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Mr. Utterson: The Epitome of Hetero-normative Lifestyle

When examining *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* by Robert Louis Stevenson through a queer lens, one may feel that Stevenson has a negative opinion on homosexuals during the Victorian Period. Some would claim that this is due to the debate on sexual politics in the late nineteenth-century. People would state that Mr. Hyde represents all that is wrong with the homosexual lifestyle. They would cite the acts of moral degradation in Mr. Hyde and the suppressed urges of a homosexual lifestyle that is released by Dr. Jekyll, leading to his eventual demise, as evidence against homosexuality being a positive lifestyle. They could claim that by Dr. Jekyll releasing this pent-up sexuality, he removed himself from a life of sanity and subjected himself to male hysteria. They could make all of these claims, and they would be right, if they only took a narrow view on the homoerotic undertones within Stevenson's novel. If one would just look, they would see a deeper side to the homosexual subtext; a positive representation of the homosexual lifestyle represented in Mr. Utterson. As much as Mr. Hyde is the dark side of the queer nature, Mr. Utterson represents the hetero-normative aspect of the gay lifestyle that was tolerated in Victorian society. We see this represented in Mr. Utterson's relationship with Mr. Richard Enfield, and how he keeps his homosexual lifestyle a secret. By looking at Mr. Utterson as an example, the reader can assume that Stevenson tolerated and accepted the hetero-normative homosexual lifestyle, as long as it remained hidden.

To understand the novel, one must first be familiar with the history of homosexuality in England, and the change from criminality to psychiatric disorder. As noted in "Pathologizing Sexual Deviance: A History," "Until 1850, the definition of sexual deviance was based primarily on moral, legal and theological considerations" (De Block 277). These

legal considerations were a result of the criminalization of sodomy during the 17th and 18th centuries. Along with acts of bestiality, men engaging in same-sex relations would be sentenced to death, if the evidence brought against the defendants supported the crime. This view also spilled into the profession of psychiatry. Many doctors did not see a connection between homosexuality and mental disorder because they believed that sexual deviants were merely criminals. These doctors based their claims on the belief that homosexuals had free will concerning same-sex relations (279).

The medical profession began to change its view on the criminality of homosexuality in the 1860s. Instead of punishment, psychiatrists began searching for a cure for same gender sexual relations. Opposed to the belief that same gender sex was a disease of the genitalia, psychiatrists felt the need to treat patients with psychology (279). This new psychological treatment led to the creation of homosexuality as a medical term. According to Michael King and Annie Bartlett, Karoly Benkert first used the term homosexuality to describe the act of same-sex relations in his book *Homosexualitat* in 1869. This text furthered the debate on whether homosexuality was a moral or mental issue. It was not until 1892, with the publishing of Krafft-Ebing's *Psychopathia Sexualis,* that society accepted the notion that homosexuality was a disease of the mind (107).

As *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* began being written in September of 1885 and was published in 1886, Stevenson would have been familiar with the debate concerning the classification of homosexuality as a mental disorder (Stevenson 26). Throughout the novel, the reader can see hints of homoerotic text intermingled with the motif of mental disorder. We also begin to see the stigma homosexuality brings and the need for secrecy, through the character Mr. Utterson. If one believes that Mr. Hyde is the outward expression of Dr. Jekyll's repressed homosexuality, the reader can see the need for Mr. Utterson to hide his sexual nature from the world, as Mr. Hyde is the representation of all that is bad in coming out with one's sexuality. But first, the reader must understand that Mr. Utterson is also a homosexual.

There are many statements within the novel to support the fact that Mr. Utterson engages in same-sex relations. The first piece of text supporting this theory is:

> The geniality, as was the way of the man, was somewhat theatrical to the eye; but it reposed on genuine feeling. For these two were old friends, old mates both at school and college, both thorough respecters of themselves and of each other, and, what does not always follow, men who thoroughly enjoyed each other's company. (38)

