

# A Preferable Ending and the Veiled Truth:

Narrative Strategy in *Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*

Mai Osada

## I

Robert Louis Stevenson was a member of the Psychological Society of Edinburgh.<sup>1</sup> His interest in psychological questions continued to the end of his life.<sup>2</sup> In the nineteenth century, multiple personality disorder was actively discussed in medical journals in France and Germany (Dury 246). Frederick W. H. Myers, who introduced to English readership two famous cases: “Louis V. and Félicité X” in 1886, sent Stevenson letters after *Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* was published (Myers 648). Stevenson wrote to Myer his experience of divided stream of consciousness: in fever episodes his mind seemed to be divided into a sane and a hallucinatory self.<sup>3</sup> The impact of Jekyll’s duplicity is enormous enough for posterity to create and produce adaptations (Showalter 104–26). Oscar Wilde dealt with Dr. Jekyll’s experiment in *The Decay of Lying* (1891): “. . . The Black Arrow is so inartistic as not to contain a single anachronism to boast of, while the transformation of Dr. Jekyll reads dangerously like an experiment out of the *Lancet*” (15). Wilde’s *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1891) is another version of the dualistic personality.

While *Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* has become famous as a tale written about man’s duality, some critics have pointed out the peculiarity of its narrative strategy and structure. One review in *The Times* in 1886 considered the short fiction to be “the product of fitting together all the parts of an

intricate and inscrutable puzzle” (Maixner 205); Christopher Frayling suggests that “the narrative was mosaic rather than linear” (116). As Gordon Hirsch points out, apparently, the ending of the story is depicted by “retelling” the plot like a detective story, “from a more informed point of view” (235). Interestingly, unlike a detective story, John Gabriel Utterson as “Mr. Seek” does not disclose the secret in the end of the story (15).<sup>4</sup> Utterson is literally situated outside of the last two chapters, because he participates in these chapters as a witness who reads the two narratives in which the mystery is to be explained after Lanyon’s death and Jekyll’s disappearance. There is no opportunity for Utterson to reveal his opinion about the metamorphosis from Jekyll into Hyde written by Hastie Lanyon and Jekyll. Several documentations and witnesses effectively create the image that Jekyll and Hyde are “double.” The purpose of this essay is to point out that Stevenson created an innovative narrative strategy, making it possible to describe what cannot be depicted in a realistic literary form. This new narrative strategy bears similarities to modern fiction.

## II

The purpose of the text of *Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* is to solve various mysteries. The fundamental mystery is the relationship between Jekyll and Hyde. Utterson’s speculations depend on his obsessive concern with documents such as “Dr. Jekyll’s Will” (12), a cheque, “Dr. Lanyon’s Narrative” (41), and “Henry Jekyll’s Full Statement of The Case” (47). On the surface, repeated analysis of the documents suggests Jekyll’s connection with Hyde. However, his opinions about the documents are speculation that amounts to little more than supposition.

To reveal the relationship between Jekyll and Hyde, not only the documents but also witnesses are important. Through the novel, the representa-

tions of Hyde are constructed by recurrence of various impressions and his pursuers' images. For instance, in the scene in which Richard Enfield observes Hyde trampling the girl, Enfield describes his impression of Hyde's face: "He was perfectly cool and made no resistance, but gave me one look, so ugly that it brought out the sweat on me like running" (9). In addition, Hyde's ill-fitting yet expensive clothes reinforce the impression of being peculiar. Moreover, according to Utterson's witness, Hyde is a "pale and dwarfish" (10) figure "with ape-like fury" (22), and he is "particularly wicked-looking" like "Satan" (10). What should be noticed is here that readers can get the information of the features of Hyde's countenance only from Utterson's impressions and explanations: Hyde "seems hardly human" (17), somewhat "troglodytic" (17), and he gives "an impression of deformity" (17). While Hyde's face is not depicted in detail, the impressions of people who observed him are repeatedly described in the novel.

Jekyll is "a large, well-made, smooth-faced man of fifty" (19). On the other hand, Hyde is depicted as a pale and grotesque figure. Their physical contrast operates as an important device when the body is found in Jekyll's laboratory.

