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‘His bachelor house’: the unhomely home of the fin de siècle’s bourgeois bachelor in Robert Louis Stevenson’s Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde.

Ashleigh Prosser

Robert Louis Stevenson’s gothic novella Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde has been textually re-embodied and figuratively re-imagined since its debut in 1886. The character of Dr Jekyll/Mr Hyde has become iconic in popular culture and his name(s) has even entered our modern lexicon as a colloquial term. The novella has also attracted much critical attention since its publication, and previous scholarship has explored many diverse interpretations regarding the contextual significance of the story and the potential allegory it represents. It has been argued, for example, that the novella’s story expresses Victorian society’s fears over a ‘crisis of civilisation’ at the fin de siècle, that Dr Jekyll represents the deterioration of the middle-classes, that Mr Hyde’s character is exemplary of theories of degeneration, atavism, sexual deviation and of the latent violent, criminal tendencies of the lower working classes, to list only a few. However, the scope of this paper is limited to the discussion of constructions of masculine domesticity in the novella.

The study of constructions of masculinity in Stevenson’s text and more widely in Victorian fin de siècle gothic fiction is not a new endeavour and there is an array of scholarship available on the Victorians’ literary representations of gender in gothic fiction. However, this paper seeks more specifically to examine the ways in which the figure of the bourgeois bachelor and his construction of an alternative form of masculine domesticity in Victorian fin de siècle society, are conveyed in Stevenson’s gothic novella via the unhomely home space. By applying Freud’s theory of das unheimliche (the uncanny, literally translated as
to a close reading of the text, this paper seeks to identify moments of the unhomely within the home and read them as spaces through which the bourgeois bachelor’s alternative form of masculine domesticity at the fin de siècle can be understood. This interpretation of Stevenson’s text is founded on reading the unhomely home as a literary chronotope, a symbolic representation of the experience of masculine domesticity within a specific moment in time, the Victorian fin de siècle, through a specific space, the bourgeois bachelor’s home.

Das unheimliche

The concept of the uncanny has been widely discussed across a variety of disciplines which has resulted in various wide-ranging analyses of the term. This paper, like most scholarship, begins with Sigmund Freud’s seminal essay published in 1919, Das Unheimliche, or The Uncanny. Freud’s essay is one of the earliest cross-disciplinary studies of the uncanny that embraced aesthetic, literary and psychoanalytic approaches to this ‘particular species of the frightening’. Significantly, Freud argues that defining the concept of the uncanny is particularly elusive in many languages, but concludes that etymologically, the German word unheimlich and the English word uncanny are the closest semantic equivalents. By comparing various dictionary definitions of heimlich, ‘homely’, it appears to become ‘increasingly ambivalent’ until it ultimately ‘merges with its antonym unheimlich, ‘unhomely’, which, Freud argues, demonstrates that, ‘the uncanny (das unheimliche, ‘the unhomely’) is in some ways a species of the familiar (das heimliche, ‘the homely’)’. Freud cites a particularly pertinent example from the 1877 German Dictionary of Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm, in which the unheimlich, ‘starting from the homely and the domestic’, is defined as ‘a further development towards the notion of something removed from the eyes of strangers, hidden, secret’. Consequently, Freud develops the argument that an uncanny experience, such as the
feeling of *déjà vu* or meeting a *doppelgänger*, can be attributed to a personal psychological encounter with the return of ‘repressed childhood complexes’ (originating from within family life) and the ‘primitive beliefs’ of pre-modern society, which have been ‘surmounted’ through our entrance into adulthood within modern society but in an instant can ‘appear to be once again confirmed.’

Freud argues that this confirmation occurs in the moment when fantasy and reality become unknowingly blurred: ‘when we are faced with the reality of something that we have until now considered imaginary, when a symbol takes on the full function and significance of what it symbolises’.

This uncanny blurring between fantasy and reality is a frequent feature of Victorian gothic fiction, particularly within *fin de siècle* works in which post-Enlightenment dominant understandings of reality are commonly blurred with the fantasies of pre-modern society’s gothic supernaturalism. Stevenson’s *fin de siècle* gothic fiction appears to explore what Anthony Vidler alleges to be the ‘yet unfinished history’ of the uncanny, whereby ‘the homely, the domestic, the nostalgic,’ are challenged by their ‘ever-threatening, always invading, and often subversive “opposites.”’

