



**HÁSKÓLI ÍSLANDS**

Hugvísindasvið

**“If he be Mr Hyde...I shall be Mr Seek”:**

**Robert Louis Stevenson’s *Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*  
and its place within crime fiction**

**Ritgerð til B.A.-prófs**

**Fríða Kristinsdóttir**

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**Enskuskor**

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## **Abstract**

This paper examines Robert Louis Stevenson's novella the *Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* as it pertains to the crime fiction genre. It strives to find the place of the novella within the genre, first by comparing *Jekyll and Hyde* with the classic detective story, which emerged around the same time as Stevenson's story and is traditionally seen as the precursor of modern crime fiction. While prominent features of the novella suggest that it belongs to the detective story genre, it also deviates from the genre in many significant ways, leaving its place in the lineage of the crime fiction genre uncertain. Re-examination of the crime fiction genre and previously overlooked predecessors clarifies the novella's place in this history. The duality of the character Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde is examined in the context of the then-emerging field of psychoanalysis, as well as its connection to the historical Whitechapel murders of 1888. Finally, this paper shows how *Jekyll and Hyde* has helped shape our very notion of the serial killer as a character and how it continues to inspire numerous characters in crime fiction and popular culture to this day.

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## I. Introduction

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. (Nabokov 179)

These are the instructions of Vladimir Nabokov, in a lecture he delivered to his students at Cornell University, where he taught from 1948-1959. The subject of the lecture is Stevenson's immensely famous story of Dr. Jekyll and his monstrous alter ego, Mr. Hyde. The story, most famous for its gothic features and dramatic illustration of the duality of man, has inspired numerous books, films, and television programmes. It has been explored in a multitude of ways and has been the subject of attention and criticism in various fields other than literature, including psychology and criminal law. It has influenced popular culture to such a degree that the original work has almost faded into distant memory. Nabokov wanted his students to appreciate Stevenson's novella as a great piece of literature, positing instead that comparing it to a detective or a mystery story would be degrading to the work (180). However, the evidence linking *Jekyll and Hyde* to crime fiction is strong and should not be dismissed without further analysis. Furthermore, numerous critical studies of the crime fiction genre that have been published since Nabokov's time at Cornell show that works of crime fiction originate primarily in the literary genres of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, including the gothic. While *Jekyll and Hyde* is indeed an example of Victorian gothic literature, with re-examination of the history of the crime fiction genre, it can also be considered a precursor to modern crime fiction. It has elements of mystery, crime and detection that clearly connect it to crime fiction, but the inherent gothic characteristics coupled with insight into the psyche of the criminal are elements that have made a truly lasting impression on the crime fiction genre.

In this paper, I begin by examining the commonly defined chronology of crime fiction and comparing *Jekyll and Hyde* with the detective story, which is traditionally considered to

be the main precursor of modern crime fiction. Then I examine an alternative approach to the history of crime fiction, and through this new perspective I show how gothic, sensational and supernatural elements mark the beginning of the crime fiction genre. Finally, I explain how Stevenson's exploration of the gothic theme of duality in *Jekyll and Hyde* influenced psychoanalysis, created the notion of the serial killer and inspired numerous criminal characters in contemporary fiction and film.

## **II. First came the detective: traditional history of the crime fiction genre**

Crime fiction was long considered lowbrow literature, and critics deemed it a “guilty pleasure” not worthy of close analysis (Priestman 1). In recent years, academic work on the genre has increased progressively, but there is still a lack of uniform terminology, and terms like detective, mystery, crime story, etc., seem to overlap between critics. As a result, a discussion and analysis of the crime fiction genre is not without complications. This paper focuses primarily on the early days of the crime fiction genre, starting with the so-called “classic detective story” and tracing its evolution into the contemporary crime novel, a period covering the late 19th century and the first half of the 20th century. While crime fiction certainly continued beyond this period, novels published in the second half of the 20th century are more diverse. The genre is now considered to have a number of sub-genres, such as police fiction, spy fiction, the thriller, and others that are not discussed in detail in this paper. Before taking a closer look at the elements in *Jekyll and Hyde* that indicate that it belongs in the canon of crime fiction, it is useful to take a brief look at the history of the genre and its most traditional presentation.

The commonly understood history of crime fiction acknowledges its beginnings with the emergence in the mid-19th century of the detective story, of which Edgar Allan Poe's first story featuring the fictional detective C Auguste Dupin (1842) is considered the very first

example. In England, Wilkie Collins published what is usually recognised as the first great detective novel, *The Moonstone* (1868). The greatest leap came almost 20 years later, however, with the famous detective Sherlock Holmes, created by Arthur Conan Doyle (Priestman 2). Holmes was featured in four novels and 56 short stories and is considered the prototype for the detective figure. Stephen Knight describes him as “highly intelligent, essentially moral, somewhat elitist, all-knowing, disciplinary in knowledge and skills, energetic, eccentric, yet also in touch with the ordinary people who populate the stories” (*Crime Fiction since 1800*, 55). Detective stories gained popularity in the beginning of the 20th century and had their heyday in the period between the two world wars, called the “golden age” of classic detective fiction. The “golden age “ was dominated by authors such as Agatha Christie, and the detective stories of the period were built around clues and thus called either “clue puzzles” or “whodunits”. Detection was considered “an intellectual problem and as such should be separate from sentiment, emotion or desire” (Ascari 2). Furthermore, the golden age stories adhered to a certain formula: the reader, along with the fictional detective, was expected to pick up on the clues as the story progressed and then systematically piece them together until they revealed the perpetrator of the committed crime (Knight, “Golden Age” 77 and 79).

