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“Citizen Hyde: Cosmopolitan Contradictions in *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*”

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Abstract

As the British empire slowly crumbled at the end of the nineteenth century, London was inundated with countless new residents, raising paranoia about crime that was presumed to originate with newcomers to the city who lived outside the presumed social mores of English gentlemen. Robert Louis Stevenson capitalized on this atmosphere to craft a notorious literary scoundrel for the city, the titular figure(s) in *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*. In this paper, I adapt Craig Morehead's argument that Victorian "writers used cosmopolitan criminality to strengthen social cohesion and codify an idea of 'Englishness,' as well as to exaggerate and institutionalize the criminal threats of outsiders (broadly based on criminal identity)," in order to argue here that multiple and concurrent definitions of functional cosmopolitanism clash with Edward Hyde's degenerate criminality, resulting in an unspoken but generative (if temporary) moral cosmopolitanism with a gothic flavor.

KEYWORDS: gothic, cosmopolitan, criminals, moral cosmopolitanism

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It is a dark and foggy night near the Thames in 19th century London Town, and Victorian gentlemen are abroad. An elderly gentleman, who from description serves as the embodied English establishment, inquires after directions from a passerby on the street, but it is his misfortune to encounter Edward Hyde, the villainous transformed double of the distinguished Dr. Henry Jekyll. Hyde viciously kills Sir Danvers Carew on the street and evades capture by evolving into his better self. This multi-faceted plotline within Robert Louis Stevenson's *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*, and particularly this noir transformation of Englishmen's bodies, dead, living, and "disfigured," embodies a complex contradiction of terms in the novella. I adapt Craig Morehead's argument that Victorian "writers used cosmopolitan criminality to strengthen social cohesion and codify an idea of 'Englishness,' as well as to exaggerate and institutionalize the criminal threats of outsiders (broadly based on criminal identity)," in order to argue here that multiple and concurrent definitions of functional cosmopolitanism clash with Edward Hyde's degenerate criminality, resulting in an unspoken but generative (if temporary) moral cosmopolitanism with a gothic flavor (Morehead 306).

I examine cosmopolitanism in Jekyll and Hyde through several interlocking but distinct understandings of the term as used by the Victorians, all of which come to bear on Hyde's criminal activities and Jekyll's social fall from grace. To take it in its simplest form, Gerrard Delanty states that "the cosmopolitan moment occurs when cultures or collective identities interact and undergo transformation as a result" (Delanty 177). The nature of this interaction and transformation depends on perspective, as Tanya Agathocleous and Jason R. Rudy neatly layer in explaining possible cosmopolitan definitions and connotations from the *Oxford English Dictionary*:

'Cosmopolitan character; adherence to cosmopolitan principles'...is figured as a positive ideal; (2) In Soviet usage, disparagement of Russian traditions and culture (equated with disloyalty)...the condemnation of lifestyles associated with bourgeois decadence, as well as an accusation of 'rootlessness'; and 3) 'World-wide distribution' which was ostensibly a neutral descriptive of a global phenomena, but the term was often used negatively in the nineteenth century (Agathocleous and Rudy 389).

Despite some popular imaginings of cosmopolitanism as a positive global idea of oneness, for many Victorians disturbed by developments in their culture and landscape the idea of "world-wide" was often synonymous with London itself, and the ever-growing and changing city proved a cause of anxiety for its citizens. Agathocleous argues in her work on urban

cosmopolitanism and realism that “the city... was imagined as a complex, incoherent web of interconnections that spanned the entire globe” (Agathocleous xv). The London of this 1886 novella is at once a city and an entire world in itself, terrifying in its vast anonymity and pluralities. Craig Morehead figures an idea of “cosmopolitan foreignness not in terms of lying beyond the national borders, as ‘out there,’ but rather, lying beyond the expectations of what it means to be English, ‘in here,’ within the national borders” (Morehead 26-27). This specific fear nestled within ideals of cosmopolitanism is my primary focus.

