

How does robert louis stevenson represent evil in jekyll and hyde? essay sample

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Robert Louis Stevenson intended this tale of The Strange case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde to be a penny numbers story, which gave us the sense that this was a simple and cheap novel, yet, it is far more sophisticated than its audience expected. Robert Louis Stevenson's captive audience were the Victorians. They were zealots, repressed and highly moral but were living through an age of change.

The book itself looks at religious, social and scientific issues, which all tie in with the time it was written, to give us a much more complex book than first thought. The book was written in the Victorian era, when Jack the Ripper was at large, giving the readers something terrifying to relate to. References to Darwin's theory of evolution are apparent in the novel, Darwin himself was vilified by the Victorians because his theory was in total contrast to their strong belief in the Christian faith, which links to the religious theme that is central to the books plot.

“ I never saw a man I so disliked, and yet I scarce know why. He must be deformed somewhere; he gives a strong feeling of deformity, although I couldn't specify the point.” – Enfield

What Enfield is saying is that Hyde's ugliness is not purely physical, it is more metaphysical attached to his soul more than his body. An example of his evilness is in the first chapter, where we see Hyde walking straight in front of a little girl, but instead of walking around her, he walks straight over her and tramples over her “ calmly”, and leaves her “ screaming”. The reason why this so evil is because it conjures up the idea of physically

harming a child, because it is not a human trait to inflict pain without feeling remorse.

Secondly, in the Carew murder case chapter, Hyde is greeted by a gentleman (Carew), however, instead of being polite and answering back, Hyde instead turns around and beats Carew to death with a stick. Hyde was said to have “clubbed him to the ground”, with “ape like fury”, and “shattered” the mans bones, with his “storm of blows”. The shattered comment uses onomatopoeia to make the image of smashing and splintering his bones very vivid. The storm of blows given is a metaphor for being thunderous, harsh, violent and sudden like a storm.

The “ape like fury” quote is a metaphor for Hyde being an animal, this could be a link between the religious aspect and the moral aspect represented by the Darwin theory in opposition to the Christian viewpoint of the time. People were afraid, as well as disgusted by Darwin’s theory. Jekyll’s progress through scientific exploration and exploitation could transform human form into animal like form, thus almost accepting the Darwin theory. Overall in these two cases Hyde is seen as a merciless psychopath, who is “evil” and “demonic” in physical and mental form. He is described as “ape like” removing him therefore from human characteristics.

Lanyon, towards the end of the novel writes a narrative, about the terrible experiences he has seen and encountered, when he saw Jekyll turn into the “deformed” Hyde. When he sees the transformation, the expressions that Lanyon uses really shows us what evil we are confronted with. He exclaims such remarks as “Oh God!”, “like a man restored from death..” and the

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main remark Lanyon makes is, " My arm raised to shield me from that prodigy, my mind submerged in terror...". Other words made about the Jekyll to Hyde transformation are " death", " sickened" " terror" and " God", which are repeated a lot, which emphasises the point that Lanyon is fearful of Hyde. Perhaps these words are used to convey Lanyon's feelings of not just disgust, but of physical sickness when he thinks of Hyde.

Evidence that Lanyon is fearful of this Hyde is when he says, " I feel my days are numbered, and that I must die, and yet I feel incredulous." This means he is shocked because he does not believe it. Lanyon and Jekyll at some point shared some research, but Lanyon chose to work in rational science, while Jekyll pursues what might be said to be a more metaphysical approach to science. Therefore when Lanyon is the first to see Jekyll's transformation – the one person who believes solely in material causes towards, science witnesses the proof of metaphysical occurrences. Therefore Stevenson is warning the future generations of tampering with science because of the consequences and whether we should be rational and ethical.

Having spent his life pursuing a rational ideal Lanyon cannot cope with what he has witnessed and prefers to die rather than living from his perspective, in a world that has been totally transformed. " I think if we knew all," he tells Utterson, " we should be more glad to get away". On saying this, Lanyon leaves the novel, his total rationalism giving way to the incomprehensible reality of Jekyll. Basically Lanyon would rather be dead than confront the ideas and vision of the " evil" that he believes that Jekyll has become.

Darwinesque descriptions are used throughout the tale of Jekyll and Hyde, like in the Carew Murder Case, where he is said to be “ape like” in fury, and “clubbing him to the ground”. In the chapter the Last night, the men who try to break into Jekyll’s laboratory find inside Hyde, the “monkey” and this makes them feel sick. This is established when Poole says, “Well, when that masked thing like a monkey jumped up from among the chemicals and whipped into the cabinet, it went down my spine like ice” What this means is that Poole and other men who have witnessed this sight are scared of what they have seen because it reminds them of themselves, yet they cannot come to terms with it, as they are reserved in terms of their thoughts.

In Jekyll’s early life was described by Utterson. “Poor Henry Jekyll...my mind misgives me he is in deep waters! He was wild when he was young...”, which implies that Jekyll had led a riotous life when he was young. . Also when Jekyll was young he was described as “kind”, “smoothed faced”, “large” and “well made.” However a few pages forward Jekyll says himself, “I will tell you one thing: the moment I choose, I can be rid of Hyde” and “I swear to God I will never set eyes on him again. I bind my honour to you that I am done with him in this world.” Jekyll’s statement is untrue, as he cannot actually be rid of Hyde, yet he just tells this to himself, as he does not want anyone to know what alter ego is lurking inside of him, which links to the statement said about Jekyll, who may have been wild when he was young and is letting that side of him out in this other form, which is Hyde.

