

**The Nineteenth Century Novel**  
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**Lecture - 48**  
**The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde, Chapter 5**

Hello and welcome to week 11's lectures. In this session we will be looking closely at chapter 5 of R. L. Stevenson's *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*. So in this chapter, we will be looking at the presence of an important narrative element, which is a letter. And we know that letters are important documents and they play functional roles in a story world, and we can see that they have disruptive roles to play too. So let us see what are the consequences of a letter in this particular novella.

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Chapter: 5  
The Incident of the Letter

- ...the building that was indifferently known as the laboratory or the dissecting-rooms...
- He eyed the dingy, windowless structure with curiosity, and gazed round with a distasteful sense of strangeness, as he crossed the theatre, once crowded with eager students and now lying gaunt and silent.



Handwritten annotations in red ink:

- Mr. Utterson
- ↳ what is he uttering?
- despair
- detective skills "amateur detective"

Chapter 5 is entitled *The Incident of the Letter*. Now we have Mr. Utterson, the friend of Dr. Jekyll, paying a visit to Dr. Jekyll. And he is visiting him in his laboratory for the first time, and that in itself is very strange because these two men have had a very long association with one another, and this is the first time that Mr. Utterson is going to enter the scientific premises of this physician.

And let us see how it looks like, and what are its implications for the narrative and the society in which this novel is situated. The building that was indifferently known as the laboratory or the dissecting room. So it has twin names, it has two names, again the idea of a binary is coming up. So the lab is also known as the dissecting rooms, rooms in which experiments

were carried out, experiments of a scientific nature. And he eyed the dingy, he being Mr. Utterson.

The name by the way, is also very symbolic. Utterson is somebody who utters. So what is he uttering? And his narrative about this particular story world is also very interesting and needs to be unpacked. So that is an aside. Let us get back to the laboratory. “He eyed the dingy windowless structure with curiosity, and he gazed round with a distasteful sense of strangeness as he crossed the theater, once crowded with eager students and now lying gaunt and silent.”

This description is again very metaphoric, there is a comparison being drawn between this space and a human being, a particular kind of human being. So let us take this slowly. So we have a very narrow, closed spatiality here. It is dingy, not very convenient, it is kind of a damp place, and it is also slightly dark and not a comfortable space, that clearly comes through. It is windowless, meaning there is no air coming into this particular structure.

Lack of fresh air indicates, you know, some kind of decay, a kind of a decaying atmosphere is present. And Mr. Utterson is very curious, and that curiosity could also be linked to his detective skills too. He is playing an amateur detective here in this particular novella or short novel, and there is a sense of distaste in him. What else brings up his distaste, can you think back and tell?

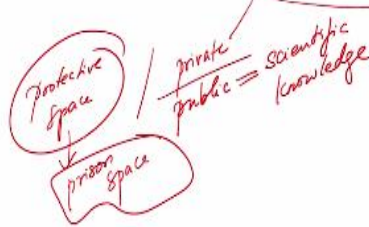
If you remember the early part of the story, the presence of Mr. Hyde brings a lot of distaste to the onlookers. So like Mr. Hyde, this structure also evokes a sense of distaste in the person who is experiencing this particular space. There is a sense of strangeness too as he crosses this theater, this you know, surgical theater. This space was once owned by a surgeon and now Dr. Jekyll, a physician, a scientific man associated with chemistry, owns the space.

So this space was once crowded with eager students, so there was a big crowd of learners here, but now it is lying gaunt and silent. We get a sense that somebody is lying, you know, in a sleeping position, and that person is gaunt looking, tired, haggard and quiet, you know. So that is the sense that we get, and we also get the sense that this atmosphere is not very healthy. Gaunt and silence indicates a quiet despair too. A sense of despair is quite apparent.

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## The Laboratory

- It was a large room, fitted round with glass presses, furnished, among other things, with a cheval-glass and a business table, and looking out upon the court by three dusty windows barred with iron.