This paper thus seeks to suggest that in Stevenson’s text, the experience of the unhomely within the home space functions to represent the challenges faced by Victorian middle-class society’s ideologically imagined conception of male middle-class domesticity and the home space itself, and its paradoxical existence within the real world of middle-class Britain at the end of the century.

**Home is where the heart(h) is: middle-class domesticity in *fin de siècle* Britain.**

During the Victorian era, Britain experienced remarkable periods of transformation through industrialisation and urbanisation, technological and scientific advancements, global trading and capitalist economic market growth, imperialist expansions
and colonisation, and various other political, social and cultural changes that completely revolutionised its people, their ideologies, and their perception of and position within the modern world. Britain’s internal and external transformations were both based on the self-interested expansionist principles of consumer capitalism, which arose from domestic political, social and economic changes that were the result of the nation’s development from an ambitious agrarian country to an urban trading and manufacturing market-economy. These changes, propelled by the rise of the middle classes and the dominance of emerging bourgeois capitalist ideologies, produced a British Empire that was to occupy the richest and most powerful position in the world for the majority of the nineteenth century. However, by the end of the century, Victorian Britain had begun to feel the effects of such an accelerated rise towards modernity.

In the fin de siècle, Britain began to fall from its imperial pedestal, vulnerable to the rise of other international powers such as the United States and changing attitudes concerning the morality of colonisation. Closer to home, all classes of society suffered the social and cultural effects of the Industrial Revolution as large-scale urbanization transformed everyday life itself, not just where it took place. It was these changes to the everyday life of most of society that opened up a space through which the dominant middle-class ideology of domesticity, traditional gender roles and the family structure could be actively questioned for the first time. The contextual focus of this paper is on this liminal space in time in which Stevenson’s novella was written, and through which one can potentially read alternative constructions of middle-class masculinity in Victorian society at the fin de siècle.

John Tosh, in his seminal study A Man’s Place: Masculinity and the Middle-Class Home in Victorian England, argues that domesticity in the Victorian period was ‘an integral aspect of modernity’ because the ideological development of the concept
was socially and culturally ‘inconceivable without large-scale urbanization’ to offer a dichotomous ‘other’ space – the city.’ Tosh maintains that it was the ‘well-ordered home, with its welcoming hearth and its solid front door’ that provided the ‘most reassuring antidote to the alienation of city life’ (p. 32). Tosh argues that because of this relationship between the rise of modernity driven by the middle classes and their development of domesticity and the home space as a moral sanctuary, the concept became the ‘talisman of bourgeois culture’ and eventually the ‘goal of the conventional good life’ for almost all Victorian families, regardless of class (p. 4). For Victorian men, the dominant understanding of masculine identity was constructed around the home, the workplace and all-male associations, particularly because, as Tosh has suggested, middle-class men’s power came from ‘their privileged freedom to pass at will between the public and the private’ (p. 2). Thus, for men, the Victorian moral ideology of domesticity created a distinctly middle-class concept of acceptable masculine public and private identities as professionals, husbands, fathers and sons.

Tosh proposes that for women, this gendered, spatial understanding of domesticity was limited to the private sphere, and thus created a ‘cult of the home’ that was most commonly associated with women’s ‘proper’ fulfilment of masculine expectations of feminine domestic roles as morally upstanding wives, mothers and daughters (p. 5). Therefore, the middle-class home became an idealised space for Victorian society in which domesticity could unite the masculine and feminine, to borrow Tosh’s phrase, ‘together in a proper relation of complementarity’ (p. 7). However, by the end of the century, the idealised middle-class ‘cult of the home’ was not as representative of the reality of Victorian domesticity as it had been at the beginning of the era. The late nineteenth century was a turning point for women’s rights as women gained political privileges, economic entitlements and legal liberties for the first time within both the public
and private spheres.

By the *fin de siècle*, the public and private lives of Victorian men were exposed to close scrutiny and actively critiqued for the first time in the period. Homosocial relationships and the popularity of the ‘gentlemen’s club’ culture moved into a dominant position within middle-class men’s domestic life, male sexuality and sexual practices were publicly brought into question, and the preference not to enter into marriage and thus domestic patriarchy came to be a viable, albeit controversial, choice for many bourgeois bachelors. However, Tosh is quick to maintain that the ‘commanding heights of the traditional structure remained intact’ and that to argue that the *fin de siècle* middle-class domestic patriarchy was ‘in crisis’ would be a ‘wild exaggeration’ (p. 160). Nonetheless, Tosh argues that by the end of the century, Victorian middle class society had witnessed the ‘climax of domesticity’ and the ‘first major reaction against it’, which placed this moral ideology of acceptable masculine and feminine roles within the private home space into a precarious position (see pp. 151, 196).

