some cases it could be plain and simple but in others, complex or even supernatural that goes beyond general observations in the world.

In Stevenson's *Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, the structure of a detective novel is present but heavily mediated through gothic elements and narrative ambiguity. The story follows Dr. Henry Jekyll, a respected scientist who creates a potion that allows him to transform into Mr. Edward Hyde, his dark, unlawful, and violent alter ego. Hyde commits terrible crimes, including the molestation of a young girl and the murder of Carew. While Jekyll

struggles to control his transformations, Hyde takes sadistic pleasure in his heinous activities and tries to permanently subdue Jekyll to take control of the body they both possess. The mystery unfolds through the perspective of Mr. Utterson, a lawyer investigating Hyde's connection to Jekyll. As the truth is revealed, Jekyll realizes he can no longer suppress his darker side and ultimately takes his own life to prevent Hyde from causing further harm. The novella delves into themes of morality, repression of desires, and the consequences of scientific ambition resulting in catastrophic disaster when left unchecked.

At first glance, the narrative progression aligns with detective fiction: a mystery is presented, pursued, and eventually resolved. Yet the 'investigation' itself is unconventional. Character traits are blurred and overlapping, particularly between Jekyll and Hyde. The same body houses both victim and perpetrator, complicating notions of justice and responsibility. Similarly, Utterson functions dually as an investigator and as Jekyll's close confidant, a conflict that ultimately compromises his role as a detective.

The discourse of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde as a detective novella should begin by stating an undeniable fact that the novella is not primarily a detective story although it possesses many elements of one. While the novella's plot follows a mystery established at the start and concludes with the resolution of the same in the end, the 'investigation' is at the least, unconventional and at times something completely different. The complexity of the situation is further increased by the absence of distinct character traits within the novella. The character traits are intricately woven together, with qualities overlapping and intertwining with one another. For instance, Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde represent a duality within a single individual; Jekyll embodies both the criminal and the victim, problematizing the notion of the oppressor and the oppressed. Similarly, Mr. Utterson serves a dual role as both the detective figure, seeking to unravel the mysteries surrounding Hyde, but then also as a close associate of Jekyll. His interest in investigating Hyde and his concern for Jekyll as a friend contradict one another.

The story perfectly follows the chronology of the conditions: crime, pursuit, identification, and/or punishment. In the very first chapter, the gothic uncanniness is established when the crime is revealed by Richard Enfield; and one more crime is committed again in the fourth chapter. The molestation of the girl and the murder of Sir Denver Carew establishes both the gothic aspects of the novella and Hyde's embodiment of chaos. According to Enfield, "It wasn't like a man; it was like some damned Juggernaut" (Stevenson 6). The description of Hyde as not being 'a man' rather 'some damned Juggernaut' excludes Hyde from the human society, furthermore, the trampling of a young girl and the killing of Mr. Carew establishes Mr. Hyde as someone who is a threat to the social equilibrium.

However, the main motive of a detective is to solve the crime, for which he needs to find evidence or clues. In his pursuit, the detective may work alone like Poe's Dupin or alongside the police like Doyle's Holmes. Regardless, their objectives are the same: finding the evidence that can solve the puzzle/mystery. By the time Stevenson penned his novella, the judicial system had undergone a significant transformation. This shift marked a departure from reliance on eyewitness testimony towards a more empirical approach, emphasizing the collection of tangible evidence and factual data to resolve criminal cases.

As mentioned before, detective fiction presents two primary approaches to solving mysteries: methodical deduction and sudden revelation. The first mode of detection relies on systematic analysis—collecting clues, interpreting evidence, and applying logical reasoning to uncover the truth. Conversely, the second mode of detection privileges intuition over the methodical process. Some detectives, particularly in more dramatic narratives, experience sudden, revelatory insights that allow them to solve the case effortlessly- the 'eureka moment. A key requirement for a detective is evidence-based deduction. Victorian jurisprudence increasingly emphasized empirical investigation over testimony. Yet Utterson, despite aspiring to be a seeker of truth, frequently jumps to conclusions without sufficient reasoning. For

example, when no letter is seen delivered, he hastily assumes it entered through the laboratory. When Hyde's handwriting matches Jekyll's, he concludes forgery without considering alternative explanations.

Utterson, eager to be 'Mr. Seek' however, is too quick to deduce before establishing proper reasoning for his claim. Which is, as Holmes says "It is a capital mistake to theorize before one has data. Insensibly one begins to twist facts to suit theories, instead of theories to suit facts. But the note itself. What do you deduce from it?" (Doyle 3). Utterson's method is neither deductive nor intuitive. Rather than entertain supernatural possibilities or probe deeply into anomalies, he clings to rational explanations.

As an austere Victorian gentleman, Utterson employs neither and tries, to the best of his abilities, to find a rational explanation for all incidents. He never even entertains any other possibilities, let alone supernatural ones. When presented with a mystery, Utterson has an explanation prepared, without any investigation whatsoever. Initially, he believes that Hyde is blackmailing Jekyll. In the case of Hyde's letter, when Poole says that no letter was delivered at the front door, Utterson is quick to "deduce" that "Plainly the letter had come by the laboratory door" (Stevenson 49). When the handwriting of the letter matches with the handwriting of a note of Jekyll, Utterson again jumps to the conclusion Henry Jekyll has forged for a murderer. Rather than examining all the clues and pieces of evidence and reaching a conclusion/explanation, he already has an explanation ready and makes the clues fit his explanation. As he and Poole are about to break down the door to Jekyll's locked apartment, Poole notices a strange figure who appears to be wearing a "mask upon his face... cry out like a rat and run from" (Stevenson 75) him when discovered. This is perhaps the best example of Utterson's ability to rationalize and deny at the same time that he is "seeking" answers. Utterson says:

"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." (Stevenson 75-76).