This passage is a meeting between Mr. Utterson and Dr. Lanyon at the doctor's home. At first, the reader assumes that this is a meeting between old school friends. To understand the deeper meaning, one must understand what took place amongst schoolmates in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. During this time, families within the higher social class sent their children to English boarding schools. As we can see by their professions of doctor and lawyer, both Mr. Utterson and Dr. Lyon would have belonged to this class of society. As stated in *Finding Out: An Introduction to LGBT Studies,* "An active molly subculture developed in England during the eighteenth century . . . Male-male sexuality was thought to run rampant in boys' schools and universities as well" (Meem 22). One would claim that this activity could be confined to the seventeenth-century. Upon further research, I found that this argument could be refuted. A person only needs to read Donald Hall's history of homosexuality in *Queer Theories*. Hall bases his finding on the Victorian writer John Addington Symonds. When speaking of the nineteenth-century, Symonds claims, "same-sex erotic activity was rampant in boys' boarding schools at mid-century" (33).

With this new knowledge of homosexual practices in English schools, the reader can begin to see the homosexual relationship that Dr. Lanyon and Mr. Utterson shared. With the phrases: "For these two were old friends, old mates both at school and college" and "men who thoroughly enjoyed each other's company," a homoerotic subtext begins to emerge. As we see, Mr. Utterson and Dr. Lanyon not only attended primary school together, but they also spent their university years at the same school. This span of almost a decade would give the two characters a chance to explore their sexual interests with each other. When the narrator claims, "men who thoroughly enjoyed each other's company," the reader begins to see that the characters are very close to one another. When you combine this "closeness" and the fact that they were "schoolmates," it is not a far stretch of the imagination that the two characters were past lovers.

We then see a repeat of these past school boy relationships when Mr. Utterson visits his friend Dr. Jekyll. The narrator states, "Mr. Utterson so contrived that he remained behind after the others had departed. This was no new arrangement, but a thing that had befallen many scores of times . . . you could see by his looks that he [Dr. Jekyll] cherished for Mr. Utterson a sincere and warm affection" (44). Through a queer lens, the reader can see a parallel between the relationship Mr. Utterson has with Dr. Lanyon and Dr. Jekyll. With the exclamation that Dr. Jekyll holds "a sincere and warm affection" for Mr. Utterson, the reader can assume that there is more than just a friendly bond between the two people. The simple act of Mr. Utterson remaining behind, until the others have left, makes the reader question the intentions of Mr. Utterson. We also see that this is an ongoing arrangement. The reader must ask himself/herself, what transpires during these secluded moments? Do these men engage in some secret sexual tryst? We only have the context of this one meeting, which gives the reader no insight to the others. It is not until we look further into the text that we find there is maybe more than meets the eye.

The first sign of a deeper relationship between Mr. Utterson and Dr. Jekyll forms in a fantasy concerning Mr. Hyde and Jekyll. In Mr. Utterson's mind, he thinks:

> Or else he would see a room in a rich house, where his friend lay asleep, dreaming and smiling at his dreams; and then the door of that room would be opened, the curtains of the bed plucked apart, the sleeper recalled, and lo ! there would stand by his side a figure to whom power was given, and even at that dead hour, he must rise and do its bidding. The figure in these two phases haunted the lawyer all night. (39)

First, Mr. Utterson fantasizing about Jekyll in bed is enough to question Mr. Utterson's sexuality. No heterosexual male would admit to thinking such thoughts. Adding to this image is the graphic nature of the scene. Not only is Mr. Utterson dreaming about his male friend in bed, but also Mr. Hyde entering. This entering reads as if it were straight from a gay or erotic novel or pornographic movie. The act of the bed curtains being pulled apart and the "sleeper recalled" is very sensual in nature. Not only is the bed quite intimate, but also the curtains give the readers a sense of personal territory. This space is equivalent that of the area around a person's body, their personal space. To see this space being invaded furthers

the sense of intimate relations about to happen. The narrator adds to this image by stating, "he must rise and do its bidding." As the scene already sets a dark sexual tone, the reader may interpret this "bidding" as a dark sexual act. We see that Mr. Jekyll is a submissive personality giving in to any request the dominant Mr. Hyde dictates. Placing this dominance over another in such an intimate setting creates an image of rough sexual intercourse, where Mr. Hyde is the master in the relationship.