The lab is “a large room, fitted around with glass presses”, glass cabinets, cupboards, “furnished, among other things, with a cheval-glass and a business table, and looking out upon the court by three dusty windows barred with iron.” This phrase is very interesting, I will come to that in a second. So as I mentioned, glass presses are cabinets in which all those chemical, you know, material are stored in containers.

And there is a glass, a big looking glass, and we will, you know, discuss the significance of that in a minute. And it looks upon the courtyard and there are three dusty windows. There is something very strange about dusty windows. One, it indicates that it has not been cleaned up on a regular basis, which means that nobody is coming into the room. So this room is very very private.

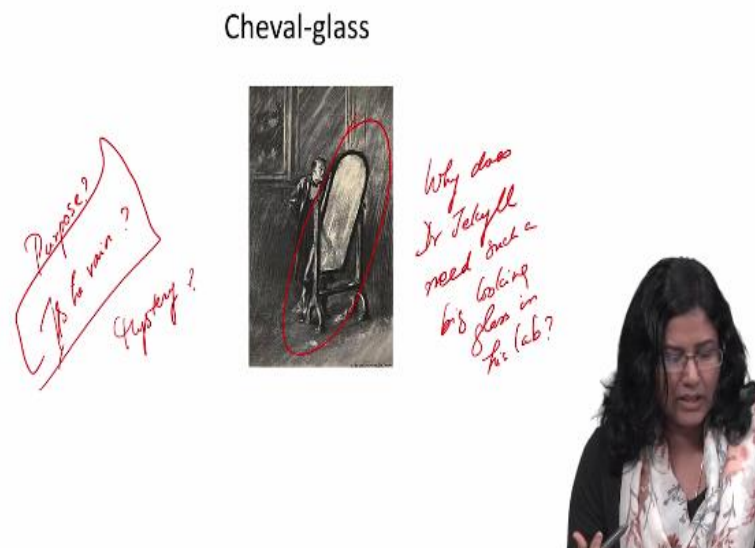
So that is one indication that we get, it is a private space, even though it is associated with something public in the sense that this space is related to scientific knowledge. That is the impression we get when we think of labs, do not they. So, and the other interesting thing as I pointed out is three windows which are barred with iron. So one, it is a very protected space as well and two, it is symbolically a prison space for the doctor who is somehow locked up, bound up, by the activity that he is engaged in.

So something is tying him up symbolically, and that is structurally manifested by the three barred windows, barred not just with any other material but with iron. So again the sense of imprisonment comes up to our mind, the idea of incarceration, and we think back to the

previous novel that we read, A Tale of Two Cities, where the central characters keep getting imprisoned time and again.

So people are being bound up either symbolically or literally by the cultural and, you know, bureaucratic discourses of the day.

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I want to show you the picture of a cheval-glass before going back to that earlier excerpt. So this is the cheval-glass, the long mirror. Why does Dr. Jekyll need such a big looking-glass in his lab, that is an important question to ask. What is the purpose? Is he a vain man? Is he vain? Is he very proud of his appearance? Is he very anxious about his appearance?

And here we are reminded of other looking glasses that we came across in our fiction that we read for this course, and we do come across mirrors in Jane Austen's Persuasion, especially in Kellynch Hall. And Admiral Croft makes a mention that there are several looking glasses in the hall, and these looking glasses bother him and he gets rid of some of the superfluous ones with the help of his wife.

So looking glasses, mirrors indicate vanity, and what exactly is Dr. Jekyll vain about, proud about? So that is a mystery that will be unraveled as the novella heads to a kind of a blazing conclusion. So let us get back to that earlier slide.

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• A fire burned in the grate; a lamp was set lighted on the chimney shelf, for even in the houses the fog began to lie thickly; and there, close up to the warmth, sat Dr Jekyll, looking deadly sick.