Nicholas Royle has pertinently described the experience of the uncanny as ‘a sense of homeliness uprooted, the revelation of something unhomely at the heart of the hearth and home.’

Robert Louis Stevenson’s *Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* is overwhelmed by this sense of ‘homeliness uprooted’, and this paper wishes to suggest that it the figure of the bourgeois bachelor at the *fin de siècle*, who transgressed the traditional patriarchal expectations of domesticity for men, that is the catalyst for this feeling of unhomeliness within the text’s domestic home spaces. The masculine identity of the Victorian bachelor at the *fin de siècle* was constructed around their rejection of the role of the patriarch, the husband and father, of the middle-class home. Instead, the bourgeois bachelor carved out two alternative domestic spaces within the private sphere, which one can argue function as unhomely homes because they represent a form of
homeliness that is uprooted from the dominant ideological understanding of the home.

The first of these unhomely homes was the ‘Gentlemen’s Club’, an exclusively masculine, homosocial domestic sanctuary for men of the middle and upper-middle classes, that offered a private space within the public sphere, an alternative ‘home’ in which, Tosh affirms, an ‘ethos of fraternalism replaced the ties of family’ (p. 129). Tosh argues that the homosocial relationships fostered by bachelorhood within club culture offered an ‘alternative emotional resource’ to that found within traditional domesticity, and by the end of the century, these relationships had become the focus of many men’s lives, often to the exclusion of marriage altogether (p. 185). Therefore, the second unhomely home space inhabited by the bourgeois bachelor of the day was their actual private home, which was often an uncanny reflection of the traditional ‘feminine’ domestic home without its governing women – the wives and daughters of the patriarch. Stevenson’s novella exemplifies the unhomeliness of the two unhomely home spaces of the bourgeois bachelor to a nicety via their transformation into uncanny and sometimes explicitly gothic spaces, in which their inhabitants often appear uncannily ‘at home’. The rest of the paper seeks to explore this interpretation through a close examination of the text.

**The bourgeois bachelors of *Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde***

*Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* is dominated almost exclusively by the figure of the professional middle-class bachelor, represented by the two doctors, Dr Jekyll and Dr Lanyon, the lawyer Mr Utterson, and two gentlemen, Mr Enfield and Mr Hyde. Stevenson demonstrates that middle-class masculine identity was defined by status, profession and public persona by introducing characters first through their professional status (which is occasionally substituted for their name), and then
through the company they keep. Mr Utterson is introduced as ‘the lawyer [...] a man of rugged countenance’ whose helpful nature led him to be the ‘last reputable acquaintance and the last good influence in the lives of down-going men’ but whose friends ‘were those of his own blood or those whom he had known the longest’. Mr Enfield is introduced as Mr Utterson’s ‘distant kinsman’ and a ‘well known man about town’ (p. 5). The ‘great’ Dr Lanyon and Mr Utterson are ‘old mates both at school and college’ and are the two oldest friends of Dr Jekyll (p. 12).

Furthermore, Dr Jekyll self-consciously asserts his own middle-class position in professional, bourgeois society in his full statement of the case which opens with a brief biography of his life born 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 fellowmen [...] with every guarantee of an honourable and distinguished future’ (p. 53). Consequently, Stevenson signifies very early in the text that the main characters are associated by a network of professional and personal relationships that have arisen from their status as well-established bourgeois bachelors.

As previously discussed, the domesticity of these professional middle-class bachelors transgressed Victorian society’s dominant understanding of the gendered, spatial ideology of the domestic by supplanting the traditional concept of the feminine domestic home space with the exclusively masculine brotherhood of the ‘gentlemen’s club’, a private domestic space completely outside of the traditional home. In the novella, the homosocial relationships between the main characters represent the dynamics of this alternative space for masculine domesticity at the fin de siècle. The action of the novella is driven by Mr Utterson’s dedication to the protection of Dr Jekyll’s reputation from the disgrace of his association with the violent transgressions of Mr Hyde. As Stephen Arata concisely states, what unites professional men together in the public-cum-private exclusively
masculine domestic space of the gentlemen’s club is precisely this ‘commitment to protecting the good names of oneself and one’s colleagues.’\textsuperscript{15} Therefore, Stevenson’s characters appear to represent a microcosmic representation of the time’s professional (and thus necessarily male) middle class, who, in order to protect their pretence of respectability as society’s elite, must seek refuge in the confidences of one another, so that their own or their companions’ transgressions can be kept hidden and safe within the bounds of society’s expectations. By the \textit{fin de siècle}, the role of the confidant and protector of reputations of middle-class men, once considered the duty of a trustworthy, discreet and morally-upstanding wife, was now a duty expected of a fellow gentleman of the bachelor brotherhood.