Agathocleous describes how fears of cosmopolitanism in Victorian England “mobilized two related anxieties: “(1) the fear of dispersal— of the loss of national character,” and “(2) the fear of hybridity, ‘vagrancy,’ or border-crossing,” so that “the label *cosmopolitan* was readily affixed to individuals or groups who appeared to challenge the social, economic, or political integrity of the nation” (Agathocleous 34). In seeking to perform an idealized form of moral cosmopolitanism by day, Dr. Henry Jekyll strives to split his socially acceptable Englishness from his fullest self and accidentally outs himself as a cosmopolitan criminal. Combining Morehead and Agathocleous’ arguments and reading our titular characters through this overlapping lens, I surmise that a cosmopolitan criminal, rootless and liminal, might be one who commit crimes as modern society understands them, but within that, may also simply be an English citizen who transgresses the boundaries of English behavior, especially the fear that one among us is not really *one of us* within the social contract, and almost invisibly so.

A focus on public “encounters” between this divided Londoner and his fellow citizens illustrate how Hyde is at once intrinsic to and firmly set apart from the “world” of London. In a text that focuses in on identifying someone, often through their handwriting, Stevenson sets the style of writing Hyde slant, as the first appearance of Jekyll’s worse self is narrativized in Mr. Enfield’s anecdotal gossip. Along with his audience, the lawyer Utterson, Enfield is a member of Jekyll’s upright social circle. Enfield is only a bystander to Hyde’s collision with and casual trampling of a small girl at the intersection of two streets because of his own implied transgressively cosmopolitan behavior in “coming home from some place at the end of the world” late at night through an eerily empty and otherworldly London neighborhood, described as “part of town where there was literally nothing to be seen but lamps... street after street” (Stevenson 32-33). This is the first instance of Jekyll’s ostensibly proper social life crossing the boundaries into Hyde’s chaotic, and often called “savage” criminality.

It also seems purposeful on the part of Stevenson, known to take pride in his wordplay, that the child is examined by a medical professional: “the doctor, for whom she had been sent, put in his appearance” (33). The wording of the doctor’s arrival hints that this child of the city is merely a plot device at the intersection of streets and identities, the impetus and excuse for Enfield to interact with Hyde in this part of London, and the entrance foreshadows the presence in the case of a doctor who is a mix of professional and violent. Per Enfield’s account of the event,

The doctor’s case was what struck me. He was the usual cut and dry apothecary, of no particular age and colour, with a strong Edinburgh accent and about as emotional as a bagpipe. Well, sir, he was like the rest of us; every time he looked at my prisoner, I saw that sawbones turn sick and white with the desire to kill him (33).

Enfield's response to the attack, as a member of the angry crowd that descends on Hyde, emphasizes that criminal behavior in Victorian society isn't necessarily punished by their relatively new police force, but rather by the sentence of public scandal: "killing being out of the question, we did the next best. We told the man we could and should make his name stink from one end of London to the other," unaware that ironically, avoiding scandal for his own name is what Jekyll had hoped to avoid by creating Hyde as a bridge between the worlds of London (33). Existing as a liminal criminal means that for much of the story, Hyde has access to London in a way no other gentleman can have without consequence.

As a resident of Soho, Hyde is a London citizen and thus by extension a world citizen who is interestingly situated in a part of London that carries a history as a liminal cosmopolitan space; a Survey of London published by the London County Council in the mid-twentieth century states that Soho has "always been foreign since its original development" and that "its geographical situation on the threshold of the West End makes it much more widely known to visitors, both native and foreign" ("General Introduction"). Hyde has access to Jekyll's back door, the gateway to accessing the laboratory cabinet and drugs, and beyond that Jekyll's home, travelling between social worlds to transform back into the upright doctor. However, this advantage contains within it the problem of unstable identity—Jekyll "lets out" Hyde to find freedom and pleasure but is not fully aware or willing to acknowledge the implication of the form that pleasure takes: that just beneath the surface of the distinguished modern human is a primal creature.