Detective stories of the “golden age” developed in different ways in England and the United States. English stories were less violent, they portrayed late Victorian society, and the detective, whether male or female, typically shared many characteristics with Sherlock Holmes (Porter 97). During the same period in the United States, a more hardboiled version of the detective story emerged, often called private eye fiction. In American stories, the detective figure, unlike his English counterpart, represented the common man, as is characteristic of much American fiction. It was his “toughness” and “verbal combativeness” that allowed the American private eye to solve his crimes (Horsley 73). This unlikely

detective was an answer to the rise of crime as a result of urbanisation, and he accepted tasks that the police force were unable to handle “whether out of incompetence, cynicism or corruption” (Porter 97).

The classic detective story had peaked as a genre by the end of World War II, and stories that deviated from the strict form began to gain ground. With the recognition of these different approaches in crime writing came the need to analyse and define the difference between the classic detective story and the work that was beginning to dominate the crime fiction genre. Some of the critical work on this particular change within the crime fiction genre is still highly acclaimed and is valuable in shedding light on just how *Jekyll and Hyde* can be classified as a preliminary work of crime fiction. One groundbreaking critical work on crime fiction is Julian Symons' *Bloody Murder*, first published in 1972. Symons argues that towards the end of the “golden age” period, crime writers were torn between producing a mystery in the way the detective story called for and wanting to write novels “about people affected by crime” (194). As a result, the detective story evolved into the crime novel, and Symons demonstrates how the two differ in plot, method, characters, setting, social attitude, and the importance of featuring a detective, clues and a mystery (191-193). Symons concluded that, while the detective story relies heavily on the detective, the clues, and the investigation progress, the crime novel does not need these mechanisms but instead builds its narrative on the exploration of the characters and their motives and social context. Another critic, Tsvetan Todorov, famous for his essays and books on literary theory, includes a chapter on typology of detective fiction in his book *The Poetics of Prose* (1977). There he describes how detective fiction characteristically contains two stories, one of the crime and the other of the investigation. According to Todorov, the difference between the “whodunit” and modern crime fiction can be found by looking at when these two stories occur in the book. In modern crime fiction, the crime and the investigation unfold for the reader

concurrently, whereas in the classic detective story the crime always precedes the investigation.

According to the timeline of the traditional history of the crime fiction genre, *Jekyll and Hyde* appears in 1886, marking the beginning of the classic detective story genre. Coincidentally, the most famous detective in literature, Sherlock Holmes, appears only one year later. This simple coincidence seems to suggest that if *Jekyll and Hyde* classifies as a work of crime fiction, it should clearly belong to the detective story genre. While this is true to an extent, it can be shown that *Jekyll and Hyde* also deviates in many significant ways that set it apart from the genre begotten by Holmes.

### **III. *Jekyll and Hyde* and the classic detective story**

Robert Louis Stevenson (1850-94) was a prolific writer who experimented with many forms of literature, such as “boys’ adventures, pirate romances, horror stories, children’s poetry,” travel narratives, and even a few stage plays (Luckhurst vii-viii). He quickly gained status as a literary star, but his critics often had a difficult time putting a label on his work. Some of it was considered quite sophisticated, while other works were considered commercial and therefore lowbrow literature (Luckhurst ix). A possible explanation of Stevenson’s inclination to write popular literature is that he believed “he would have no readers without entertaining them” (Menikoff xxiii). He certainly managed to hold his readers’ attention with *Jekyll and Hyde*, a thrilling horror story featuring the combination of a gothic setting and the striking character of a scientist experimenting in his laboratory with chemicals that transform him into a diabolical monster. These are the elements of the story that come instantly to mind when people think of *Jekyll and Hyde*. Yet there are other features of the novella that have been overlooked and often ignored in adaptations for stage or film, namely the mystery, the investigation of the mystery, and the suspense that builds

and is released with the revelation that Jekyll and Hyde are in fact the same person (Luckhurst xxiii)

First, the title and names of the chapters of Stevenson's novella suggest that it is a detective or police story. The mysterious relationship between Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde is referred to as a 'Strange Case'. The crime that draws the attention of the police is described in the chapter bearing the name 'The Carew Murder Case', and the final chapter, 'Henry Jekyll's Full Statement of the Case', presents the criminal's confession and explanation of his actions. The content of *Jekyll and Hyde* fulfils the promise made in the title: it features a mystery, a crime, and detective work, all of which are elements of detective stories. Gordon Hirsch dedicates a great part of his critical essay to analysing *Jekyll and Hyde* as a work of detective fiction, and points out the clear connection:

Practically each encounter with Jekyll and 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. (230)