Furthermore, in Stevenson’s novella middle-class women, traditionally considered symbols of the ideal domestic home space in the Victorian era, are notably absent. The novella places the main characters in both solitary and exclusively homosocial domestic scenes within middle-class home spaces that emphasise the unhomely realities of the bourgeois bachelor’s alternative form of masculine domesticity. When at home, Mr Utterson, Dr Lanyon and Dr Jekyll can all be found alone, sitting close by the fire of a glowing hearth, possibly reading ‘some dry divinity’ with a glass of wine in hand (pp. 11, 12 and 24). Mr Utterson, seen the most times at his own hearth, which made the room ‘gay with firelight’, on one occasion shares a ‘bottle of a particular old wine’ with his head clerk, Mr Guest. These scenes of masculine domesticity evoke an atmosphere of unhomeliness, of isolation and emptiness in a space which according to traditional domestic ideologies they should not, because they lack the defining feature of Victorian society’s dominant understanding of the home, the family and its women and children. Arata similarly argues that the arousal of these unhomely feelings comes from Stevenson’s transformation of ‘the hearth – that too familiar image of cosy Victorian domesticity – into a symbol of these men’s isolation
and repression.\textsuperscript{16}

All the scenes of domesticity in Stevenson’s novella lack the feminine and familial presence that was understood to have defined the dominant ideological conception of the private home space for the Victorian middle classes. The novella is void of any representation of the middle-class family, or the middle-class woman; the only women who are fleetingly present in the text are of the lower, domestic and working classes.\textsuperscript{17} In fact, Stevenson goes so far as to make women completely superfluous as a sex. As Judith Halberstam compellingly argues, the birth of Mr Hyde literally comes from the flesh of Dr Jekyll who ‘felt it struggle to be born’, and was brought about by scientific experiment which conveys ‘a gruesome parody of pregnancy’.\textsuperscript{18} Dr Jekyll’s experiment symbolically renders women’s natural reproductive powers redundant.

Thus the late Victorian London of \textit{Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde} is depicted as a homosocial space occupied entirely by bourgeois men, products of the nineteenth century’s rise of modernity and the professional, scientific and technological world of the times. The setting of Stevenson’s novella can thus be understood to be an uncanny gothic reflection of the microcosmic world of the \textit{fin de siècle} bourgeois bachelor, without middle-class women or any portrayal of their public or personal lives, relationships or families. It can be argued that through this exaggerated absence of the feminine in the novella’s homosocial representation of Victorian London, Stevenson’s depiction of the unhomely home space functions symbolically to represent contemporary issues concerning the bourgeois bachelor’s rejection of the dominant middle-class ideological conception of an idealised familial, feminised home space governed by the patriarch.

\textbf{The uncanny gentleman Mr Hyde’s unhomely home}

Stevenson’s representation of Mr Hyde’s class status as one of these bourgeois bachelors is another instance of the uncanny
within the masculine home space. In the novella, many characters describe him as a villainous monster, and yet he is most frequently referred to as a gentleman. For example, Mr Enfield, when recounting to Mr Utterson Mr Hyde’s trampling of a young girl, consistently refers to Mr Hyde as ‘my gentleman’, suggesting that he is of equal class. However, it is also necessary to acknowledge the possibility that the characters’ use of the term ‘gentleman’ may be being applied ironically by both the characters and the author. This argument rests on an interpretation of the term being used by the characters as an actual description based on considerations of class. For example, one could assume if Mr Hyde was not a gentleman, but rather a lower working-class man, that his speech and accent would contextually be very different from that of the middle and upper-middle classes, and that this would be noted by the characters in their description of his behaviour and physical characteristics; yet no characters make any claim that Mr Hyde is not well spoken, or speaks colloquially, or with an accent not of their own refined, middle-class tongue.