Consider Mr. Enfield's famous description of Hyde that he gives to Mr. Utterson: "There is something wrong with his appearance; something displeasing, something downright detestable... He must be deformed somewhere; he gives a strong feeling of deformity, although I couldn't specify the point" (Stevenson 35-36). Enfield is unwittingly building the profile of a Victorian cosmopolitan criminal, a picture that can exist without any single specific identifying feature. Michael Kelly notes some of the great spoken and unspoken concerns of the late Victorian period: "acute anxiety about otherness and social change—anxiety in which multiple sources converge—hence also of anxiety about fluid identities," which intersects with what Gordon Hirsch identifies as "the ultimate threat posed in Jekyll and Hyde, not that one person is actually two, but that he is many—thus really not one person at all but lacking a coherent self or identity" (Kelly 200, Hirsch 240). Hyde's fluid, plural and quasi-hybrid identity make it difficult for him to be physically identified beyond his size and age, but Enfield and others pick up on something more subtle that Stevenson drips into the doctor's mysterious concoction.

Atavism and degeneration of the nation at large were common fears in the late Victorian period, and cosmopolitan criminals are defined in part by Morehead as "a new racially coded type of urban subspecies within the metropolitan slums, exhibiting degeneration in both physical and moral attributes, and identified as genetically different from a 'pure' English stock" (Morehead 26). Hyde stands out not because of his actual physical features, but due to some subconscious recognition on the part of his fellow citizens that Hyde is not only not one of *them*, but really part of what Morehead calls a "criminal race distinct from the English upper, middle, and lower classes" (30). Rather than taking part in the idealized social cosmopolitanism that theoretically excises borders between people, Hyde's existence forces a blurring of the boundaries in order for him to be free; this is what encourages other citizens to temporarily ignore class structures and other differences in order to try to limit Hyde.

The nighttime attack on the child is the first scene where Hyde's criminal behavior unwittingly creates a generative moral cosmopolitanism, as is evident when the wealthy Enfield

joins the angry crowd along the child's working-class family and empathetically connects with the summoned doctor: "I knew what was in his mind, just as he knew what was in mine" (Stevenson 33). The city-world is briefly united by this act of violence in what seems like a serendipitous coming-together, but this is complicated in that by extension, Hyde must destroy natural order in order to build a sense of brotherhood for even one evening. This raises the question of whether a positive understanding of cosmopolitanism, this sense of togetherness, is actually a significant possible change for their society and a moral foil for Hyde's actions, or whether the generative moral cosmopolitanism only restores the social order temporarily upset in an encounter with a degenerate cosmopolitan criminal, wherein normality means that this small child will go back to playing on the streets of London at 3am. Morehead notes that "cosmopolitanism... can also be utilized in a way that reifies a social hierarchy," and thus oddly, Hyde has both unbalanced and rebalanced the system, both abandoning and regaining his citizenship (Morehead 77).

A related concern in the publicity of cosmopolitan behavior, good or bad, is that these behaviors are overwhelmingly *visible*. Jekyll's acts of charity and religious behavior are noted by others, meaning he takes trouble to make his cosmopolitan benevolence known rather than making anonymous donations or private works. Similarly, Hyde's attack on a working-class child has multiple witnesses, including the wealthy Mr. Enfield, while the murder of an elderly aristocrat is witnessed by a working-class maid. It is of note that these late-night crimes have an abundance of available witnesses, all of whom are able, thanks to surprisingly good lighting in a fog-ridden city, to see exactly what happens. The attack on the elderly Sir Danvers Carew mentioned above takes place in an estranged nighttime cityscape that is full of streetlamps.