Not every mysterious story can be considered a detective story, though, and Hirsch supports his argument further by citing three key elements of the detective genre as described by the scholar John G. Cawelti. First, "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) the concealed facts are made known at the end" (Hirsch 229). The main mystery in the story is the question: what exactly is Hyde's relation to the respectable Dr. Jekyll? The reader learns early on that Jekyll has stipulated in his will that everything be left to Hyde in case of his "disappearance or unexplained absence for any period exceeding three calendar months" (11). This is very peculiar and seems to indicate that Hyde has some hold over Jekyll, since there is no familiar relationship between the two. At first, the most obvious

explanation seems to be that Jekyll must have been blackmailed by Hyde (8), and as Hirsch points out, blackmail was commonly used as an explanation for relationships of this kind in classic detective fiction (229). The character Enfield, Utterson's friend, suggests this as an explanation but recognises almost immediately that this is an inadequate answer (8). The case is clearly not as cut-and-dried as it first appears, and the sense of mystery escalates with further wrinkles in the plot. As Hirsch keenly points out: Why did Hyde attack Sir Danvers Carew unprovoked? "How has Hyde managed to disappear so completely?...What has Hastie Lanyon seen that will bring on his death?" (Hirsch 229). These are only a few of many mysteries that begin to pile up as the story unfolds. Enfield's foreshadowing words suggest quite clearly that the case will not be as simple as Utterson hopes and that he might not like what he will discover.

You start a question, and it's like starting a stone. You sit quietly on the top of a hill and away the stone goes, starting others; and presently some bland old bird (the last one you would have thought of) is knocked on the head in his own back garden and the family have to change their name. (8-9)

There is certainly no shortage of mystery in *Jekyll and Hyde*, and the sense of the enigmatic is an important feature in the suspenseful nature of the narrative.

In order to unravel the mystery, Stevenson supplies the story with a detective. This brings us to the second element Cawelti considers essential to the detective story formula: the inquiry into the mystery and the inquirer-protagonist. Gabriel John Utterson, a close friend of Dr. Jekyll, is the featured detective in *Jekyll and Hyde*. Utterson becomes involved in the case in his attempt to help a friend, who he believes is connected in some unfortunate way to Mr. Hyde. He is strictly an amateur, although his profession as a lawyer may play a part in his investigative approach. For the most part, the narrative is told from Utterson's perspective and is therefore constructed around his own inquiry into the mystery.

In his investigation, Utterson uses various methods, many of which resemble established methods in modern police work. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, however, these practices might not have been quite as standardised. The Metropolitan Police was founded in the UK in 1828, and the Detective Police force was established in London in 1842 (Priestman xi), less than 50 years before the publication of the novella. Utterson's methods consist of questioning people like Enfield (8) and Dr. Lanyon (12), who might possess useful information about Hyde. He cross-examines the character Poole after he has claimed to have indirectly witnessed his master Jekyll's murder (39). Utterson also visits Hyde's neighbourhood each day in the hope of finding him, in the same way a modern detective would continually revisit the last known location of a key witness or suspect in order to make contact (13-14). Stevenson even includes a handwriting expert who, conveniently enough, is an employee of Utterson. In the Carew murder case, he reveals a letter ostensibly signed by Edward Hyde to be in fact written by Dr. Jekyll (27). Stevenson employs a thorough process of detection in his story and even employs methods used by law enforcement officials, as is common in detective stories.

*Jekyll and Hyde* clearly contains two of the three key elements Cawelti claims make the formula for a detective story. It features a mystery and details the inquiry into the mystery, and it even features a detective as the protagonist. The missing pieces, though, are not altogether revealed at the end of the story, as Cawelti's third element prescribes. The key mystery, which is the nature of Jekyll and Hyde's relationship, is explained in the last chapter in Jekyll's confession; however, Jekyll's so-called "Full Statement" lacks information on a number of other smaller mysteries embedded in the story. There is nothing to reveal the nature of his "concealed ... pleasures" (52), or to explain why Hyde attacks and kills Mr. Carew, and the reader never learns the content of the letter addressed to Utterson, found on Carew's dead body (21-22). With all these loose ends, it is clear that *Jekyll and Hyde* fails to

meet Cawelti's third criterion in full. Yet if it has failed, what are the possible reasons for that failure? One possible explanation lies in the detective's inability to solve the mystery.

As a detective, Utterson is in many ways like the intellectual and disciplinary Sherlock Holmes. As a rule, detectives in "golden age" stories bring "a satisfying sense of completion and closure" (Horsley 12), but this is not true in Utterson's case. He begins his self-assigned detective work with great confidence, though. " 'If he be Mr Hyde', he had thought, 'I shall be Mr Seek' " (14). And, like Sherlock Holmes, he is a man of reason who therefore believes that everything can be explained using logic: "he thought the mystery would lighten and perhaps roll altogether away, as was the habit of mysterious things when well examined" (13). But Utterson cannot be described as all-knowing, a word commonly used to describe Holmes; his compassion prevents him from identifying immoral behaviour in other people, and he is often "the last reputable acquaintance and the last good influence in the lives of down-going men" (5). This is certainly a fitting description of the development of his friendship with Dr. Jekyll. When he finds out that Jekyll has signed a letter as Edward Hyde, a clear indication Jekyll is not innocent, he decides to protect his friend, locks this evidence in his safe, and instructs his employee, Mr. Guest, to keep it a secret (27). Later he receives another letter that he knows could explain Jekyll's part in Lanyon's untimely death, but he hesitates to open it, thinking: "I have buried one friend today...what if this should cost me another?" (30). Utterson's initial enthusiasm and integrity in solving the mystery diminishes as he sees the unfortunate direction it is taking. Furthermore, he is set up for failure, as he is trying to solve what turns out to be a supernatural mystery using common sense and reason. It can be argued that Utterson, rather than being Stevenson's tool to unravel the story's mystery and bring it to a close, signifies the shortcomings of real human beings in solving life's mysteries.