Furthermore, Mr Enfield, the doctor ‘Sawbones’ and the child’s father promise to enact their own distinctly middle-class punishment on Mr Hyde: ‘killing being out of the question’ they do the ‘next best’ and vow to ‘make such a scandal out of this [...] to make his name stink from one end of London to the other’ (p. 7). Mr Hyde emphasises that ‘no gentleman but wishes to avoid a scene,’ and responds to such threats with the expected reaction of an urbane, middle-class gentleman of the period by offering a monetary bribe (p. 7). The men all agree to rest until morning in Mr Enfield’s chambers, they even breakfast together, before going to the bank to witness Mr Hyde cash the cheque (signed by Dr Jekyll) to prove it is not a forgery (p. 8). The act of Mr Hyde breakfasting with these men, after Mr Enfield has offered them his home as a resting place, seems unusual unless Mr Hyde is considered to be at least of the same class. Stephen Arata further affirms this theory, suggesting that the entire scene exhibits
the men’s recognition of Mr Hyde as ‘one of their own.’ They address Hyde with the ‘politeness due to a social equal,’ and the men ‘literally encircle Hyde to protect him’ from the women ‘wild as harpies’ so that they may handle the situation within their own private masculine ‘club’ world. Consequently, they threaten the punishment most feared by a middle-class gentleman, a disgraced reputation. This scene reveals that Mr Hyde, in the words of Arata, ‘may not be an image of the upright bourgeois male, but he is decidedly an image of the bourgeois male.’

The private domestic space of Mr Hyde’s rooms in Soho, further conveys the uncanny because it offers the reader another representation of ‘unhomely’ masculine domesticity. The house’s location within the city of London suggests that it should not be the home of a bourgeois gentleman who was ‘heir to a quarter of a million sterling’ (p. 22). Linda Dryden argues that fin de siècle gothic literary representations of London illustrate Victorian popular perceptions of the ‘threatening nature of the metropolitan experience,’ in which the city is a ‘schismatic space that contains extremes of wealth and poverty’ as exemplified by the class divisions of the East and West Ends. Stevenson physically embodies such fin de siècle anxieties within the geography of London by gothicising the juxtaposition of the lower socio-economic suburb of Soho with the light, bright busy squares and main streets of the West End, where the majority of the novella’s bourgeois bachelors’ houses are situated.

In the novella, the suburb of Soho is depicted as a specifically gothic topography because its neighbourhoods and by-streets are described as dark, dangerous labyrinths of vice and sin, frequently obscured by thick layers of fog, which produce the appearance of an endless night (p. 22). Furthermore, Mr Hyde’s house is situated in a ‘dingy street’ in a ‘dismal quarter of Soho’, between ‘a gin palace, [and] a low French eating house’, where ‘many ragged children huddled in the doorways, and many women of different nationalities passing out, key in hand, to
have a morning glass’ (pp. 21-22). Soho is also described by Mr Utterson as a ‘district of some city in a nightmare’ (p. 22). Mr Utterson’s own nightmare of the ‘nocturnal city’ haunted by ‘that human Juggernaut’ Mr Hyde, who glides ‘stealthily through sleeping houses [...] through wider labyrinths of lamplighted city,’ to intrude into Dr Jekyll’s bedroom and force him to do his bidding, crushing children in his wake, more than reinforces this gothic vision of London (p. 13).

The unhomely sense of domesticity within Mr Hyde’s residence in Soho offers an equally strange encounter for Mr Utterson and Inspector Newcomen. Mr Hyde employs a housekeeper, a ‘silvery-haired old woman’ with an ‘evil face’; but when confronted with Mr Utterson and Inspector Newcomen, her ‘manners were excellent’ (p. 22). The presence of a housekeeper suggests a bourgeois home-owner, and interestingly, she mirrors the uncanniness of her employer who is also described as evil and yet well mannered. Another encounter with the unhomely is Mr Hyde’s decision to occupy only a few rooms, leaving the rest of his house empty. However, the rooms he has chosen have been decorated to the standards of a bourgeois gentleman’s refined, expensive tastes: ‘The closet was filled with wine; the plate was of silver, the napery elegant; a good picture hung upon the walls [...] and the carpets were of many plies and agreeable in colour’ (p. 22). Mr Hyde’s home can thus be read as an unhomely space of masculine domesticity because of its scandalous (for an apparent gentleman) lower-class location in London’s disreputable Soho district, the presence of an ‘evil-faced’ yet well-mannered housekeeper, and its considerable uninhabited emptiness. Nevertheless, his rooms are notably agreeable to Mr Utterson and Inspector Newcomen for they appear to simulate the tastes of a bourgeois gentleman, much like Mr Utterson himself.