There is also a hint of jealousy concerning Dr. Jekyll by Mr. Utterson. Just prior to the aforementioned action, the narrator speaks of the turmoil within Mr. Utterson's mind. He states,"the great, dark bed on which he tossed to and fro, until the small hours of the morning began to grow large. It was a night of little ease to his toiling mind, toiling in mere darkness and besieged by questions" (39). With the phrases "tossed to and fro" and "his toiling mind," the reader can picture the distress Mr. Utterson is under. As this distress leads to the erotic dream, one must question how much is stress and how much is jealousy? As Mr. Utterson is lying in bed in the present, he also visions Jekyll in the same state, when Mr. Hyde enters. The reader can make a connection to the setting Mr. Utterson is in and that in which this homoerotic episode takes place. It is as if Utterson has a longing to be dominated by Hyde, even though he is repulsed by Hyde's character. This idea of submitting to Mr. Hyde further demonstrates the hidden homosexuality within the narrator.

The final passage I wish to highlight concerning Mr. Utterson's sexuality comes from the opening chapter of the novel. When describing Mr. Utterson, the narrator states, "In this character, it was frequently his fortune to be the last reputable acquaintance and the last good influence in the lives of down-going men. And to such as these, so long as they came about his chambers, he never marked a shade of change in his demeanour" (31). On first glance, one would just view this as part of Mr. Utterson's profession as a lawyer. On a regular basis, he would be inclined to meet with those of less reputable morals and defend them. It is the use of the word "chambers," which can be viewed as a queer subtext. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, a chamber is, "A room or suite of rooms in a house, typically one allotted to the use of a particular person, a private room; (in later use) *esp.* a bedroom." As Stevenson did not use the term "office," or the like, the reader can see a

more intimate setting, for the meeting. As these are "down-going men," who lack morals, the reader would wonder in what types of services these criminals would engage in Mr. Utterson's private rooms. As they have been invited into Utterson's private lodgings, I believe Mr. Utterson took full advantage of lack of character, and made them engage in his hidden sexual exploits, to procure his services as a lawyer.

As we have explored the hidden lifestyle and urges of Mr. Utterson, we must now examine Utterson's relationship with Mr. Enfield. We are first introduced to the couple's relationship when it is stated that, "his [Mr. Utterson] affections, like the ivy, were the growth of time . . . Hence, no doubt, the bond that united him to Mr. Richard Enfield, his distant kinsman, the well-known man about town" (31). With the use of "affections" and "the bond that united," to describe the relationship between Utterson and Enfield, the reader can picture a romantic involvement between the two characters. Although they were "kinsmen," it was known in the nineteenth-century that homosexuality was hereditary. According to Chiara Beccalossi in her article titled "Nineteenth-Century European Psychiatry on Same-Sex Desires: Pathology, Abnormality, Normality and the Blurring of Boundaries," doctors understood the connection between heredity and mental disorders. This link between the diseases of the mind and heredity was also applied to sexual deviance (230). As both Mr. Utterson and Mr. Enfield are related, the idea that both would inherit the gene for homosexuality is plausible.

We know that the two men spent much time together. We know this when the narrator states, "in their Sunday walks . . . For all that, the two men put the greatest store by these excursions, counted them the chief jewel of each week, and not only set aside occasions of pleasure, but even resisted the calls of business, that they might enjoy them uninterrupted" (31-32). By the statement that these two men would not engage in anything else when scheduled to meet, we find that they will forsake all else to share each other's company. The act of walking together is also a form of class distinction. David Scobey asserts, "Bourgeois New Yorkers of the Victorian era loved to promenade. Throughout most of the nineteenth century, they made seeing and being seen, in public and in motion, a core rite of sociability" (203). Although the author cites the locality of New York, I have

found, through my participation in reenactments of English society during the Victorian period, that this was also the case with the London society. I have also learned that these "promenades" were primarily exclusive to people within a relationship and women, when their husbands were not around to escort them. This allowed others to see the standing in society the couple shared (Tagatz n.p.). Applied to the situation with Mr. Utterson and Mr. Enfield, more evidence that the fellows had more than a typical friendship is discovered.

