

Lawrence and dobyys essay revision

Life, Adolescence



The human mind is a complex and often mysterious force. While it has a great capacity for logic and reasoning, there is also a part of it that reacts in a more primal, emotional way. It not only controls what we think, but how we think, and often this can lead us to do things that we would not otherwise consider doing. These actions can become so much the center of our thoughts that we can think of nothing else. We are forced to follow a course of action that can prove to be quite detrimental, and often even deadly. It is possible for us to convince ourselves that there is only one possible solution to a dilemma, and because of that, we can find ourselves spiraling out of control and into an abyss of destruction with little chance of steering away from it.

Both “Rocking Horse Winner” and “Kansas” illustrate this fact in different ways. D. H. Lawrence, in “Rocking Horse Winner,” uses the desire of a child, Paul, who wants desperately to gain the luck that he has been told his entire life that his parents have lacked, and in so doing help stop the whispers of a house that demands money. His mind sets on the need to acquire this luck however he must, and once he starts on the course to gain it, his fate falls into place. In his mind, gaining the luck seems to be a course for gaining his mother’s love instead of the sham with which he has lived his entire life. If only he can stop the whispers of the house, the “hard little place” (340) in his mother’s heart will dissolve and she will feel a genuine warmth and caring for her children. This hope becomes his obsession, and his mind locks on the solution that he sees, and nothing can deter him from his goals.

Conversely, Stephen Dobyns, in the short story “Kansas,” writes about a farmer who sets his mind on the destruction of wickedness demonstrated by

his wife and the man with whom she runs off. His mind is so set on this course of action that the boy who rides with him finds “the strength of his resolve” (109) more frightening than the gun that lies between them. The boy perceives it as possible that the farmer will do anything to achieve his goal, and the fear that this instills in him prevents him from taking actions that, later in life, he regrets not taking. In his old age, as he is dying, his mind plays over the scene and various possible results if only the boy of so many years before had tried to steer the course of the farmer’s resolve in another direction.

Both of these stories by D. H. Lawrence and Stephen Dobyns demonstrate the power of the human mind to make one thought overcome all others so completely that there seems to be no other resolution. The thought becomes an obsession, and, while it is possible that the obsession could be diverted, the task is a difficult one.

While Paul and the farmer share the fact that their minds have resolved that they have one way, and one way only, to accomplish their goals, those goals take vastly different forms. Paul wishes to acquire something, and he reaches out with his mind into a realm of fantasy in which riding his rocking horse will help him reach his dreams and make things right. The farmer is more practical in a way, keeping his thoughts focused on a more tangible way of solving his problem. However, while Paul wishes to create, the farmer wishes to destroy. Paul’s desire to grab onto luck and hold on and the farmer’s desire to rid the world of wickedness are both quite logical in their minds, while the futility of these desires is obvious to the reader. However,

those who are obsessed can rarely, if ever, realize that such futility is present. They have to learn it on their own, but too often the results of their obsession are tragic.

The stories also diverge in their similarities when considering other important characters. In “Rocking Horse Winner,” while others are allowed to see brief glimpses of Paul’s obsession, no one really knows to what lengths it has gone. Bassett and Oscar only know that Paul wishes to continue to gain money for the benefit of his mother. They don’t see the obsession until it is too late for them to do anything about it, if such a thing is possible.

However, the boy in “Kansas,” quickly gets insight into the obsession of the farmer. While his time is more limited during the short ride he is given, he has a chance to try and divert the farmer from his murderous goal. The task is difficult, but the possibility is there, although his fear keeps the boy from giving it more than a weak attempt. He even goes so far as to promise not to talk to the police, which takes away the one other chance that he has to put a stop to the farmer’s plans. This leads to a dying obsession of the old man that the boy has become to ponder all of the other possible outcomes of his encounter from so many years before. He will never know what really happened, however, and this leads to his last moments being overcome by thoughts of what might have been.

Love, or perhaps the lack of love, plays a part in both stories as well. It is obvious that this emotion is what spurs the boy in Lawrence’s story on to his obsession. He sees the chance to gain real love from his mother, and that

chance taunts him and pulls him in to his obsession. While it is luck that he convinces himself that he really wants, and even needs, it is the lack of love from his mother that haunts him, and the desire to fill the void in himself becomes all encompassing. He effectively fools himself into thinking that luck is his great desire. In the end, perhaps he acquires his mother's love, but by then it is too late.

Dobyns demonstrates how love can be perverted and turned into something dark and evil. One can assume that the farmer loves his wife, but her betrayal of him, if it does not destroy that love, certainly twists it and makes him want to kill that which hurt him. He convinces himself in his mind that he is doing it to destroy the wickedness that he sees represented in this betrayal, and only by killing the objects of this wickedness will he set things right. Perhaps he believes that by destroying the object of his love he can destroy the pain that he surely feels because of the betrayal. He must “stomp it out” (108) because that is what he believes he is supposed to do and he resolves that it is something that only he can do, because he is the one who was betrayed, and his wife is his own business and not that of outsiders who he likely sees as interlopers who will rob him of his final resolution.

While one might write off the actions of Paul as youthful ignorance, it is more difficult to excuse the farmer. His life experience should tell him that his intended actions are wrong, but his mind finds a way to twist this knowledge and turn it into something that seems justified and even acceptable. Paul is

his own victim, but the farmer has other victims in his sights, who seem right in his mind, for he was a victim of the wickedness exhibited by his targets.

So we see in these two stories the power of the mind to destroy those that it rules.

It can turn thoughts into overwhelming obsessions which lead people into actions that they would not normally consider. When paired with deep emotion, the possibilities of what a person will do to feed those obsessions increase to degrees that might not seem possible to that person or those people close to him or her.