The last line is particularly interesting as it perfectly depicts Utterson's disposition in regard to finding the truth. The explanation must be "plain and natural", one which "hangs well together". There are more things in heaven and earth, but he refuses to look beyond his rational understanding of any situation.

However, before we blatantly disregard Utterson's credibility as a detective, we must also consider the perspective through which he was observing the situation and; most importantly, his goals. The very first thing we need to understand before criticizing Utterson harshly is that his objective is completely different from that of a detective. Utterson is a typical austere and dreary gentleman of his time. Although he claims to find the truth about Hyde his actions seem to follow the conventional Victorian dictum: staying out of other people's affairs. When Jekyll asks Utterson to stop inquiring about Hyde Utterson reluctantly agrees, though he doesn't feel comfortable with the request. He promises to cease his investigations into Hyde's affairs out of respect for his friend, Jekyll. Although he is intrigued by the whole ordeal of Hyde (as he is already prejudiced against Hyde) and wants to know more, his *primary* concern is the well-being of his friend Jekyll. He, being a lawyer by profession, is inclined to protect his client's best interests despite what the truth may be. Thus the two fields of work stand in contrast. As the novella says,

"...he had an approved tolerance for others; sometimes wondering, almost with envy, at the high pressure of spirits involved in their misdeeds; and in any extremity inclined to help rather than to reprove." (Stevenson 2).

This description befits a lawyer more than a detective. He puts protecting Jekyll before punishing Hyde. His friendship with Jekyll turns the dialogue between the two into a conversation that should be an interrogation. He is not reluctant to suppress information to protect his friends. He hopes that Hyde may not be brought to trial for Carew's death as Jekyll's name may come up. He also advises Poole not to reveal Jekyll's full statement so that at least his (Jekyll's) reputation may be protected. He is not a good detective, because Stevenson did not want him to be a detective, but a friend concerned for the wellbeing of his friend. The mystery regarding Jekyll and Hyde is ultimately cleared by Dr Lanyon's and Dr. Jekyll's posthumous letters. It is not an investigator's triumph but a criminal's surrender. The instigator of the crimes, himself deals the punishment by taking his own life. Jekyll created Hyde, his alter-ego, and in a sense his son as he created Hyde, just as Frankenstein created his monster. Sharing the same body meant that Jekyll also shared the blame for the crimes committed by Hyde. Killing Hyde is the punishment that relieves Jekyll from those crimes committed. Thus the novella questions the notion of morality, ethics, and dual identity more poignantly than establishing Utterson as a truth-seeker.

Critics such as Patrick Brantlinger and Elaine Showalter have noted how Stevenson's novella straddles genres, incorporating elements of both detective fiction and gothic horror. Brantlinger identifies Jekyll and Hyde as a "degenerate case" of detective fiction, where the crime is rooted in identity itself, while Showalter emphasizes the repressive structures of Victorian society as central to the story's psychological tension. Peter Thoms, meanwhile, explores the detective structure within the narrative as a critique of epistemological certainty.

These readings affirm that Stevenson's work deliberately unsettles generic boundaries, using the detective mode not for resolution, but for deeper thematic exploration.

The novella's time of origin, the Victorian era, a period marked by strict social constraints, emphasized moral conduct and adherence to well-mannered behaviour. Society expected individuals to conform to specific norms, particularly in terms of sexual restraint. However, these rigid restrictions often led to a populace grappling with mental instability and unhealthy behaviours, as repressed desires manifested in unlawful actions. In striving to maintain social stability, society tended to isolate or eliminate those perceived as threats to this equilibrium. This dynamic reveals a significant tension within Victorian society, where the pressure to conform frequently resulted in psychological distress and social exclusion for those who deviated from accepted norms. In an exemplary manner through his experiments, Jekyll rejects these restrictions and goes beyond the scope of 'normal science', and creates, what Kuhn terms a 'model drift', a small subversion or exception from the accepted or practised science. That's the reason for Dr Lanyon's refusal to help Jekyll further his research, as it was not something that could be understood by conventional methods, nor could be achieved by practical scientific applications. Thus it is an anomaly in a normal pattern that is honestly next to impossible to notice by Utterson, the lawyer, or anyone else. Rather than a detective story, "*The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*" is a gothic murder mystery novella with some elements of detective fiction. It deals with themes such as the conflict order and chaos embodied by Jekyll and Hyde, and the disruption created by it. Ultimately, the letters of Lanyon and Jekyll himself confirm the supernatural dual-identities of Jekyll and Hyde, solving the puzzle. The disruption caused by the murderer is solved by the murderer himself when Jekyll commits suicide.

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About the Author

Priyam Biswas passed B.A. with Honours in English from City College, Kolkata. Now he is pursuing M.A. in English from Maulana Azad College, Kolkata.