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Strange Case of Jekyll and Jekyll

Throughout the novella *Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* it is explained that Jekyll and Hyde are two separate people with separate goals and desires, although it is revealed that Jekyll and Hyde are the same person. Stevenson gives examples of Jekyll being a mix of moral and evil while Hyde is the evil that holds Jekyll hostage. Jekyll speaks about Hyde as if Hyde is uncontrollable. But there are nuances about this story that explain how Jekyll is only using Hyde to be anonymous and does not have a split duality of nature at all, and how Jekyll is in control for the full duration of this story. The start of the final chapter sheds light on this topic and is important to the rest of the novel because it shows how Jekyll is not completely honest with himself, nor is he honest with the ones he explains his story to.

In “Jekyll’s Full Statement of the Case” Jekyll explains how, when he was younger he had separate public and private versions of himself. He was his happy, less inhibited self when nobody was looking but a grave/serious version of himself when he was in public. When Jekyll says, “I found it hard to reconcile with my imperious desire to carry my head high, and wear a more than commonly grave countenance before the public” (Stevenson 48) he explains how he wants to be proud of his nature but the public demands a more down-to-earth behavior. The way Jekyll explains this shows that his true original nature is one of reduced inhibitions or a “gaiety of disposition.” (Stevenson 47). His creation of Hyde is only a way to get back to a way of life he has been pressured away from. Religious practices of the day are largely to blame for this, and Jekyll knows it.

In her footnotes to when Jekyll refers to the “hard law of life” Linehan explains that Jekyll is referring to the religious view that “…desires of the soul will often be pitted against desires of the body” (qtd. in Stevenson 48). Jekyll holds a grudge against the main religious view of English Victorians that condemns the portions of a person who does not resemble the pious saints that have become so idolized, but he does not want to admit this grudge in his inhibited paradigm. People of this time period were very judgmental of others and was largely due to their commitment to their religion and their own required, shameful conformity. This is important because Jekyll wrote blasphemies all over his books, including the bible. He did this while his physical form was Hyde, as he was in his state of reduced inhibitions. Jekyll came up with a new handwriting style for Hyde and used it to distinguish between the two alleged personas, e.g. he used this alternate handwriting to open a bank account under Hyde’s name. Jekyll did not try to change his handwriting when he wrote blasphemies in his bible though he was physically Hyde at the time.

This does not fit the idea that his two sides are pitted against each other, this fits the idea that Jekyll cannot express his true thoughts and feelings when he is the prudent person he created to fit in with society. Jekyll explains, “all human beings … are commingled out of good and evil: and Edward Hyde, alone in the ranks of mankind, was pure evil,” (Stevenson 51) but his actions are not that of pure evil but of unbridled gaiety. But if unbridled gaiety in the Victorian Era is forced under a category of either good or evil, or a category of angelic or demonic, unbridled gaiety would fit under the negative side. Jekyll speaks as if being uncontrolled is the worst thing a person of respect could do in Victorian England.

Jekyll clearly dislikes the life he was pressured into and shows it when he explains, “I had not conquered my aversions to the dryness of a life of study.”(Stevenson 52). When Jekyll explains his actions as Hyde he does not explain a criminal, he explains, “I would still be merrily disposed at times; and as my pleasures were (to say the least) undignified.” (Stevenson 52). This is more of an explanation of a person who disagrees with conforming to the rules of society.

Jekyll had been forced to think of selfish or pleasurable wishes as evil because of the society surrounding him. When Utterson writes to Jekyll about the soured relationship between Jekyll and Lanyon the response is illuminating to the way Jekyll feels about his unbridled gaiety. Jekyll responds, “You must suffer me to go my own dark way. I have brought on myself a punishment and a danger that I cannot name. If I am the chief of sinners, I am the chief of sufferers also.” (Stevenson 30). In this response Jekyll admits to being the sinner and the sufferer, Jekyll acknowledges the fact that he is the one committing the “sins” and has brought a punishment on himself. He does not place blame on an uncontrolled person that comes and goes but on a person he knows he has control over, “I am the sinner”, himself (Stevenson 30).

Jekyll is a person with conflicting goals, he has the goals that make a reputation for himself through restrained good behavior in front of others and the opposing goal of feeling the freedom of unrestrained behavior. This is shown when Jekyll refers to his incompatible goals as a “dreadful shipwreck” in his statement, “With every day, and from both sides of my intelligence, the moral and the intellectual, I thus drew steadily nearer to that truth, by whose partial discovery I have been doomed to such a dreadful shipwreck: that man is not truly one, but truly two.” (Stevenson 48). This is important because, throughout the novella, we are led to believe that Hyde is holding Jekyll hostage. But in reality Jekyll refers to Hyde as something evil only when he is having second thoughts about the choice he made to be someone else sometimes.

In “Henry Jekyll’s Full Statement of the Case” Jekyll explains how happy he really is when he becomes Hyde, or when he becomes not-Jekyll, “There was something strange in my sensations, something indescribably sweet.”(Stevenson 50). A weight is lifted from Jekyll’s shoulders when he does not have to prove anything to anyone any longer, “I felt Younger, lighter, happier in body; within I was conscious of a heady recklessness, a current of disordered sensual images running like a millrace in my fancy, a solution of the bonds of obligation, an unknown but innocent freedom of the soul.” (Stevenson 50). This does not sound like a man being controlled by the most evil of man but a man being set free from a life to which he thought he was doomed.

Jekyll did not become a new person, he only gave himself an outlet. He felt guilty about this treachery to the society he trusted and to the life he made for himself, the life he felt was the right life to have because of the pressures he lives with. But the rebellion and freedom excited him at the same time. “I knew myself, at the first breath of this new life, to be more wicked, tenfold more wicked, sold a slave to my original evil and the thought, in that moment, braced and delighted me like wine.” (Stevenson 50). One can draw an allegory to an abashed man who wants to dress as a woman his whole life who finally takes the plunge into cross dressing, this is not exactly a man of “pure evil” (Stevenson 51).

This final chapter of the book completely turns the story on its head and shows that Jekyll is not being completely honest with himself or to those he tries to explain this situation to. His feelings are those of a person who can finally do what he wants. It is unfortunate that Jekyll is running out of the drug that allows this freedom. It is also unfortunate that he takes his new freedom too far in the end by murdering someone out of passion. This cut off the only escape Jekyll thought he had, restricting his life back to the Jekyll persona made life not worth living any more. Hyde might just be the true personality that hides under the lifelong public persona of the respected Dr. Jekyll.

Works Cited

Stevenson, Robert Louis. *Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*. Ed. Katherine Linehan. 2003. Print.