Lanyon has many things to say about Jekyll, like when he calls him, “wrong in mind” and that he does “unscientific balderdash”, yet when he says this

of Jekyll he turns red, which means he might know something of Jekyll and that he is embarrassed to criticise a friend in front of another friend. All these factors link to Freud's notion of the id, which means our primary process of thinking – our most primitive need gratification type thoughts. The Id, Freud stated, constitutes part of one's unconscious mind. It acts on primitive instinctual urges like hunger, sex and anger. Maybe Jekyll is unaware of his id? Maybe he had these urges from when he was young and "wild" and is unleashing them now? It seems possible.

In the Victorian period, people were very repressed and that rule is true in the tale of Jekyll and Hyde. Utterson is a repressed man, who only drinks "dry" drinks, like gin rather than vintage wines and described as "lean", "long", and "dusty". The gin detail means he is repressing himself in terms of what he enjoys. Also, Utterson is said to have "enjoyed the theatre" but "had not crossed the door for twenty years", he keeps his urges pent up inside him. Lastly for Utterson, even though he suspects Jekyll of crimes – like blackmail or hiding from murder -, but he does not talk openly about these facts, he instead hides them, thus repressing his feelings due to the nature of the Victorian times and so that he does not damage the reputation of a well liked and respected doctor.

Jekyll, the "well liked", "respectable" also has repressed feelings in this tale. One such example is seen when the tale describes Jekyll as a young man, "wild" in nature, yet as he grew older, he became more calm, and this leads us readers to believe that he has a wild nature inside of him (Hyde in his case), which can be unleashed at any moment. Furthermore, Jekyll denies

that Hyde is still here and that he is “ gone”, yet Jekyll cannot get rid of Hyde that easy.

The London streets have “ sleeping houses” at night, and a “ labyrinth” of “ lamp lighted” roads. The streets are very “ solitary”, have “ small sounds” and “ domestic sounds” being made. The city is almost like a human, as the “ sleeping houses” imply the city is sleeping or tired looking. The “ labyrinth” means it is also like a complicated maze, filled with “ fog” and sounds to add to the grim and forbidding atmosphere. The “ growl” of the city metaphorically speaking means that it is like a beast, which as we know are very ferocious. The “ shadows” may mean it is like a mystery waiting to be found in the “ darkness”.

The West End and Cavendish Square are the main areas in the story, with Soho being the area that Hyde frequents. Cavendish Square – the home of Jekyll, Utterson and Lanyon – was a very respectable and wealthy area of London’s West End back in the Victorian age, however in contrast to this area is Soho, the home of Hyde, then was one of the least respectable and poorest places to be in the West End. People would go to Soho for cheap meals, music halls or to make deals, like prostitution. The streets were dingy and crowded, and at night, it was the kind of place where you would expect to meet criminals, prostitutes and beggars.

The area in a way, explains to us what the characters that exist in it are like in a metaphorical sense. Jack the Ripper, an evil, mystery of a man was a serial killer in the Victorian era, who murdered five prostitutes in streets of Whitechapel, a similar area to Soho, leaving their bodies bloody and

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battered. This was a cause for concern for the people, and it gave them a feel of uneasiness. Socially, the Jack the Ripper period is linked to this book, as when they read this tale of Jekyll and Hyde, they will know about the “evil”, “ugly” character Hyde, who relates to Jack the Ripper – when you read about him, it makes you think of Jack the Ripper. This tale creates tension and social unrest for the readers in the Victorian era.

The houses interiorly and exteriorly personify the owners of the house throughout the book, especially with Hyde, in the chapter Story of the Door. The house is described as a “sinister block of building”, which infers that Hyde himself is sinister. The house has “neither bell nor knocker”, which signifies that he is uninviting. The house has no windows too, which means that Hyde might have something to hide, something inside him that he does not want us to see. Furthermore, the lack of windows could also mean that physically he looks dead, with his eyes shut. Other physical references are made by “blistered and distained”, which indicates he himself is blistered and distained, almost ill in demeanour. All these descriptions of the houses

Imagery and description in the book is used to emphasise evil, for example in the chapter The Last Night, light and dark helps us see a connection with evil. In this case the, “The wind, which only broke in puffs and draughts into that deep well of building, tossed the light of the candle to and fro...” The light of the candle is hope, metaphorically, yet the draught is going to blow it out, hence being in complete darkness, which is a metaphor for evil.

Thus evil will take over when Hyde takes control. In addition to this, the Last Night chapter also shows us a glass, which is said “to have seen some

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strange things” and is “glazed”. The men who search for Jekyll look through this glass and what this implies is that their view on Jekyll is distorted when they look through the glass. This implies that they view Jekyll as evil and inhuman as apposes to their earlier view of him being normal. Stevenson uses this distorted image as a metaphor to reflect the repressed feelings of the Victorian era.

So what were Robert Louis Stevenson’s views on evil? Personally I think he has been deliberately ambivalent about all of these issues. In terms of social issues, Stevenson has made the link that fear of the unknown to the contemporary society leads to repression of emotions. This is shown through Jekyll’s alter ego Hyde, who was an evil presence whom Jekyll feared to expose due to Victorians view of reputation and their fear of the unknown.

In terms of scientific issues Stevenson is warning the future generations of science that they shouldn’t tamper with science because of the consequences and weather we should be rational or ethical, which is proved with Lanyon’s sight of Jekyll’s transformation.

Religiously, evil is represented in many forms, firstly in the subtle form of Utterson’s forename, which is Gabriel, which is linked the angel Gabriel, therefore making us think that Utterson is the good character and Hyde is the evil one. Secondly the comparison of dark and light here, “The wind, which only broke in puffs and draughts into that deep well of building, tossed the light of the candle to and fro...”, shows us that light is good, as in heaven, and when the light is blown out we see darkness, which is evil.

Thirdly another subtle point made is where Jekyll makes the potion to make

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himself Hyde, which shows us a man tampering with the human form, the way God intended us to be, which is evil and not right.