Right in the midst there lay the body of a man sorely contorted and still twitching. They drew near on tiptoe, turned it on its back and beheld the face of Edward Hyde. He was dressed in clothes far too large for him, clothes of the doctor's bigness; the cords of his face still moved with a semblance of life, but life was quite gone; and by the crushed phial in the hand and the strong smell of kernels that hung upon the air, Utterson knew that he was looking on the body of a self-destroyer. (39; underlines are mine)

In this scene, although the face is not described in detail, Utterson identifies

it as “the face of Edward Hyde” (39). On the other hand, the clothes are subsequently depicted: they are “far too large” (39) for the body, a detail that evokes Hyde’s costume. Such implications allow readers to believe that the body is that of Hyde. Furthermore, the narrator’s implication, “clothes of doctor’s bigness” (39), is not incidental but intentional, suggesting a connection between Jekyll and the body. As a result, although relationship between Jekyll and Hyde is veiled, readers are encouraged to interpret this scene as follows: in Jekyll’s laboratory Utterson finds “the body of self-destroyer” (39) which is identified as Hyde.

Implication is also one of the peculiarities of the narrative strategy and structure in *Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*. Such a peculiar technique of narrative is employed not only for the description of Hyde but also for the explanation of his circumstances. The dialogue between Utterson and Poole about the cheval glass in Jekyll’s laboratory is suggestive:

Next, in the course of their review of the chamber, the searchers came to the cheval glass into whose depths they looked with an involuntary horror. But it was so turned as to show them nothing but the rosy glow playing on the roof, the fire sparking in a hundred repetitions along the glazed front of the presses, and their own pale and fearful countenances stooping to look in.

“This glass have seen some strange things, sir,” whispered Poole.

“And surely none stranger than itself,” echoed the lawyer in the same tones. “For what did Jekyll”—he caught himself up at the word with a start, and then conquering the weakness: “what could Jekyll want with it?” he said.

“You may say that!” said Poole. (40)

After Hyde's body was found in the chamber, they looked into the cheval glass in which they have "seen some strange things" (40), and they regard it as an item unsuitable for experiments. His words "what could Jekyll want with it?" (40) suggest the peculiarity of the glass. The glass in the laboratory seems slightly strange yet suggestive, due to their expressed curiosity about it, but what makes it more remarkable here is their facial expressions when they look into it: "their own pale and fearful countenances" (40) are more incomprehensible and disputable, and this induces readers to have a certain suspicion about the glass and its usage in the laboratory. Their reference to it functions as a device interwoven into the text creating suspense and arousing readers' suspicion about why Jekyll used it in his experiment. In addition, the reason they feel fear and anxiety is left unexplained here, which allows readers to interpret unconsciously their reference and attitudes to fulfill the implied meaning of its usage. Their overwhelmingly surprised and fearful expressions, moreover, create the impression that Utterson and Poole would already have known both the purpose of the glass in the laboratory and what Jekyll might have done with it.

Judith Halberstam points out the influence of Wilkie Collins's sensation novels upon the Victorian Gothic tradition (Halberstam 21). Halberstam suggests that novels employing the narrative device that Collins adopted in *The Woman in White* (1860) "share an almost obsessive concern with documentation and they all exhibit a sinister mistrust of the not-said, the unspoken, the hidden, and the silent"(20–21). Stevenson also employed this device to present a sinister mistrust of the silent in "INCIDENT AT THE WINDOW", in which Utterson and Enfield observe the sick and depressed Jekyll standing by the window:

But the words were hardly uttered, before the smile was struck out of his

face and succeeded by an expression of such abject terror and despair, as froze the very blood of the two gentlemen below. They saw it but for a glimpse, for the window was instantly thrust down; but that glimpse had been sufficient, and they turned and left the court without a word. In silence, too, they traversed the by-street; and it was not until they had come into a neighbouring thoroughfare, where even upon a Sunday there were still some stirrings of life, that Mr. Utterson at last turned and looked at his companion. They were both pale; and there was an answering horror in their eyes.