Even though Utterson serves as a detective figure in *Jekyll and Hyde*, it is obvious that Stevenson did not intend the story to be a tribute to his detective skills. Hirsch argues that “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” (234). Stevenson has taken part of the detective story and deployed some of its elements in his novella, but ultimately he has not written a detective story. In fact, he had reservations about the detective or crime genre, which he aired in the epilogue to *The Wrecker*, a story he wrote in collaboration with his stepson, Lloyd Osbourne:

We had long been at once attracted and repelled by that very modern form of the police novel or mystery story, which consists in beginning your yarn anywhere but at the beginning, and finishing it anywhere but at the end; attracted by its peculiar interest when done, and the peculiar difficulties that attend its execution; repelled by that appearance of insincerity and shallowness of tone, which seems its inevitable drawback. For the mind of the reader, always bent to pick up clues, receives no impression of reality or life, rather of an airless, elaborate mechanism; and the book remains enthralling, but insignificant, like a game of chess, not a work of human art. (425-426)

It is clear that neither the story nor its author is willing to be confined to the strict framework of the classic detective story. Stevenson’s interest in the double plot of the genre is reflected in *Jekyll and Hyde*, but at the same time he wants the story to be sincere. He has developed an authentic character in Utterson and puts his strength and flaws on display in the novella.

#### **IV. *Jekyll and Hyde* compared to contemporary crime fiction**

Further analysis of Stevenson's use of the double plot of the detective story and his emphasis on character reveals that the novella has much in common with the crime novels that emerged after the "golden age" of the classic detective story. Tsvetan Todorov discusses the double plot of the crime fiction genre in which the reader is presented with two stories, one of the crime and the other of the investigation, and demonstrates how the author's treatment of the plot is distinctly different in the classic detective story and in subsequent work in the genre. In the "whodunit", which Todorov calls the "purest" form of detective story, the crime has already taken place before the story starts, or it takes place in the very beginning, before the detective enters the scene (44). The narrative simply traces the investigation, or second story, as it unfolds. In this case, the detective is removed from the action and danger of the crime, which Todorov calls "the detective's immunity" (44). In crime stories that followed the "whodunit", the two stories are intertwined. Other crimes may take place while the detective is doing his job, and "everything is possible, and the detective risks his health, if not his life" (Todorov 47). According to this definition, *Jekyll and Hyde* has more in common with contemporary work of the crime fiction genre, as its two stories unfold simultaneously. On the first page of the novella, Utterson is introduced and his friend Enfield describes to him a scenario he had witnessed where Mr. Hyde runs over a little girl in the street (6-7). This incident is the only part of the crime element that has already taken place at the beginning of the story. The narrative, the story of the crime continues: Mr. Carew is murdered, Lanyon gets shocked 'to death', and by the end the prime suspect appears to be holding Dr. Jekyll captive in his own house. Simultaneously, the story of Utterson's investigation unfolds in the present along with the crimes themselves. Utterson is only a few steps behind the crimes, and in his pursuit he is certainly risking his health and life when he decides to try and save his friend Jekyll: "I am puzzled by this note which seems to prove him

to be still alive, I shall consider it my duty to break in that door” (38). Furthermore, he is distinctly aware of the danger: “Do you know Poole, he said, looking up, that you and I are about to place ourselves in a position of some peril?” (39). Stevenson’s use of the double plot in *Jekyll and Hyde* produces action and excitement, similar to that featured in the thrillers and suspense stories that did not enter the crime fiction genre until the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century.

Julian Symons’ dissection of the differences between classic detective fiction and modern crime fiction provides another, though very different, distinction between these two genres. When *Jekyll and Hyde* is viewed in light of Julian Symons’ approach, the novella proves once more to share characteristics with the more modern work. Symons uses the term “crime novel” for work appearing after the classic detective story period and presents eight features in order to distinguish between the two sub-genres of crime fiction. In only two out of the eight features, the presence of clues and a detective, does *Jekyll and Hyde* resemble the classic detective story. According to Symons, the crime novel normally does not feature clues or a detective, but if these are present in a crime novel they are usually not of much importance (192). Symons’ other six features concern the method of detecting, the plot, the importance of the puzzle, characters, setting, and finally, social attitude. All six features are consistently present in *Jekyll and Hyde* and, as will be shown, the story has much more in common with contemporary crime fiction, such as the crime novel.

