

# The black veil by charles dickens and talking in whispers



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Important ideas and feelings don't die easily and even survive the transition from one generation to another. Two authors from two different centuries try to communicate the same ideas through their books; they are Charles Dickens, from the 19th century, and James Watson from the 20th century. Both of these authors wrote a book that contains similar characters and ideas, the 'Black veil' by Charles Dickens and 'Talking in whispers' by James Watson. How people cope when presented with adversity are the main ideas included in the novels.

The 'Black veil' is about a surgeon in 1860, after recently establishing a medical business is approached by a woman in a Black veil that asks him to save a doomed man's life. The surgeon still not fully understanding the situation agrees to help but is in for an unpleasant surprise. Different in storyline but similar in themes and ideas 'Talking in whispers' is about a man of 16 years old, Andres, who recently lost his father to the secret police, struggles to deliver evidence of the Junta's brutality, with the help of twins Isa and Berto, and is tortured in the process.

Dickens's London is an unpleasant and filthy place in writing this story Dickens hopes to show this suffering to people and motivate them to take action against it. Watson's Chile is harsh and sometimes shocking in an attempt to awaken people to the brutal reality of military takeover. Both books describe suffering and the authors used this to motivate people then and today to do something about it. I believe that these books are just as good as motivators today as they were when first written because the themes are still relevant.

Both authors are trying to say, " Stop this suffering". Poverty was probably a very big part of the suffering in London in 1860 where Charles Dickens grew up and Dickens shows this to us when the surgeon is walking down the back of Walworth street. Dickens describes the street as " not calculated to raise the spirit of the young surgeon" with " a stunted tree, or a pool of stagnant water". He does this to show us the suffering of the " lower class".

Poverty was probably the main motivator to write this story on Dickens behalf because he, himself, grew up in poverty and only through his stories did he get out of the ' trap' of poverty. Once Dickens had ' escaped' he very quickly realize that the conclusion of poverty and suffering in the upper class was that it happened to someone else and Dickens wanted, through his books, to slap them in the face and make them wake-up, like the surgeon, from their dream-world and show them that it exists right under their noses.

Similarly James Watson was motivated by suffering in the community, but alternative to 19th century London when the suffering is due to neglect, the suffering in Chile is inflicted by a totalitarian regime, a military government. He represents this in his book as the Junta (pronounced un-ta, the ' J' is silent in Spanish). James Watson is an English man who is very interested in Chilean affairs and having witnessed the brutality of the government was motivated to write this book, that themes the Chilean spirit and its resilience to being repressed.

The junta does not personally affect James Watson but he cares deeply and this is something that he is trying to motivate people to do also. Both of the authors have written the book to motivate or to make others aware of

suffering in their time periods, to tell them that it is not happening somewhere else and is not some fantasy thing on another planet. It is happening here, then and now. It is surprising how similar the themes of both books are. The main theme in both stories is death, the only certainty in life.

In the Black Veil the son of the woman in black was hung " My God, this man has been hung"-Surgeon, and in Talking in Whispers the Silver Lion was assassinated " the silver lion has been shot dead"- Berto. I feel that death is themed greatly in these books because it is a very effective motivator, people do not want to see death, and take actions to stop or avoid it. Another theme that appears in both books is poverty. Now poverty was the course of suffering in Charles Dickens's book but in Talking in Whispers poverty is the result of the suffering inflicted on them by the government.

No matter the relation, whether poverty is the course of suffering or the result of suffering, poverty has a deep relation with suffering, to be in poverty is to suffer and to suffer is to be in poverty. Going back to the theme of death and the ' Black veil', death is one of the themes in the story but is not actually mentioned or materializes till the end of story, the theme is created along with the atmosphere. The reader imagines the worst and death is the worst. In both books grief is a theme, which seems to be the start of the story.

In ' Talking in whispers' Andres, right at the beginning, loses his father to the C. N. I and his friend Horacio. More importantly the grief he has, motivates him or gives him the strength to do things he would not normally have done.

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Not to dissimilar to ' Talking in whispers' in ' The Black Veil' the " woman in deep mourning" is motivated to approach the surgeon and ask an impossible favour, by the grief she fills for the death of her son " Tomorrow morning he whom I speak will be, I know, though I would fain think otherwise beyond the reach of human aid".

In both stories grief is a very powerful motivator because of the pain it causes emotionally, which can sometimes be so intense that people will do almost anything to change the situation that is causing the grief. The authors are using the theme of grief and are trying to make you feel grief to motivate you to change the situation that is causing the grief. Punishment, a theme in the two stories, is only punishment when it is deserved, any other time it is torture.