“God forgive us, God forgive us,” said Mr. Utterson.

But Mr. Enfield only nodded his head very seriously, and walked on once more in silence. (32; underlines are mine)

The narrator intentionally avoids telling what Utterson and Enfield saw; like other Late-Victorian Gothic, the scene is constructed using the “unspeakable” (Mighall 187), which effectively creates a sinister and horrible atmosphere. Moreover, their pale complexions and “an answering horror in their eyes” (32) obviously suggest that they confront something of terror and horror. Because the details of the incident at the window are left unwritten here, their horrible expressions function as a narrative device in inducing readers to interpret what they observe as an incident provoking terror and fear.

In addition, the recurrent indications of fearful expressions and the silence underlining the wickedness of the unspecified incident is a crucial element arousing readers’ attention in this scene. What precisely they see is not explained and the narrator merely indicates: “They saw it” (32), which gives the impression that what they see is unexposed yet considerable. Their quiet walking, moreover, implies that they confront difficulty in uttering any words due to a shocking and horrible sight. Utterson manages to say: “God forgive

us, God forgive us" (32). Enfield "only nodded his head very seriously, and walked on once more in silence" (32). With the recurrent usage of the term "in silence," uncertainty and ambiguity in the narrative provoke curiosity about what they see; hence, the unspoken truth quickens readers' imagination. Furthermore, their pale countenances and the horrible expressions on their faces present the impression that what they see is something queer and horrible, so that they face difficulty in describing it and become unable to speak. In this scene, Stevenson refuses to disclose what Utterson and Enfield see, while he indirectly yet intentionally depicts the incident at the window with the narrative strategy used in sensation novels, and precisely conveys the fear and horror experienced by Utterson and Enfield. This narrative strategy motivates the reader to try to identify and figure out what exactly they see and, as a consequence, to try to interpret their pale and fearful countenances as well as their ramble without a word in order to discover the concealed truth.

As Robert Mighall points out, like monstrous figures and villains in Gothic romance, Hyde "remains ultimately indescribable and unrepresentable" (190). By the 1880s, it was common that criminals were equally considered as degenerates into the bottom of society. For this reason, physical deformity was considered to be a certain symbol of deviates (Arata 34). In the late nineteenth century, atavism and savagery were frequently depicted in Gothic novels. Their ugly, evil, and deformed features imply retrogression and degeneration. Their deformities are related to grotesque criminals and degenerates. According to the reader's speculation and imagination, Hyde's physical appearance is also seen as a degenerate figure in the *fin de siècle*. In fact, in one critical essay in *The Athenaeum* in 1894, *Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* was discussed as an example of "Art following Nature" (Frayling 160), though it was published two years before the Whitechapel murders. And "no-

one questioned the point: it had indeed become the 'artistic reflection' of Jack the Ripper" (Frayling 160).<sup>5</sup> Due to their indefinite substance both Hyde and Jack the Ripper were paradoxically represented.

### III

The mystery in this novel is disclosed by "a perpetrator's confession" in the last chapter. In the previous chapter, there is supporting corroboration that helps readers to understand what the veiled mystery is. These two chapters present the truth that Hyde is Jekyll's double and that he embodies his evil aspect, which induces readers to consider Jekyll and Hyde as a byword for a dual personality. But it is uncertain whether there is evidence that proves Hyde is Jekyll's alter ego.

When Utterson finds Hyde's body, he unseals Dr. Lanyon's narrative. In the narrative, Lanyon refers to Jekyll's book for his experiments found in the laboratory:

The book was an ordinary version book and contained little but a series of dates. These covered a period of many years, but I observed that the entries ceased nearly a year ago and quite abruptly. Here and there a brief remark was appended to a date, usually no more than a single word: "double" occurring perhaps six times in a total of several hundred entries; and once very early in the list and followed by several marks of exclamation, "Total failure!!!" All this, though it whetted my curiosity, told me little that was definite. (44; underlines are mine)