The method of detecting the crime is straightforward in the crime novel according to Symons, as opposed to a more misleading method in detective stories; for example, in a detective story “the victim appears to have been shot but was in fact poisoned” (192). In *Jekyll and Hyde*, there is no question of the details of the crimes since there is a witness to all of them: Mr. Enfield tells Utterson about the incident where Mr. Hyde runs over the little girl (6-8), and when Mr. Hyde strikes again, a maidservant witnesses the brutal murder of Mr. Carew (20-21). Instead of concerning itself with the details of the crime and concealing them,

as in the detective story, *Jekyll and Hyde* focuses on the psychology of the characters and their motives. Where does Mr. Hyde come from, why does he commit these crimes, why does Dr. Jekyll put up with him? Through the medium of his detective character, Stevenson attempts to address these questions in ways that never arise in the classic detective story. Symons also refers to the plot when he explains that the detective story is constructed in retrograde, working backward from the crime, and what initiates the investigation is usually a deception such as “misleading remarks”, “fake prints” or a “locked room” (191). On the other hand, Symons describes the plot of the crime novel as being constructed forward from questions that arise regarding the behaviour of the characters (191), much like the initial question about the relationship between Jekyll and Hyde that drives Utterson’s investigation.

In general, characters are very important in the crime novel, and Symons mentions two more features that underline their importance. In the detective story, the detective is described in detail, and he and the mystery are the only things that remain in memory (193). In the crime novel, more characters than merely the detective receive attention, and their behaviour is more important than the mystery (Symons 193). Characters in the crime novel are also remembered for a long time after the story; this is especially true for the main character in *Jekyll and Hyde*, which has become so widely known that even people who have never read the story have some familiarity with the character. This intriguing character has established itself so profoundly that it has developed into a phrase in the English language with its own dictionary entry: “single person with two personalities, one good (Jekyll) and one bad (Hyde)” (*Oxford Advanced*).

The last two features on Symons’ list are setting and social attitude. He argues that the setting is “important to the tone and style” of the crime novel, and “the pressures involved in a particular way of life lead to this especial crime” (193). The gothic setting of the city – London in the case of *Jekyll and Hyde* – is distinctly important to the atmosphere of the story.

The city enables Dr. Jekyll to live a double life in a way that would not be possible in a small countryside community where anonymity is rare and exceedingly difficult to maintain. In his confession, Jekyll blames his evil nature on the inhibition of his desires due to the continuous pressure for decent behaviour that society requires of him (52). In the detective story, the social attitude will be conservative, but the crime novel will often question “some aspect of law, justice or the way society is run” (Symons 193). This last feature surfaces in Stevenson’s story when Utterson is hesitant about going to the police, as “he was conscious of some touch of that terror of the law and the law’s officers, which may at times assail the most honest” (22). This mistrust of the legal system is also reflected in the conclusion of the novella by the fact that Jekyll is not captured by the police and thereby escapes justice.

*Jekyll and Hyde* clearly emphasises complex characters and explores the criminal’s motive in a social context, which indicates that the story has more in common with modern crime fiction than the detective story despite the fact that the latter is a contemporary of the novella. If *Jekyll and Hyde* is to be considered part of the crime fiction genre, however, how can it feature elements that authors of crime fiction would not employ in their work until decades later? Furthermore, how can *Jekyll and Hyde* possibly belong to a genre that seems to renounce features that are fundamental to our story, like the gothic and the supernatural? If a different approach is taken and the *Strange Case of Jekyll and Hyde* is viewed through the lens of a revised history of the crime fiction genre, it becomes clear that the novella in fact fits neatly into this timeline, situated between contemporary crime fiction and its ancestors: gothic and supernatural literature.

## **V. Gothic and supernatural elements in crime fiction and *Jekyll and Hyde***

The traditional view of the history of crime fiction states that the genre started with the detective story and confined itself to a set of rigid rules until the emergence of more

diverse fiction. This view dominated the discourse on crime fiction for the majority of the 20th century. Yet contemporary literary critics now agree that this history has been oversimplified and that earlier critics downplayed influences from pre-existing genres. In his book *A Counter-History of Crime Fiction: Supernatural, Gothic, Sensational*, Maurizio Ascari discusses in detail how the history of the crime fiction genre has been misrepresented; he argues that its precursors were gothic, supernatural and sensational works. The first detective stories of Edgar Allan Poe and Arthur Conan Doyle show clear signs of being influenced by the sensational, supernatural and gothic elements of their literary contemporaries. Ascari points out the gothic theme in Poe's "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" (1841) where Dupin lives in a "time eaten and grotesque mansion" and how he is "an uncanny creature of the night, like the predatory vampire, but also a super-hero like Batman, somebody who can pierce the darkness of the city streets as well as of human hearts" (49). Similarly, Doyle's first story of Sherlock Holmes, *A Study in Scarlet* (1887), plays on the Victorian gothic themes of omniscience and persecution (Ascari 53). In addition, Holmes' detective prowess itself seems to rely on a somewhat supernatural ability to sense and solve a crime (Ascari 52).