*modif*

*Fog: mists  
 vision  
 muddies the atmosphere  
 unhealthy*

*Warm comfortable*

*Fog → Spread over the urban space*



A fire burned in the grate, grate is that fireplace. “A fire burnt in the grate; a lamp was set lighted on the chimney shelf, for even in the houses the fog began to lie thickly; and there, close up to the warmth, sat Dr. Jekyll, looking deadly sick.” So the most obvious thing first, Dr. Jekyll is very ill. Now I want you to think back to the metaphoric figure which is lying gaunt and sick that was used in the context of that space.

The entire, you know, theater room, the surgical room looks like as if it is a person lying down, you know, prostrate with illness. So we have a literal manifestation of sickness in the figure of Dr. Jekyll here. So how interesting, you know, there is a coincidence. So the metaphorical illness is kind of literally embodied in the figure of Dr. Jekyll, and so that is one, you know, interpretation that we can easily make of this passage.

There are others. A fire burned, it is a really warm place. The place is warm, it is very comfortable, we get that sense when we read that in this passage, you know, a fire burns here, there is a lamp on the chimney shelf and Dr. Jekyll sits close up to the fireplace to get a lot of warmth. So this passage gives us an indication that there is a comfort, there is a lot of comfort and cosiness to this place.

But there is one disturbing element. What is that disturbing element? That is the reference to the fog. Fog its mists, it kind of blocks one’s vision, it kind of muddies the atmosphere, it is very unhealthy, inhaling fog is not very good for one’s health. If you feel that there is fog in the room, then there is something wrong in this place too. So let us see what the narrator says again.

“Even in the houses, the fog began to lie thickly.” So even inside the house, there is a kind of a thick, smoke-like air. So if you have smoke-like air in your room what does that indicate? That indicates, as I said, an unhealthy, you know, air in the room, that is the literal interpretation, the metaphoric interpretation is that something is really wrong in terms of the moral order, in terms of the moral universe of this particular domesticity, this particular house, and therefore the entire society of London itself.

So fog is usually known to kind of spread over the urban space, because the urban space houses all the factories, the industrial structures. So there is a lot of industrial activity which is coughing up a lot of smoke into the atmosphere. So the urban spaces usually what is associated with smoke and smog, and now that smoke and smog is kind of entering the household spaces.

If you think about Dickens' fiction, there is quite a lot of fog in his universes. For example, Bleak House opens with a description of the fog that is kind of smothering, you know, suffocating the life of the people of London. And even in a Tale of Two Cities if you look at the opening scene when the Dover coach is, you know, moving on the landscape of Britain, there is a lot of fog and smoke and the wintry air is mixed up with all these bad vapors.

So you know, fog is something that indicates the skewed nature, the moral turpitude of society, and we get the same, you know, motif here. We call this the motif in literature, same motif is drawn in this particular narrative too. So we saw this.

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## Dr Jekyll's promise

- I bind my honour to you that I am done with him in this world.

It is all at an end. And indeed he does not want my help; you do not know him as I do; he is safe, he is quite safe; mark my words, he will never more be heard of."

*Society is also safe from him*



Now if we want to know about the context of this particular excerpt, we need to go back to chapter four where we saw that Sir Danvers Carew was murdered brutally by Mr. Edward Hyde, and Edward Hyde becomes notorious across London. And quite naturally, Dr. Jekyll is affected by the news that his close aide, the man, the young man whom he has taken under his wing is the culprit, the criminal who could, you know, enact such cruelty over a vulnerable, aged, respectable, you know, MP.

So once he comes to know about this, he falls sick, so that is the assumption we can make. He falls sick, and this is Mr. Utterson coming to visit his friend, and this is Dr. Jekyll's promise to his friend. He says that "I bind my honor to you that I am done with him in this world. It is all at an end. And indeed he does not want my help; you do not know him as I do; he is safe, he is quite safe; mark my words, he will never more be heard of."