In his narrative, Lanyon refers to the book he has found in Jekyll's laboratory. Although the book is "an ordinary version" (44), Lanyon realizes that nothing but dates have been described for many years, but almost one year ago no de-



scription is inscribed. What is more interesting is that Jekyll's experiments are not depicted in it. In the book, there is "usually no more than a single word: 'double' occurring perhaps six times in a total of several hundred entries," and "once very early in the list and followed by several marks of exclamation, 'Total failure!!!'" (44). Another narrative technique—the use of the hidden—is employed; the circumstances of his experiments are unspecified. Since what is recorded in the book is limited, Lanyon and readers have to interpret the purpose of the book and try to figure out what Jekyll might have been doing in the laboratory. Thus what precisely "'double' occurring perhaps six times in a total of several hundred entries" (44) means is difficult to interpret. But, in the latter part of Lanyon's testimony, Jekyll's transformation into Hyde with chemical powder is depicted, which suggests that the "double" written in the book refers to Jekyll's experiments. He might have been looking for a peculiar way to become another self with a chemical powder. The important thing, however, is that what exactly "double" means remains uncertain and unspecified. To make it more specific, because of the disappearance of Jekyll, it is supposedly impossible to reveal what the "double" means, but, the narrative technique used here intentionally gives readers a defined direction to believe that "double" must imply that Jekyll and Hyde are double.

As mentioned in the previous section of this essay, it is difficult to reveal what precisely Jekyll intended to write in his book. Jekyll's book is not the only unreliable evidence in this novel. Dr. Lanyon's narrative, which is an important piece of evidence to prove that Hyde is Jekyll's alter ego, is also unreliable:

What he told me in the next hour, I cannot bring my mind to set on paper. I saw what I saw, I heard what I heard, and my soul sickened at it; and yet now when that sight has faded from my eyes, I ask myself if I be-

lieve it, and I cannot answer. My life is shaken to its roots; sleep has left me; the deadliest terror sits by me at all hours of the day and night; I feel that my days are numbered, and that I must die; and yet I shall die incredulous. (47)

Lanyon, who witnesses to Hyde's transformation into Jekyll, doubtfully depicts what he saw: "now when that sight has faded from my eyes, I ask myself if I believe it, and I cannot answer" (47). Moreover, since he is the witness to the transformation of "degenerate into doctor gives Lanyon a shock from which he never recovers" (Mighall 191), his prediction about his death in the near future is signified (47). Lanyon's mental and physical weakness undermines his narrative reliability.

Furthermore, like Lanyon's narrative, the reliability of Jekyll's testimony is in doubt. As Jekyll writes: "I must here speak by theory alone, saying not that which I know, but that which I suppose to be most probable" (51), Jekyll suggests that analysis of his change into Hyde is not a theory but a supposition. Jekyll, moreover, confronted difficulty in investigating Hyde objectively:

And yet when I looked upon that ugly idol in the glass, I was conscious of no repugnance, rather of a leap of welcome. This, too, was myself. It seemed natural and human. In my eyes it bore a livelier image of the spirit, it seemed more express and single, than the imperfect and divided countenance, I had been hitherto accustomed to call mine. (51)

In the closing passage in Jekyll's statement: "Here then, as I lay down the pen and proceed to seal up my confession, I bring the life of that unhappy Henry Jekyll to an end" (62). Here, in respect to the narrator's identity, one inquiry emerges: Who is this "I"? Does "I" indicate "Jekyll" or "Hyde"? The

narrator confronts difficulty in identifying himself in the narrative of a dual personality disorder; fragility and uncertainty of narrating are his destiny. The story is in part narrated by Jekyll, and in sequence by Hyde. Like his identity, his narrative authority seems doomed to be divided into two subjects.<sup>6</sup> As Jekyll declares, it is impossible for him to recognize Hyde as "I": "He, I say—I cannot say I" (59). Jekyll's narrative splits and becomes combined fragmentations between "I" (the first person narrator) and "He" (the third person narrator) (Thomas 75). From Jekyll's point of view, it is difficult to prove Hyde's existence because it is impossible for him to grasp his true image objectively. In his statement, Jekyll obviously faces contradiction to present/represent his self-image. Therefore, unreliability of narrating his self-image implied in his statement suggests fragility of credibility in the opinion that Jekyll is within Hyde simultaneously.