But why were these elements and precursors of crime fiction omitted in the traditional history of the genre? The reason is that critics and authors of detective stories wanted the genre to be perceived as intellectual, and to achieve this, could not associate it with the unscientific elements of its precursors:

During the 1920s and 1930s detective fiction finally achieved the full status of a literary genre thanks to a rich critical output, including R.S Freeman's 'The Art of Detective Stories' (1924), Dorothy Sayers's introduction to *Great Short Stories of Detection, Mystery and Horror* (1928), and H. Douglas Thomson's *Masters of Mystery: a Study of the Detective Story* (1931). These critical essays can be

considered as symptomatic of the increasing tendency to disparage the nineteenth-century crime tradition in order to promote the more recent ‘scientific’ developments of the genre. Both the theoretical and the historical approach to detective fiction tended to consign it to a space of rigid rules. In their attempt to assert the dignity of the genre, writers and critics emphasised its rational elements at the expense of other components and consequently pushed the more sensational aspects into the background. (Ascari 3)

As a result, the classic detective story in the style of Doyle or Christie became a standard for what could be considered a work of crime fiction. Works that did not adhere to these standards did not get much attention, but as Knight points out, there was in fact a wide variety of work, such as the psycho thriller and other mystery stories, that represented the “types of social and personal unease which would contradict a notion of an idyllic ‘golden’ period” (“The Golden Age” 77). What the new lineage of crime fiction shows is that early detective fiction was not unaffected by other genres. Moreover, elements like the gothic and supernatural were present all along in works of crime fiction; in fact, they are still prominent features in the present-day crime genre (Ascari 11). It seems ironic that the elements originally downplayed by critics and authors of detective fiction in their attempt to elevate its status to a more intellectual literary plane are the very elements that have prospered in the crime fiction genre, well after the clue-puzzle detective stories lost their popularity. Stevenson was dissatisfied with classic detective fiction and recognised that it would also grow stale with readers. In *Jekyll and Hyde*, he demonstrates in a modern way how the gothic genre could be employed in a compelling and timeless story of a crime.

The gothic features in *Jekyll and Hyde* that particularly link Stevenson’s famous novella to crime are the classic theme of the double personality and the Victorian gothic theme of the city and its decay. The classic settings of the gothic novel were the English

moors and remote mansions; late Victorian gothic works, however, were more often set in the city, as *Jekyll and Hyde* is. London, like other Western cities, was experiencing the side effects of the Industrial Revolution, such as overcrowding, poverty and escalating crime rates. These conditions inspired the gothic fiction at the end of the 19th century. Crime and disease in “city slums” became common subjects in the genre (Byron 132). The main setting of Stevenson’s story, the neighbourhood where Hyde resides, is described as “a district of some city in a nightmare” (22). Furthermore, works in the Victorian gothic tradition were concerned with “the fears and anxieties attendant upon degeneration” and explored how horror brought about “the dissolution of the nation, of society, of the human subject itself” (Byron 133).

The degeneration of Jekyll’s psyche is an important topic in Stevenson’s story, but he also explores the degeneration of common citizens. In a brutal scene at three o’clock in the morning, when Hyde practically tramples down a little girl, it is particularly interesting to notice the reaction of the girl’s family and a doctor as they arrive to confront Hyde. The doctor is described as turning “sick and white with the desire to kill him” and the women had to be physically prevented from attacking Hyde (6-7). This vivid description would be more suited to a herd of animals, certainly not the civilised people of a modern society. This, too, is found in a description of Jekyll. When his evil alter ego takes hold of him, Hyde is repeatedly likened to a creature: he is “hardly human” (16), acting out in “ape-like fury” (20) and jumping “like a monkey” (39). The concept of the degradation of society and its individuals manifests itself in the physical transformation that Dr. Jekyll undergoes. The description of Hyde himself is that “Evil...had left on that body an imprint of deformity and decay” (55). Stevenson is not only portraying a gothic monster but is also reflecting the way criminals were perceived in the 19th century, in that their evil character was believed to be visible on the outside (Warwick 562). *Jekyll and Hyde*, however, also demonstrates the inner reflections

of Jekyll, which is more in line with the 20th century view in criminology, where “the gaze increasingly turned inward, not now into the body, but into the mind of the killer” (Warwick, 562). Moreover, the criminal mind of Dr. Jekyll demonstrates a battle between good and evil, or the double, another gothic theme not unfamiliar to Stevenson.

## **VI. The double, psychoanalysis and Jack the Ripper**

Stevenson was obviously very interested in the duality of man, and in several of his works he explored good and evil as two sides of the same coin. *The Master of Ballantrae* centres on the rivalry between two brothers. The elder brother is favoured by his family yet is relentlessly evil, while the younger brother faces unjust treatment despite attempting to act reasonably and fairly. In *Treasure Island*, the pirate Long John Silver is first presented as a trustworthy man; however, he turns out to be two-faced and does not hesitate to betray and even kill if he thinks it is in his own best interest. In the short story “Markheim”, the protagonist kills an antique store dealer for no apparent reason. He is then forced to look at the evolution of this source of evil in his life and, instead of escaping the scene of the crime, he repents and turns himself in.

Stevenson’s preoccupation with the double-sided character was not unprecedented at the time, but no character has become as widely recognised as a representation of this idea as Dr. Jekyll and his evil alter ego, Mr. Hyde. The story’s thrilling visual image of Jekyll as the scientist experimenting in his lab and his transformation into a devilish creature have contributed to the popularity of this famous double character.

