

The green mile by stephen king

Business



Appearance versus Reality in The Green Mile The Green Mile by Stephen King is a literary masterpiece. While the story and characters are clearly intriguing, there is so much more to this novel than the words themselves. Behind these words is an abundance of deeper meaning.

One repeated theme throughout The Green Mile is appearance versus reality. Throughout the entire novel the reader is forced to question the characters and the society in which they live. While it is easy to judge someone based on his appearance, these judgments can be inaccurate and dangerous. This must be taken into consideration while reading The Green Mile, during which the dynamic characters must not be evaluated based on the reader's first impressions. Take Paul Edgecombe for example.

Society views Edgecombe as a hero, “exterminating” all those who have committed gruesome crimes against others. However, this praise for Edgecombe is extremely ironic, due to the fact that he himself is a murderer. He even acknowledges this fact, saying “And then, maybe, he'd think of Old Sparky and it would cross his mind that yes, in a way we were killers. I'd done seventy-seven myself, more than any of the men I'd ever put the chest-strap on, more than Sergeant York himself got credit for in World War I” (440). Here, Edgecombe recognizes the grim truth that he has committed more murders than the criminals in E Block.

Deep down, Edgecombe knows that what he is doing is wrong, no matter what the circumstances are. This shows that no matter why he is taking these lives, murder is murder, and Edgecombe is just as much a murderer as Eduard Delacroix or Arlen Bitterbuck. It soon becomes clear that the

seemingly “ good” protagonist of the book is actually a killer. Also take into consideration the biblical allusion surrounding John Coffey. While Coffey is seen by society as a violent rapist and murderer, this is quite the opposite of what he actually is.

Coffey is really an allusion to Jesus Christ, both through his healing powers and his strong opposition to true evil. Upon arriving at Hal Moores’s home, Edgemcombe observes, “ And whatever spirit it is that opposes that other, demonic one, it was in John Coffey that night” (401). This “ spirit” that Edgemcombe describes is a biblical allusion to the Holy Spirit that goes against the evil of the devil. This same allusion, along with multiple scenes in which Coffey heals people of their illnesses, shows a strong connection between Jesus Christ and Coffey. Although it takes time, the prison guards soon see Coffey for who he truly is, a gentle and kind man.

This allusion provides an entirely new perspective on Coffey, and shows that society’s view on people may be warped and incorrect due to false appearances. Percy Wetmore, the arrogant young prison guard, appears to be a threatening and tough man in the beginning of the novel. The harsh way in which he treats prisoners such as Coffey and Delacroix, and his violent murdering of the innocent mouse, makes Wetmore look like he can face any criminal who enters E Block. However, there is one important distinction; Percy only abuses those who he knows will not be able to retaliate. But, in the presence of true evil, he is nothing more than a frightened boy.

For instance, when Wharton, who symbolizes utter evil, attacks Dean, Percy can do nothing more than hide against the wall, paralyzed and unable to act. Edgecombe describes the situation by saying, “ He loved that damned baton of his, and you would have said this was the chance to use it he’d been pining for ever since he came to Cold Mountain Penitentiary... but now that it had come, he was too scared to use the opportunity. This wasn’t some terrified little Frenchman like Delacroix or a black giant who hardly seemed to know he was in his own body, like John Coffey; this was a whirling devil”.

(172) The same man who is so eager to pull his baton on men while they rest in their cells is too afraid to stop the assault on Dean. The juxtaposition between true evil and gentle criminals reveals Percy’s true nature; he is not a brave and strong guard as he first appears to be, but instead a coward who feeds off of others weakness in an attempt to better himself.

Old Sparky, the Big Juicy, the electric chair; call it what you will, but this final destination on the green mile is more than just a method of execution. While this chair performs the deaths of dozens of criminals, it also attracts a strange curiosity and pleasure from the citizens of the surrounding towns. Despite these executions being very intense situations in which lives are being taken, chairs are set up for people to come and watch the deaths. In fact, the repetition of the word “ show” throughout the novel indicates that these executions become a gruesome form of entertainment for society, during which people watch the writhing prisoners as if they were part of a circus sideshow. This chair is not just an instrument to end the lives of criminals, but more so a way for society to get an odd pleasure from these deaths. Edgecombe is talking about Bitterbuck’s execution when he says, “

Almost all of the chairs were occupied, with the people in them murmuring quietly among themselves, like folks do when they're waiting for a wedding or a funeral to get started" (111).

This ongoing analogy comparing the executions to a social event demonstrates the lightheartedness with which the public views these killings, as well as the way in which the executions of criminals are seen by society. This shows that while the electric chair at the end of the green mile appears to be some simple wooden seat, it is actually the center of a dark form of amusement for the dark side of society. While reading *The Green Mile*, it is imperative that the characters be analyzed on more than just the words describing them. They must be interpreted based on the deeper meaning behind the words, and the way in which these people influence others around them. It is easy to get caught up in first impressions, but this novel offers a much starker reality behind these outward appearances. With the use of rhetorical strategies, Stephen King creates a society in which nothing can be judged by first impressions.

The concept of appearance versus reality in *The Green Mile* conveys an important lesson about our judgment and perception of the world around us.