**The doors to the uncanny duality of Dr Jekyll’s house**

The uncanny is further manifested in this unhomely domestic
way through the respectable frontage of Dr Jekyll’s house, which architecturally conceals the identity of Dr Jekyll’s old medical theatre and laboratory cabinet through the buildings’ apparent physically separate existences. Dr Jekyll’s home, situated in a ‘square of ancient, handsome houses’, obscures its relationship to its own gothic double through external physical appearances (p. 16). The disused theatre and laboratory appear as a ‘sinister block of building’ that ‘bore in every feature, the marks of prolonged and sordid negligence’ located in a ‘dingy neighbourhood’ (p. 6). In actuality, these structures are situated inside the property of Dr Jekyll’s home, and are internally connected to the house itself. The gothic secret of the uncanny nature of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde’s dual existence is thus concealed within, and symbolically reflected by, the house’s architectural ‘split personality’. The doors to Dr Jekyll’s house, the old medical theatre and laboratory-cum-cabinet are thus of great significance for this discussion of the uncanny, gothic depiction of the bourgeois bachelor’s home space because they can be read as symbolic thresholds representative of his transgressive experience of masculine domesticity at the fin de siècle.

The door which Mr Hyde uses to access Dr Jekyll’s laboratory opens the novella as the subject of ‘Story of the Door’ recounted by Mr Enfield as a ‘very odd story’ (p. 6). Mr Enfield and Mr Utterson both remark that they have taken note of the door previously because the door itself is very odd; it is ‘nothing but a door’ and yet it is also unusually ‘blistered and distained’ and ‘equipped with neither bell nor knocker’ (p. 6). The door is further described as set in what appears to be a deformed face, ‘a blind forehead of discoloured wall’ which lacks eyes for it ‘showed no window’ on the upper storey, and on the lower storey, the strange door appears to be its tightly closed mouth. David Seed pertinently suggests that Stevenson is employing the ‘traditional trope of the house as body, the house as the container of the soul.’ Thus the building’s uncanny face both masks and
reveals the duality concealed within its structure and its owner’s bodies and soul(s).

Furthermore, this mysterious introduction to the physical and symbolic duality of Dr Jekyll’s house is Stevenson’s first use of the uncanny as a gothic technique of foreshadowing for the story that is to follow. In this sense, the recounting of the ‘Story of the Door’ is uncanny because the story is being retold, it is both foreshadowed and foreshadowing the novella. As Shafquat Towheed has confirmed, the ‘Story of the Door’ is not a ‘new adventure into the unknown’ but rather a ‘return to the familiar’, particularly evident when Mr Utterson states, ‘I do not ask you the name of the other party [...] because I know it already,’ thus revealing that Mr Enfield’s ‘tale has gone home’ (p. 9, my emphasis).25

The foreshadowing of uncanniness is clearly revealed once the door is found to be the back door to Dr Jekyll’s laboratory in the ‘Incident at the Window’, thus positioning it as a gothic double of the front door to Dr Jekyll’s house. The entrance hall to Dr Jekyll’s home reflects its distinguished owner: it ‘wore a great air of wealth and comfort’ and opens to reveal a ‘large, low-roofed, comfortable hall paved with flags, warmed (after the fashion of a country house) by a bright open fire, and furnished with costly cabinets of oak.’ Mr Utterson considers this hall to be the ‘pleas- antest room in London’ despite his feelings of ‘a menace in the flickering of the firelight’ and the ‘uneasy starting of the shadow on the roof’, a response that is perhaps a reflection on the reality of the unhomely-homeliness of his own bachelor house (p. 16). It is by such symbolic means, then, that the ideologically transgres- sive nature of the fin de siècle bourgeois bachelor’s alternative form of domesticity is represented, as Stevenson shows the entrances to bourgeois bachelors’ home spaces, in this instance Dr Jekyll’s hall, to be uncanny thresholds indeed.

In the novella, the very last threshold to be crossed by the characters (and the reader) is the red baize door to Dr Jekyll’s cabinet, set at the top of a flight of stairs within the disused
medical theatre. The cabinet is only encountered once before ‘The Last Night’, when Mr Utterson goes to visit Dr Jekyll after Sir Danvers Carew’s murder. He is received, unusually, in Dr Jekyll’s cabinet and experiences a foreboding ‘distasteful sense of strangeness’ when he is brought through the courtyard into the ‘dingy, windowless structure’ (p. 24). These feelings of uncanniness occur because Mr Utterson is encountering the ‘innermost part’ of Dr Jekyll’s house, which Seed suggests represents the ‘spatial correlative of the secret embedded in the narrative.’