In the nineteenth century, a double personality was considered to be a symptom of a double brain which was associated with criminals (Stiles 27–49). Therefore, Jekyll's horrible and morbid double life creates a grotesque and abnormal atmosphere in the text. Furthermore, Hyde is an expedient figure in order to conclude that dreadful crime and sinful deeds such as the murder of Carew and trampling of the girl were committed not by Jekyll but by Hyde. Consequently, Hyde's cruelty and insanity not only suppress the vices and immoralities committed by Jekyll but also protect his honour and respectability as a gentleman. But, the theory of the duality of Jekyll/Hyde, in fact, is based on evidence of conditions and unreliable statements. In *Lady Audley's Secret* (1862), Mary Elizabeth Braddon used female madness as one device to protect Sir Audley's honour and respectability and suppress Lady Audley's sensational crime. Lady Audley is forced into a mental asylum on the continent for treatment and cure of her insanity (Braddon 350). Like *Lady Audley's Secret*, Jekyll's split psychology functions as a device to protect

not only his own respectability but also that of his friends, Lanyon and Utterson. What is more, his double personality is an essential element to conceal immoral acts and vice such as homosexuality and murder contemporary people of the *fin de siècle* confronted; thus the truth is hidden beneath the grotesque case. Therefore, it is important to regard that the author intentionally induces readers to interpret Hyde as Jekyll's dual personality. In addition, it is significant to consider the directed interpretation that Hyde is Jekyll's split personality as a cleverly fabricated ending of the novel in order to conceal the truth within the text.

#### IV

Behind the case the truth is buried. To disclose the buried truth, it is necessary to examine Jekyll's last will. In the first will, a successor of Jekyll's inheritance is "Edward Hyde," but, surprisingly, "in place of the name of Edward Hyde" (40) the name of "Gabriel John Utterson" (40) is inscribed in the last will. Although Utterson found it "with indescribable amazement" (40), such alteration in the will is artificial and unreasonable, which arouses suspicion that Utterson who is a legal advisor to Jekyll, must know the reason behind Jekyll's/Hyde's death and disappearance. The unreasonable alteration evokes several conjectures on Jekyll's relationship with Hyde. For instance, Carol Margaret Davison suggests that "[Utterson] is guilty of Jekyll's/Hyde's murder" (155) in order to erase crime committed by Jekyll/Hyde and protect their honour. Certainly, since the story is narrated from Utterson's point of view, it is certainly possible for him to reconstruct the story as he likes.

As Judith Halberstan points out: "nineteenth-century Gothic monstrosity was a combination of the features of deviant race, class and gender" (4). Accordingly, it is possible to consider that Jekyll/Hyde are a combination of conflicting elements such as an empire and a colony,<sup>7</sup> a professional and a labor-

er, or men and women.<sup>8</sup> On the other hand, many other cases of duplex personality discussed in various French scientific journals in the period were female (Dury 249). Jekyll/Hyde is associated with womanly expressions: Hyde walked “with a certain swing” (38) and he cried “like a woman” (38). Moreover, Hyde is “closer than a wife” (61). Similarly, Jekyll’s hands are “white and comely” (54). Describing the first transformation is linked to childbirth: Hyde “felt it struggle to be born” (61). Lanyon made a diagnosis of Hyde as follows: “I could see, in spite of his collected manner, that he was wrestling against the approaches of hysteria” (45).