So we know that everybody is hunting, you know, everybody is trying to hunt down Mr. Edward Hyde. He has disappeared, nobody can track him down, nobody can, you know, give out a portrait that would help people, you know, trace him, because nobody can describe him adequately. So he seems to have kind of disappeared into the smog of London, and this is Dr. Jekyll who says that he is safe, he is quite safe and he is not going to be heard of, you will not even hear about him. And he further says that I am done with him in this world, I am no longer going to be associated with Edward Hyde, our association, our friendship is at an end. And this is very interesting in this entire quotation, he says that he does not want my help. He does not want my help anymore.

I do not need to be his guide, he can act on his own. And further, this is another interesting statement, you do not know him as I do. I am quite well-versed with the dynamics of his personality, and that is why I tell you that he does not want my help. So this is a mysterious, you know, narrative about Hyde, and then there is further promise that Dr. Jekyll offers about not going to be associated with him anymore.

When he says he is quite safe, he is also hinting that society is also safe from him. In other words, there will be no more criminal activities that will be committed by him, therefore he is indirectly hinting that please let him lie low and leave him to himself. He will not come back into respectable society.

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The Letter *helpless person - Lawyer*

- "I have received a letter; and I am at a loss whether I should show it to the police. I should like to leave it in your hands, Utterson; you would judge wisely, I am sure; I have so great a trust in you."

*The Will of Dr. Jekyll amending*

*Anne Elliot*

*The Letter*

*Manipulative*

Dr. Jekyll also offers Mr. Utterson another interesting object here, and he says that "I have received a letter; and I am at a loss whether I should show it to the police. I should like to leave it in your hands, Utterson; you would judge wisely, I am sure; I have so great a trust in you." So this is another document that is coming up in this narrative. The first document that is much discussed is the will.

The will of Dr. Jekyll which he keeps amending, right. He first says that on his death the property would go to Mr. Edward Hyde, and then he says that it would go to Mr. Hyde even if he disappears, even if Dr. Jekyll disappears for more than three months, the property has to automatically go to Edward Hyde. So that is one interesting document that we have seen in this narrative early on.



And Victorian fiction in general is associated with, you know, who is going to get the money, you know, the novels are obsessed with this, you know, topic. Who is going to get the property at the end of the novel, is it the central hero, is it somebody else, what are the implications of getting the property?

So these are some of the questions that you know, fascinates Victorian fiction, 19th century fiction, and if you go back to Austen's *Persuasion*, we know that Anne Elliot is not going to get Kellynch Hall, right? Anne Elliot does not want the property, and that is very interesting, and she refuses to marry a man who will get the property for her, and she instead chooses a kind of an adventurer, Captain Wentworth, who makes money on his own merits.

So that is a different kind of dynamic that we have, but on the whole, Victorian fiction, 19th century fiction is geared towards answering this question of who is going to be the inheritor of the biggest property in that, you know, novel universe. So here, who is going to get the property of Dr. Jekyll is one of the questions that is fascinating to answer, and that question will be answered quite, you know, unexpectedly, quite curiously, at the end of the novel.

Because you know, we will come to know of a person who is quite different, whom we do not expect to inherit the money get it at the end of the day. So we have talked about the document of the will. Now I would like to talk about the letter, and Dr. Jekyll offers this object to Mr. Utterson. He says that I do not know what to do about it, I am at a loss. He kind of represents himself as a helpless person here, and he seeks the help of the lawyer, Mr. Utterson.

And he says that I do not know whether I should hand it to the police, but then I should like to leave it in your hands. Look at the way the, you know, idea shifts, the idea of Mr. Jekyll shifts, and he says that I should like to leave it in your hands because you are such a capable, wise person and I trust you quite a lot. There is a very interesting play of ideas in this word trust, you know, he is indicating something here.

And I want you to go back to the first chapter of this novella, and there we see a crowd scene, a scene in which Mr. Hyde cruelly tramples down a little girl, and the crowd is furious. They want to get this man you know, to the police, but then they do not. They do not get him to the police, what they do instead is they blackmail him into giving the girl's family 100 pounds.