One can argue that it is for this reason that the cabinet door is frequently depicted as closed and locked. The fittings and locks are described to be of ‘excellent workmanship’, the wood ‘tough’ and the door itself ‘very strong’, hence the violent force needed by Poole and Mr Utterson to break it down, and the two hours it took Dr Lanyon’s locksmith to open it (p. 40, p. 46).

In fact, Seed further suggests Poole’s violent axe blows literally and metaphorically break the liminal boundary between the known and the unknown, represented by the cabinet door, and appear as if they are ‘killing the occupant who is temporarily conflated within the room itself, and once the door is breached sure enough he is discovered in the death throes of cyanide poisoning.’ It appears that the moment of revelation of the secret that lies within the cabinet simultaneously brings both the (literal) death of the known and the unknown, leaving only unanswered questions – for characters and readers alike – in its wake. As Shafquat Towheed has argued, this ‘architecture of the uncanny’ ultimately leads to the cabinet because it is the final private masculine space of the novella, which conceals the climactic gothic secret that has been uncannily foreshadowed throughout, in which the homely and the unhomely shockingly collide.

**The horror of the homely in Dr Jekyll’s cabinet**

Dr Jekyll’s cabinet is the most disturbing home space in the novella precisely because it is uncannily homely. It is the ‘last
earthly refuge’ of Dr Jekyll / Mr Hyde, and it appears in ‘The Last Night’ as a scene of private domesticity concealed within the utterly gothic exterior of the old dissecting theatre. When Poole’s axe causes the lock to ‘burst in sunder and the wreck of the door fell inwards’, Mr Utterson and Poole find:

the cabinet before their eyes in the quiet lamplight, a good fire glowing and chattering on the hearth, the kettle singing its thin strain, a drawer or two open, papers neatly set forth on the business table, and nearer the fire, the things laid out for tea; the quietest room, you would have said, and, but for the glazed presses full of chemicals, the most commonplace that night in London’ (p.41).

One can argue that the scene seems so ‘commonplace’ because it simply reflects every other scene of bourgeois masculine domesticity within the novella.

The central focus of the room is, once more, the hearth, around which the actions of Dr Jekyll / Mr Hyde have revolved: ‘the easy-chair was drawn cosily up, and the tea things stood ready to the sitter’s elbow, the very sugar in the cup’ (p. 42). However, the room is also portrayed as lifelessly empty and its dweller(s) isolated and solitary, like its previous unhomely counterparts. This uncanny reflection is literally reflected back upon itself when ‘the searchers’ peer into the depths of an out-of-place cheval-glass mirror ‘with an involuntary horror’ expecting, according to Towheed, to find a ‘revelation in this symbolic epicentre of the uncanny.’ However, they only find that –

it was so turned as to show them nothing but the rosy glow playing on the roof, the fire sparkling in a hundred repetitions along the glazed front of the presses, and their own pale and fearful countenances stooping to look in. (p. 42)
This moment, which is so shocking to Poole and Mr Utterson, is perhaps founded on the realisation that the presence of a full-length mirror in Dr Jekyll’s laboratory is uncannily ‘out-of-place’; it is an object with a specifically domestic, feminine, and suggestively narcissistic purpose (p. 42). Indeed, from Stevenson’s descriptive language it is possible to argue that the room itself depicts a traditionally feminised form of Victorian domesticity; there is a ‘quiet lamplight’, a ‘rosy glow’ from the hearth to which the ‘easy-chair was drawn cosily up’, a ‘singing kettle’ and ‘tea things’ neatly ready, the ‘very sugar in the cup’ (p. 40-42).30 Furthermore, the feminine domesticity of the scene that appears to be evoked by this imagery is the very same descriptive language used previously to portray the bourgeois bachelors’ private homes.

It should be noted that it is doubly uncanny that the cabinet should appear like the novella’s previous representations of bourgeois bachelor homes, simply because it is not supposed to be one. The cabinet is Dr Jekyll’s laboratory, and so by the nature of its professional usage for ‘scientific studies’, it should not be presented as a predominantly domestic space, let alone a feminised one (p. 52). Thus the scene suggests once more that the bourgeois bachelor’s masculine domesticity, as a displaced all-male manifestation of traditionally feminine domesticity, is paradoxically unhomely because it is so homely.