The people in the slums of Walworth in ' The Black veil' can be said to be receiving punishment for their social disposition or they could be said to being tortured because of the state in which they live in " stagnant water" " filthy woman" because as far as the upper class is concerned to people in the lower class get what they deserve whether it is torture or punishment " a few scattered people of questionable character". Punishment in ' Talking in whispers' is very little on the side of justice and is more dealt out by the junta who abuse the country's justice system.

As in ' The Black veil' it could be said that the junta are more like torturing the population then punishing them for supposed ' crimes'. In ' The Black Veil' the characters remain nameless to avoid preconceptions, Charles Dickens did this so that the characters remain a mystery. The surgeon in the

start of the story is in his quiet, cosy, little parlour. Charles is showing the surgeons ignorance to the suffering outside in the cold wind and rain. The character could represent the general public and their ignorance.

The surgeon is also dreaming, which can also represent the public with a dreamy cosy world that they have created around them to protect them from the harshness of the real world. During the story, the character of the surgeon develops as he slowly comes to realize the reality that is right in front of him (the Black Veil's dead son) at the end. The surgeon "turns away in disgust" at the sight of the body, now he could "turn away in disgust" at the way society treats these people or he could be turning away in disgust of the people that live in this poverty.

This was probably the attitude adopted by the people of the time. Moving along with the idea of characters representing ideas or feelings of the public, Andres's is a good character to analyse. Andres is a 16-year-old Chilean who is part of a band that sings songs against the junta. The character of Andres's is strong "I must not cry" brave and resistant. James Watson is using the character of Andres to represent the Chilean strength, resistance, but also the pain and suffering they endure for he has lost his father to the junta and his best friend in a shootout by the junta.

The character of the woman was unusually tall for the period. She is first described as being erect and alert, her "figure was drawn up to its full height". Charles Dickens describes the woman as having a black shawl that was worn for purposes of concealment, adding to the mystery. The effect is that this is an unusual woman dressed oddly ("in the mourning") and very

mysteriously. This is done to give the atmosphere a feel of suspicion and tension.

In the quote “ men have been bought back to life before” Charles Dickens is suggesting to us that the character of the woman has created a fantasy world like the surgeons dreamy world at the beginning of the story, with the hope of restoring her son, to cope with the unbearable truth, that his reality. The characters of Isa and Berto are interesting. They appear to be two representations of two different attitudes that the Chilean people have adopted to survive the junta. Isa is called, Tom, levelheaded and asks anyone only what needs to be asked, so she is quiet but certain.

Berto is nosy, anxious or possibly even cautious in friends he chooses, as said in the book “ in Chile under the military junta you trust the truth only with close friends. And sometimes not even them”. The setting of both books was important to get the message across. The setting held relevance to both the story and the social impact it would have. If the Black Veil was set in Antarctica this story loses all meaning and relevance to the poverty in London. Similarly if Talking in Whispers was set in Australia it also loses all relevance to the junta and the Chilean spirit of resistance.

But the authors were aware of this and wrote their books to show this. The Black Vail is set in London about 35 years before the story was published. And most of the story is actually spent in the poverty part of London, Walworth, which probably was known for poverty because of the reference made by Dickens to the reader “ the back part of Walworth is a straggling

miserable place, even these days; but, five-and-thirty years ago, it was little better than a dreary waste.

The setting for Talking in Whispers in the first chapter is out in the Chilean countryside, near a river. The Chilean countryside is harsh “ they’re searching for Andres now, among the brambles and shrub where the ground grows up from the wind the Valley Road” to “ trees spat bark ” “ Ditch” “ sharp rocks” “ brambles”, James Watson uses these harsh descriptive words in the story to show the harshness of either the landscape or the situation.

There’s always the suggestion that the surrounding land was somehow made the way it is by the junta. Looking at the two stories you can see that the layouts are different. The Black Veil keeps important information from the reader in an attempt to confuse as none of the facts make sense till the end. This is because the story is laid out like a mystery story, designed to invoke curiosity and to be confusing. Charles Dickens did this because it worked well with the actual plot of the story and is intended to keep the reader interested.

You cannot get a message across to the reader if they stop reading.

Differently the lay out for Talking in Whisper is that of a thriller, the story has a lot of tension and action to move across quickly from one part to the next. Finally, I believe that the Black Veil has metaphorical relevance to both stories. The Black Veil was not only worn by the strange woman in ‘ the Black Veil’ but it is also a metaphor for the state in which the public of the time and the surgeon live in.



They live 'shrouded' in this Black Vail to hide themselves from reality, because it is simply too cruel to witness, and Charles Dickens, with his book, is removing this protective Black Vail from their eyes, like when the surgeon opens the curtains and sheds light on the truth (the woman's dead son) and showing them to suffering below them. The Black Vail is also a top, black, cover over Chile and the people are fighting to remove this suppressing presents from their lives.