At the time Stevenson’s story appeared, the notion of split personalities was also becoming a popular topic in a the new field of psychology. Critics claim that “Stevenson’s work did not only reflect these developments but actually helped constitute them” (Luckhurst xvii). The instant popularity of the story, coupled with the emergence of the study of human

psychology, certainly contributed to the development of the Jekyll and Hyde character into an iconic representation of the duality of man and “a shorthand for multiple personalities” (Luckhurst xix). The way Stevenson creatively explores the criminal mind in the chapter describing Jekyll’s confession resonates directly with the important role of psychoanalysis in the evolution of detective fiction:

The readers wanted more than just a plot - the notion of *motive* and *intent* had become an important element of the storytelling... psychoanalysis offered a concept more intriguing than just the obvious, surface motive. It delved into the criminal’s mind, teasing out the underlying driving force for murder, even if the criminal was not actively aware of it at the time of crime. The murderer may have intended to commit the crime, but was the intention a product of his or her own will? (Yang 597)

In the above-cited essay, Yang explains how criminal motives are portrayed with theories from psychoanalysis in popular works in the crime genre around the mid-20th century. They “link the motive to a source from the past” and explain how the person’s “unsuccessful repression of the illicit desire” led to his or her downfall (Yang 602).

Jekyll himself explains that his criminal motivation is the result of years of trying to repress feelings that were not considered appropriate in his position in society:

Indeed the worst of my faults was a certain impatient gaiety of disposition, such as has made the happiness of many, but such as I found it hard to reconcile with my imperious desire to carry my head high, and wear a more than commonly grave countenance before the public. Hence it came about that I concealed my pleasures; and that when I reached years of reflection, and began to look round me and take stock of my progress and position in the world, I stood already committed to a profound duplicity of life. (52)

Jekyll's motives for his (or Hyde's) wrongdoings seem to be found in his past, as there is no evidence pointing to any grudge against his particular victims. As Linda Dryden points out, "Stevenson gave Hyde no apparent motive and heightened the horror - to kill or maim for the sheer pleasure of it" (15). This notion of committing a crime for pleasure resonates strikingly with a psychological condition called antisocial personality disorder, sometimes referred to as sociopathy. A person with antisocial personality disorder feels no remorse and in this sense possesses the essential characteristic given to the fictionalised serial killer. Alexandra Warwick describes how the figure of the serial killer "emerges from the crime scene of most extreme unintelligibility: the murder of a person for no apparent reason". However, quite interestingly, she argues that the notion of a coherent type of serial killer is an invention that can be traced back to a series of murders taking place in London in 1888 (552-553), commonly known as the Whitechapel murders.

The portrayal of the dual character in *Jekyll and Hyde* and the real-life event of the Whitechapel murders contributed to what would later become a characteristic of the serial killer. In autumn 1888, five prostitutes were murdered in London's Whitechapel district. The police did not manage to find the murderer, but they received a letter supposedly from the killer, signed with the name Jack the Ripper (Warwick 552). These brutal murders were covered by the news in a sensational manner, and the media likened the unknown killer to characters from familiar fiction in order to keep the public interested. Incidentally, a dramatised version of *Jekyll and Hyde* was being staged in London in 1888, and journalists immediately picked up on the link between the suspect, Jack the Ripper, and the character in the play. As a result, the image of Jekyll and Hyde "is still regularly deployed to describe the serial killer" (Warwick 557). In fact, Stevenson's character has arguably inspired the serial killer and other dual characters in crime fiction and popular culture.

## VII. Henry Jekyll: an inspiration for the serial killer in fiction and film

The physical transformation of Jekyll into the younger, yet deformed, body of Hyde is a feature not directly employed in the realistic fictional serial killer story, despite the fact that serial killers can be seen figuratively as animalistic creatures. Stevenson's portrayal of the gothic monster and his physical transformation has inspired other criminal characters in fiction, however, including *The Invisible Man* by H.G. Wells (1897). In Wells' famous novel, the protagonist, Griffin, invents a drug in order to make himself invisible and is unable to return to his visible state, which compromises his mental stability and eventually leads him to commit crimes. The comparison with Dr. Jekyll and his transforming drug is obvious. Yet Jekyll creates his drug to experience the evil part of himself in pure form, and the physical transformation into the body of Hyde can be seen as a side effect or a manifestation of the wickedness (55). Griffin, on the other hand, uses his drug for its purely physical transformative characteristics.

Characters in popular fiction that lead dual lives are numerous, and the superhero genre is based primarily on the idea of this duality. Superman, Batman and Spiderman all lead double lives, and Linda Dryden argues that these particular superheroes "owe a great deal to Stevenson's vision of respectable citizens leading double lives" (15). The character of Jekyll/Hyde, however, has a stronger connection to the darker and more realistic criminal, like the serial killer, than these characters of science fiction. Ultimately, the physical change in Stevenson's novella is a physical manifestation of the mental state of being evil, and the psychological representation of the character of Jekyll and Hyde is what has inspired the modern criminal in fiction.

It has been established that the sociopath kills for no apparent reason other than his own pleasure. In the case of the fictional serial killer, it can also be noted that his

circumstances usually do not provide him with a reason to turn to crime. Henry Jekyll begins his confession as follows:

I was born in the year 18- to a large fortune, endowed besides with excellent parts, inclined by nature to industry, fond of the respect of the wise and good among my fellow-men, and thus, as might have been supposed, with every guarantee of an honourable and distinguished future. (52)

Jekyll's childhood and social status would not normally be conceived as an environment that breeds criminality, but in the world of the fictional serial killer this is not an uncommon description of the perpetrator's youth. Serial killers in fiction and film tend to come from a wealthy or respectable family; they are usually well educated, intelligent and sophisticated. Dr. Jekyll enjoys high social status, has a degree in law and is a medical doctor (11), and is "known for charities" (28). The serial killer might not have exactly these characteristics, but what is most important is that he has the appearance of a respectable citizen.