The unhomely-homeliness of the cabinet is further disturbed by the final uncanny gothic intrusion on the scene: ‘right in the middle there lay the body of a man sorely contorted and still twitching’ (p. 41). This man is Mr Hyde, who appears to have been simultaneously both ‘at home’ and yet completely out of place within such surroundings, and the presence of his corpse in the cabinet is the final and literal embodiment of the unhomely within the home space. The reader learns from Dr Jekyll’s full statement that the transformations between the two bodies had become uncontrollable, hence Dr Jekyll’s retreat into
the safe seclusion of the cabinet. However, it is also revealed that Poole believes his master to have been 'made away with, eight days ago' and since then he has only heard and caught glimpses of Mr Hyde (p. 36). It follows that what Mr Utterson and Poole discover in the homely tableau of Dr Jekyll's cabinet are the perfectly domestic activities of Mr Hyde, the gentleman murderer and trampler of children. This jarring discovery, in which the capacity for homely, feminine domesticity is unfathomably found within a figure of gothic horror, can be read as the final representation of Victorian society's anxieties over the bourgeois bachelor's transgressive creation of an exclusively homosocial domestic world.

**Concluding remarks**

Stevenson’s portrayal of the bourgeois bachelor in *Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*, presents the reader with an ambiguous, and at times gothic image of middle-class masculine domesticity in Victorian *fin de siècle* society. Such a portrayal has left the text open to a multitude of possible interpretations regarding its constructions of masculinity. By applying Freud’s theory of *das unheimliche* to a close reading of the novella, I propose that one can read the way in which the uncanny functions in the text to reveal Stevenson’s creation of the unhomely-home as a chronotopic space, through which the bourgeois bachelor’s alternative form of masculine domesticity can be symbolically investigated. This unhomely-home space functions chronotopically because it is where ‘the interconnectedness of [the] temporal and spatial relationships’ of *fin de siècle* Victorian London and the bourgeois bachelor’s formation of an alternative masculine domesticity are to be found.\(^{31}\) Bakhtin argues that it is through the literary chronotope that ‘space becomes charged and responsive to the movements of time, plot and history’\(^{32}\) and he goes on to claim that such chronotopes are ‘organising centres’ and ‘the place in which the knots of narrative are tied and untied
[...] to them belongs the meaning that shapes narrative. The uncannily homely and unhomely bachelor spaces of Stevenson’s most famous novella exemplify this understanding to a nicety.

Notes

1 Many scholars have explored these specific interpretations, and there are simply too many examples to list here. However, I find Andrew Smith’s discussion of Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde in his monograph, Victorian Demons: Medicine, Masculinity and the Gothic at the Fin De Siècle (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004) to offer an excellent analysis of each of these interpretations through his own expertly argued proposition that the relationship between dominant scientific discourse and degeneration theory at the fin de siècle functioned to pathologise discourses of middle-class masculinity.

2 For example, see Donna Heiland, Gothic and Gender: An Introduction (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2004); and the seminal text by Anne Williams, Art of Darkness: A Poetics of Gothic (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995).


4 Freud, p. 134.

5 Freud, p. 133. Interestingly, the first collection of fairy tales by the Brothers Grimm, which are renowned to be both Gothic and decidedly uncanny retellings of folk tales, is aptly titled Children’s and Household Tales (1812). See Brothers Grimm, The Complete Fairy Tales, trans. and ed. by Jack Zipes (London: Vintage Books Random House, 2007).

6 Freud, p. 155

7 Freud, p. 150


For further discussion of these points on Britain’s decline at the fin de siècle, see Glennis Byron, ‘Chapter 11: Gothic in the 1890s,’ in The Companion to the Gothic, ed. by David Punter (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2000).


Mr Hyde’s contentious status as a gentleman, and its importance, shall be explored in more depth later.


Arata, p. 42.

The female characters in the novella are the young girl trampled by Hyde (p.7), the maidservant who witnesses Sir Danvers Carew’s murder (p.20), Hyde’s housekeeper (p.22), and a hysterical servant girl (p.35). Stevenson mentions briefly the women who gather around Hyde after the trampling (p.7), shop girls and a street vendor (p.64), and lower class drunken women on the street suggested to be prostitutes in Soho (p.22).


Stephen Arata also notes this reference to Mr Hyde as a gentleman, see Arata p. 38.


David Seed, ‘Behind Closed Doors: The Management of Mystery in


26 Seed, p. 182.
27 Seed, p. 184.
28 Towheed, p. 29.
29 Towheed, p. 32.
30 This conclusion is also reached from a contextual understanding of Victorian gender ideology, previously referenced in this paper.
32 Bakhtin, p. 84.
33 Bakhtin, p. 250.