

The strange case of dr jekyll and mr hyde essay sample



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Robert Louis Stevenson's "The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde" is one of the most famous works of horror fiction ever written. Like the tales of "Frankenstein" and "Dracula," a version of its central idea resides in the collective human consciousness. Stevenson wrote his most famous work in October 1885 at the age of 35. At the time he was dependent on his father, but this work enabled him to become financially independent for the first time. Originally intended as a 'shilling shocker' for publication at Christmas 1885, it was delayed until January of the following year due to a rather full market.

Many other such novels were produced in this tradition, including other works by Stevenson, such as "The Body Snatchers" and "Olalla." From the very start this story was noticed to be different from other such novels, far more subtle, disturbing and complex in some ways, whilst when it is stripped to the basics it is just about the conflict between good and evil, a concept almost as old as time. I will now begin to compare aspects of this book with other famous works of Gothic and horror fiction.

In terms of plot it is quite unusual, as the classic Gothic story is set in some distant time and /or country, often involving various nobles, family curses and members of the church, set against a backdrop of decaying castles or mysterious monasteries. Notable examples of this are "Dracula," and "The Castle of Otranto," the latter having arguably started the whole genre in the first place. Stevenson, however, dispenses entirely with such 'distancing devices' and sets his novel in London, in the present day, and disguises terror and evil inside a respectable person.

This is clearly very different from normal Gothic setting and plot, although, in terms of plot he does have plenty of monstrosity and evil readily available in the formidable form of Edward Hyde. In some ways the construction is very reminiscent of a detective story. The vast majority of the novel concerns Mr Utterson trying to decipher various suspicious and secretive happenings, most of them utterly ruinous if they surfaced in such a society, (i. e. one so obsessed with reputation and credit and governed by public opinion.

From the start Utterson doesn't really want to know the truth, but actually is more interested in saving his friend from scandal and potentially losing his ' credit. ' If duality can be said to be a staple theme of Gothic fiction, then this novel certainly adheres to that point. The central theme of this book is duality, and in fact it could be said that the reason duality is such a well known aspect of Gothic literature is due to this book.

Admittedly other works contain references to this concept, such as the apparent schizophrenia in " The Black Cat," and the contrast between creator and creation in " Frankenstein," but no other references are as glaring as those apparent in this work. Some of the styles are also comparative: such as the occasional long winded and romantic sentences that suddenly degenerate into short, sharp sentences about mindless violence. Recourse to the unspeakable is another staple property of Gothic literature evident in this book; " Mr Hyde was pale and dwarfish, he gave an impression of deformity without any nameable malformation.

Although not necessarily a property of Gothic fiction, Stevenson is always very allegorical and vague about his geography, and often is deliberately

ambiguous and never explains suspicious circumstances such as; “ I was coming home from some place at the end of the world, about 3 o’clock of a black winter morning,” Stevenson never clarifies what Enfield was doing, or, in fact, what Sir Danvers Carew was doing in the district where he was murdered either, also in the early hours of the morning

Some say that this novel works well as a piece of Gothic fiction partly as it creates more questions than it actually answers, which is true in some ways. Another tradition of Gothic and horror fiction is that of narrative complexity and the use of letters, statements and other such items to broaden the perspective, and to make the incidents concerned sound more plausible. Stevenson makes good use of such aids, even though anything is possible in such a tale of dual appearances and double lives.