One of the most recognised serial killers in fiction, Dr. Hannibal Lecter, created by Thomas Harris, appeared first in the novel *Red Dragon* (1981) and subsequently in later novels and film adaptations. Lecter himself is a psychiatrist and, more importantly, is highly intelligent and extremely sophisticated. The serial killer Martin Vanger, in Stieg Larsson's *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo* (2005), is also a likeable man from a wealthy family. By day he manages the family business, but his dark secret is that he has brutally murdered hundreds of women in the basement of his mid-century modern home (464). The criminal tendencies of both Hannibal Lecter and Martin Vanger are traced to a distinct source somewhere in the character's past – in both cases, a childhood trauma. Jekyll's dark other half began to develop as a result of the pressure he felt from society to repress questionable desires. In fiction about serial killers, including *Jekyll and Hyde*, there is a strong and persistent notion that the motive can be found in society and in the criminal's past. Warwick

says that “the figure of the serial killer is being used in ways that go beyond entertainment and police work, having more to do with ways of understanding ourselves and modern society” (553). In some serial killer fiction, writers amass sympathy for the killer and even argue convincingly that the behaviour is justifiable. One has only to look at the popular novels and television programmes featuring the serial killer Dexter Morgan to find an example of this. Dexter works for the police as a forensic investigator, yet unbeknownst to his colleagues, he is born a psychopath and acts on his urges by killing the murderers he is investigating. The fact that he kills only people who “deserve” it is the justification given for his murders, one that allows the reader to empathise with a serial killer.

Hyde’s crimes are committed for pleasure in much the same way as the crimes of the Hannibal Lecters and Dexter Morgans that followed. Although Jekyll feels slight guilt at times and experiences a need to “redeem the past” (61), he never truly takes responsibility for the actions of his evil alter ego. Jekyll insists on justifying the crimes by explaining society’s responsibility for the course of his life and by underscoring his kind and benevolent behaviour: “After all, I reflected I was like my neighbours; and then I smiled, comparing myself with other men, comparing my active goodwill with the lazy cruelty of their neglect” (62). Philip L. Simpson, in his book on serial killers in fiction, comments on how this lack of responsibility is usually demonstrated in stories:

Few of these remorseless killers come to any true moral reckoning with their consciences. Even if captured, they ultimately manage to escape justice. The killers escape personal accountability in such a way as to spread the blame for murder among the society that helps create “monstrous” serial killers. (136)

This is clearly reflected in the resolution of the crime novels mentioned above. The killer either gets away with the murders, like Dexter, or kills himself to escape the consequences, like Martin Vanger and Henry Jekyll.

## VIII. Conclusion

Robert Louis Stevenson explored many genres as a writer and has been associated with many by critics, but he has rarely been associated with the crime fiction genre. This paper establishes clearly, however, that his famous story the *Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* has a strong connection to the work of crime fiction. The reluctance or failure of critics and scholars to connect Stevenson's inherently gothic story to the crime fiction genre can be traced to what is now considered a critical misrepresentation of the chronology and lineage of the genre itself.

The detective story as we know it, which originated in the late 19th century, was considered for decades to be the chief work in the crime fiction genre. Critics and writers of "golden age" stories were deeply concerned about its status as an intellectual genre and deliberately overlooked or even eliminated elements in the stories that could be perceived as unscientific. The result was a genre criticised for homogeneity and formulaic structure. Eventually, these types of stories, with their rigid design, even lost their appeal to readers.

Attempts to compare *Jekyll and Hyde* to detective fiction can therefore be seen, as Nabokov suggested, as the defamation of a story that is in fact a great work of literature. Close analysis shows that Stevenson's story does not even fit the criteria of the classic detective story. This does not prevent it from being compared to other works of crime fiction, however. As the crime fiction genre has gained the attention of scholars, it has been acknowledged that the present canon of crime fiction has drawn inspiration from key elements of the gothic, supernatural and sensational. These elements can all be found in *Jekyll and Hyde*. Rather than excluding it from the genre of crime fiction, there is clear evidence that the novella marked the beginning of the crime novel, a genre that continues to flourish today, well after the rise and fall of its cousin, the detective story.

When *Jekyll and Hyde* is viewed as a crime story, its most prominent feature, the character of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, can be appreciated as an early portrayal of a very modern criminal. Stevenson captured his readers' attention with a gothic monster, but his psychological exploration of the criminal's mind was unique and far ahead of his time. His dual character has since inspired countless others that embody this conflict: the interior battle between good and evil.

Stevenson's inclination towards experimenting with different genres does not cast a shadow on his greatness as a writer; quite the contrary. As Todorov explains so elegantly, "One might say that every great book establishes the existence of two genres, the reality of two norms: that of the genre it transgresses, which dominated the preceding literature, and that of the genre it creates" (43). Stevenson's masterpiece *Jekyll and Hyde* pays tribute to the gothic genre and anticipates a genre of crime fiction.

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