In the maid's account of Carew's murder, she only witnesses this crime because she, like Enfield, is engaging with the city as a cosmopolitan. However, rather than indulging in a possibly illicit activity like her male counterpart, she is at her window gazing out over the world of London, stating that "never had she felt more at peace with all men or thought more kindly of the world," and it is specifically noted that Sir Danvers Carew interacts with Hyde directly in front of her window (Stevenson 46). Much like Enfield's wanderings through silent, lamp-lit streets, the lane by the maid's house is described as being "brilliantly lit by the full moon," indicating a reverse of the expected gothic chiaroscuro (46). Rather than sticking to the shadows as a bogeyman criminal, Hyde's atrocities are perhaps deliberately showy. Morehead notes that "a criminal's crimes provided evidence of their racial atavism, so that even if they were English-born, they could be considered a different race to the upstanding English citizen"—Hyde needs to be seen and known to be not one of us in order for the generative moral cosmopolitanism to work (Morehead 20).

During the second attack, it is notable that Hyde strikes "with ape-like fury" when the elderly Carew appeals to a fellow citizen's sense of brotherhood and navigational skills (Stevenson 46). The public outcry over Carew's death, "resented as a public injury," temporarily unites the populace once more, but the subsequent disappearance of Hyde is implied to stall its momentum (54). Jekyll subsequently withdraws from both his public life and Hyde's activities, noting in his confession later that "Jekyll was now my *city of refuge*; let but Hyde peep out an instant and the hands of all men would be raised to take and slay him" (88).

The power of Hyde's brutal nature as a member of the aforementioned "criminal race" is elaborated on in Jekyll's postmortem confession—in addition to sharing how he came to divide himself, Jekyll pinpoints a moment when he realized his control over transformation is dwindling. While sitting in Regent's Park at some unspecified point after the Carew murder,

Jekyll, who had gone for some time without letting Hyde loose, takes a moment to reflect on his selves. In a boundary-crossing moment, Jekyll thinks: “After all I reflected, I was like my neighbors; and then I smiled, comparing myself with other men, comparing my active goodwill with the lazy cruelty of their neglect” (88). Moments later, he spontaneously transforms into Hyde, sans drugs. Committing unnamed transgressions as a finally fully harmonious self, Jekyll is finally at peace with himself, unaware that he has not only fully become a cosmopolitan criminal, but one in denial of his own hypocrisy. It is in framing himself as Dr. Jekyll without acknowledging Mr. Hyde that he has transformed, or rather, has been revealed as his worst self on the bench in the public eye.

Michael Kelly writes, “Cosmopolitan practice can be understood as the pursuit of a different kind of belonging—the ‘citizenship’ of or active identification with a hypothetical figure of belonging exceeding all established parameters of community,” and it is Jekyll’s desire to project the image of a proud cosmopolitan gentleman with sociable and charitable habits that is disrupted by his longing (first controlled but eventually unleashed) to escape moral cosmopolitan and access the other side of the coin, cosmopolitan criminality (Kelly 199). Therefore, Jekyll/Hyde’s actual cosmopolitan practice is a hybridized gothic cosmopolitanism which reflects both his liminal status in the city-world and the frightening potential of the gothic, of which Gordon Hirsch notes: “There is a sense that the terrifying, inexplicable violence within the person and within society will break out once again, that conventional restraints will shatter, and that the belief in personal continuity and identity will prove unsustainable,” raising the question of whether it is *possible* to fully be oneself in Victorian society without transgressing some boundaries. (Hirsch 241). The problem of Jekyll and Hyde is in some sense the problem of the cosmopolitan individual existing in a rapidly changing and anxious conformist society, which perhaps can account in part for the story’s enduring popularity—it is intended as an allegory for hypocrisy, but who among the Victorians and their descendants hasn’t wanted to enjoy social acceptance and respect, all the while indulging in the London nightlife without consequences? The novella seeks to admonish those who would lapse into degenerate behavior, but the response of the public indicates that such cosmopolitan criminality would trigger a moral cosmopolitanism in the populace that serves to rebalance the city-world.

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