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Summary of Charles King’s “Themes and Variations”

In Charles King’s article “Themes and Variations,” (King 157) he explains how different filmmakers have used ideas from the novella *Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mister Hyde* in a variety of ways to produce distinctly different films that focus on distinctly different ideas. These films contain aspects of the fear of an inner beast, the uneasy nature humans have with their more negative aspects, sexual repression and the need for restraint, contrasting good relationships with abusive relationships, racism, science going too far, drug use, and humor. King describes how the original plot premise is a good framework on which to build new ideas.

This article discusses how some films focus on the fear that humans have an evil base nature and a fear that individuals could possibly bring out this nature in the form of some fearful animal or deformity. Some of these films explore the idea that it is possible for a Jekyll / Hyde experience to happen to anyone.

The evil aspects of sex are exploited in some of these films and the main focus is on the idea that one should repress these sexual desires for the greater good or the opposite idea showing that repression creates an inner beast; Dr. Jekyll turns into Mr. Hyde to explore the evil side of sexuality in the form of an uncontrollable inner beast that comes and goes at will.

Some of these films describe a problem in social norms that create and promote the evil inside humans through the example of Dr. Jekyll. They show how bad relationships can occur if society does not allow love to flourish between members of differing social casts and how Jekyll uses Hyde as a last resort to be with the girl he wants to be with. But of course, Hyde is not the desired person to be in a loving relationship; society pressured Jekyll to promote his worst self to get what he wants.

King explores some of the films that emphasize drug use and one even go as far as saying Hyde is not real, that he is merely a drug induced delusion that allows Jekyll the freedom to do as he pleases.

He also explains that comedy has been crafted on this idea showing the humorous aspects that can happen when one becomes another person. These are usually a wish fulfillment fantasy that ends up better for the shape shifting main character’s original form.

Many works have been created based on the ground work laid out by the original *Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* but have not been limited to the basic story in the tale. The original work is malleable enough to become a commentary on many facets of human life.

Analysis of Charles King’s “Themes and Variations”

In the article “Themes and Variations” (King 157) Charles King explains how versatile the themes in *Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* are. This is important because it has allowed a remarkably large number of works to be based on this original work. “Different filmmakers have treated this premise in a variety of ways, producing everything from grim cautionary tales to slapstick comedy, from puritanism to pornography” (King 158). King’s article focuses on the films that have expanded on a central theme of the original novella.

Most of these films have focused on some kind of basic human need possessed by the main character and how this need is released (sometimes voluntarily, sometimes not). The original work explores the idea that humans have a dual nature, how humans are being of good and evil at the same time. The films that followed toyed with the fear of this inner evil. The world of film would be a very different place without the inspiration of Stevenson’s novella.

King, Charles. “Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde: A Filmography.” *The Jornal of Popular Film and Television,* 25:1 (Spring 1997): 9-20.

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