So instead of going to the legal system, the judicial system, the police system, they kind of solve the matter privately. The same formula is kind of utilized here, look at the way Dr. Jekyll, you know, throws out that question. I do not know whether I should go to the police, but I will give it to you. So he is just solving the matter privately in some ways, or he is strategically doing it for reasons of his own.

So this is an interesting, you know, thing that we can think about the attitude of Jekyll, and I would use the word manipulative here. Since I have read the novel and I know what the outcome is, in retrospect I would call this as extremely manipulative behavior in which Dr. Jekyll is trying to prey on the values of honor and integrity and loyalty that Mr. Utterson holds dear. And he knows that he can trust in Mr. Utterson who will not do anything that will bring scandal to Dr. Jekyll's reputation.

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**The Letter**

- ... "Have you the envelope?" he asked,
- "I burned it," replied Jekyll, "before I thought what I was about. But it bore no postmark. The note was handed in."

Mysterious place of origin

And an interesting question follows from Mr. Utterson. He asks his friend, "have you the envelope?" "I burned it," replied Jekyll, "before I thought what I was about. It bore no postmark. The note was handed in." So Mr. Utterson asks a very interesting question, a pointed question, and he is once again playing the detective here.

He is hoping to trace the origin, the place of origin of the letter, because that would give some indication as to the place in which it was posted, and that would get the police on the track to you know, hunting this criminal down. And the question was immediately answered by Jekyll

who says I burnt it, and he kind of expresses it very innocently, before I knew what I was about, before I thought what I was about, why was this hurry?

Why was he in a hurry to burn it? But then he you know, covers up his mistake of, the supposed mistake by saying that there was no postmark, there was no stamp on the envelope, it was handed in at the house, and that is why it does not matter, you know, whether I burned the envelope or not. So there is a lot of, you know, hodgepodge about the way in which Dr. Jekyll, you know, treats the letter, and he adds to the mystery that is enveloping the origins and the current place of Mr. Hyde.

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- "Well, I shall consider," returned the lawyer. "And now one word more: it was Hyde who dictated the terms in your will about that disappearance?"
- The doctor seemed seized with a qualm of faintness: he shut his mouth tight and nodded.
- "I knew it," said Utterson. "He meant to murder you. You have had a fine escape."



This is the response of Mr. Utterson who says; "Well, I shall consider,' returned the lawyer. 'And now one word more: it was Hyde who dictated the terms in your will about that disappearance?' The doctor seemed seized with a qualm of faintness: he shut his mouth tight and nodded. 'I knew it,' said Utterson. 'He meant to murder you. You have had a fine escape.'"

So while there is this discourse about the letter and its implications such as where did it come from, why is it addressed to Hyde and what was in the letter, you know, we never know what was in the letter, interestingly enough. This chapter does not tell us, Mr. Utterson does not tell us, we do not know exactly what Mr. Hyde apparently wrote to Dr. Jekyll. That is immaterial, the content is immaterial.

What is important, significant for narrative purposes is its form, you know, the physical element, the object that it becomes and which is transferred to Mr. Utterson. Anyway, the lawyer who has received the letter jumps to the previous document, and he is worried about that. He asks this important question to which he wants to know the answer, and he asked was it Hyde who dictated the terms, did he ask you to write that will.

Did he ask you to make that amendment about your disappearance? So in that will, if you remember, Jekyll wrote that if I disappear, Mr. Hyde is going to get the money and the house and everything. So Mr. Utterson wants to know if it was dictated, if he was forced to do such a, you know, will, and the answer is yes. The doctor nods, agrees with his mouth shut tight, he just nods and Mr. Utterson is justified.

He is quite ecstatic to know that yes, his assumptions have been quite right, and what that assumption is that he forced him to write, amend the will in such a way so that he can immediately get the property if he is able to murder Dr. Jekyll. So he says that he meant to murder, he was going to get rid of you, and now you have escaped his clutches. So Mr. Utterson is relieved about the disappearance of Mr. Hyde because you know, that would

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