In *fin-de-siècle* fiction, many figures who would later be categorized as “hysterics and Narcissists” were created (Kaye 55). As the relationship between male hysteria and homosexuality has been pointed out (Showalter 106), when Hyde is interpreted as a symbolical figure of a sensual laborer (Showalter 111), to veil the secret that Jekyll and Hyde are homosexual, it is possible to consider that Utterson is involved in Jekyll’s disappearance and Hyde’s suicide or homicide. It is obvious that, as Henry James indicated, women are excluded from the central plot in *Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (James and Stevenson 155–56); moreover, in the imperialist romance, which is “primarily a male-oriented genre” (Patteson 5), which flourished between 1880 and 1920, a homosocial party, male bonds, and homosexuality had been dealt with. Furthermore, when the novel was published, most cases of dual personalities discussed in French journals were female patients (Dury 249). Considering the historical background, it is possible to consider that Jekyll tries to conceal his sexual tendency, a homosexual relationship with Hyde. If such an interpretation is allowed, the ambiguous term “double” in Jekyll’s book contains another meaning.

Furthermore, Jekyll/Hyde are represented in terms of father and son: “Jekyll had more than a father’s interest; Hyde had more than a son’s indiffer-

ence" (55). Such expressions induce readers to consider that Hyde is killed in order to conceal the truth that he is Jekyll's illegitimate son.<sup>9</sup>

Using intimation, silence, and buried truth is characteristic of the narrative strategy. Apparently, like these interpretations, Jekyll's disappearance and Hyde's death induce readers to have a different interpretation about their relationship. But, because of Hyde's death and Jekyll's disappearance, their secret will never be fully disclosed.

In *Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, several pieces of documentary evidence such as a narrative, a newspaper article, and a cheque are effectively employed, and Jekyll's statement is placed in the last chapter. *Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* employs a multiple narrative strategy, giving a directed interpretation that Hyde is Jekyll's split personality. The revealed truth, apparently, presents the buried mystery behind the case, which remains a preferred ending, but the preferred ending is far from the truth, because there is no legal and trustworthy witness. Like Bertha Mason, Hyde is shut up within the narrative discourse. As Judith Halberstam indicates: "most Gothic novels lack the point of view of the monster" (21), monstrous figures lose their verbal and visual authority. In short, the strange case is narrated from different perspectives—those of Utterson, Enfield, Lanyon, and Jekyll—which implies that there is no absolute fact or truth behind the case narrated from these perspectives; it is suitable to consider that there are three different versions of discourses on the case depicted in the short story. Narrating a double personality with the narrator split between I and He, Stevenson created a new narrative strategy which makes it possible to depict what is unable to describe in a realistic literary form, and something that is pursued once again in modern fiction.<sup>10</sup>

## Notes

1. See Swearingen 11 and Dury 239.
2. See Stevenson, *Letters* 189 and 198, Matus 160–82 and Dury 237–52.
3. See Stevenson, *Letters*: 331–34 and Swearingen 101.
4. All quotations in this essay in *Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* are from *Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*. Ed. Katherine Linehan. New York: Norton, 2003. Numbers of pages are included in parenthesis.
5. See Malchow 112 and Walkowitz 206.
6. See Luckhurst, Introduction xiv and Baldick 146.
7. Annette Cozzi describes the relationship between Jekyll and Hyde as below: Jekyll/Hyde embodies “the relationship between the British and the Irish” (143). Patrick Brantlinger points out that Imperial Gothic expresses “anxieties about the ease with which civilization can revert to barbarism or savagery and thus about the weakening of Britain’s imperial hegemony” (229). Imperial Gothic represents anxieties about reverse colonization and the loss of power the British Empire faced in the late nineteenth century. The anxiety of reverse colonization is represented as the projection of the increasing fragility of the Empire’s imperial prestige and its terror of an impending colonial revenge. Therefore, Jekyll embodies the increasing fragility of the Empire’s imperial power, while young and vivacious Hyde represents colonies which roughly become prosperous. That is to say, Jekyll and Hyde are the incarnate anxieties that contemporary people confronted.
8. Jekyll/Hyde is interpreted as a conflict between the professional and working classes. See Ruddick 191.
9. See Arata 40, Miller 211 and Luckhurst, Notes 185.
10. Marlow in Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* (1902) is also an unreliable narrator. Mad narrators are used in Henry James’s *The Turn of the Screw* (1898) and H. G. Wells’s *The War of the Worlds* (1898).

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#### Keywords

male madness, a double personality, narrative