It is on one of these walks that the couple encounters the door through which Mr. Hyde enters and leaves Dr. Jekyll's residence. When viewing the surroundings, the couple points out that "Tramps slouched into the recess and struck matches on the panels" (32). Most readers would view this as an innocent observation, but there is more than meets the eye in this statement. One historian, Seth Koven, claims, "Victorian slumming, the coded references . . . to the upper- and middle-class fascination with the bodies of the poor"[1] (qtd. in Reay 1:220-21). By Stevenson using the phrase "tramps," we know that the people the couple is viewing are poor and destitute. Although the "tramps" physical characteristics are not described, we must give credence to the idea that Mr. Utterson and Mr. Enfield are searching for the poor, to engage in "Victorian Slumming."

The question remains, why would males partake in the act of "Victorian Slumming?" Koven asserts that men of the Victorian Period would slum to acquire male prostitutes. Xavier Mayne furthers our understanding of this practice. He states, "although scarcely visible to the uninitiated, male prostitution in the large cities was as common as its female counterpart"[2] (qtd. in Reay 2:221). This statement shows the way that Victorian men exercised sexual deviance. When applied to the novel, one can see that the walks that Enfield and Utterson took were not only for leisure, but also to find men with whom they could engage in sexual intercourse. Although the street on which they were walking was not a bad section of town, the reader also learns that the street that crosses the one they are on, where Dr. Jekyll's front door is located, is a less desirable area of London. The fact that the two fellows notice the poor in Jekyll's back doorway further accentuates the notion that they are

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[1] S. Koven, *Slumming: Sexual and Social Politics in Victorian London* (Princeton, NJ, 2004), ch. 1.
[2] X. Mayne, *The Intersexes: A History of Similisexualism as a Problem in Social Life.* (New York, NY, 1975), pp. 426-42. A reprint of the original edition of 1908. Mayne's real name was Edward Irenaeus Prime Stevenson.

on a mission of sexual deviance.

With all the talk of immoral actions, many would feel that there is no way for Mr. Enfield and Mr. Utterson to have a hetero-normative lifestyle. Along with the couple walking together, secrecy of their relationship is a large factor in creating a hetero-normative image. We see when Mr. Enfield states:

> "I feel very strongly about putting questions; it partakes too much of the style of the day of judgment. 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 you would have thought of) is knocked on the head in his own back garden and the family have to change their name. No sir, I make it a rule of mine: the more it looks like Queer Street, the less I ask." (35)

Mr. Enfield is trying to convey that secrecy is paramount in anyone's life. He is also claiming that if one engages in gossip about another, it is not long before the tables are turned on the gossip. To keep his and Mr. Utterson's relationship a secret, it is best to not discuss the life of others. With the term "day of judgment," the reader also begins to sense a fear of the afterlife by Mr. Enfield. One can relate this fear to the religious idea that the couple's relationship, although similar to a married couple, might condemn them to Hell. Because of this speech by Mr. Enfield, Utterson begins to see the need for secrecy and discretion and agrees with his partner.

By this act of secrecy and all the homoerotic text, we can rightly assume that Stevenson condones homosexual relationships. Through my examination of *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, I have highlighted this with text and my interpretation. Although there was debate on sexual politics in the late nineteenth-century, Stevenson has shown what is right and wrong in the homosexual lifestyle. Yes, Mr. Hyde represents the moral degradation of character, but only by the act of flaunting his sexuality. It is the deeper and secret relationship, of Mr. Utterson and Mr. Enfield, which opens our eyes to the positive aspects of living a hetero-normative lifestyle. This positive representation proves that Stevenson understands both sides of the debate. By creating such an upstanding character as Utterson, Stevenson was trying to convey to society homosexuality was not completely bad.

In context with the period and the advances within the scope of psychiatry, the reader can find Stevenson's advice for discretion to the homosexual male. He would have known and understood how the medical field was beginning to classify homosexuality as a mental illness. He would have known the laws surrounding those who engaged in its practice. The reader can believe this novel was Stevenson's way to inform the homosexual community that they needed to remain secretive. Although this homosexual subculture needed to remain underground during this period, Stevenson gave homosexual males a positive role model to mimic in Mr. Utterson. Even today, it is not hard for gay males to find parallels between their own experiences, and the ones of the characters in the novel. Although homosexuality is more publicly accepted, many of the same struggles in politics and society surround the modern gay subculture as it did in the Victorian Period. Just as it is now, it is nice to know there are supporters, such as Robert Stevenson.

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