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Houghton’s Hypocrisy

Houghton divides his paper into three sections, “Conformity”, “Moral Pretension”, and “Evasion”.

Houghton explains that conformity in the Victorian Era was of utmost importance to avoid social stigma (which was much more important then than it is now). He compares the judgment of neighbors to be a greater than tyranny than that imposed by Nero or Tiberius. The opinion of others could ruin a person in those times, public opinion demanded “… the proprieties be observed – or else!” (Houghton 147).

Evasion in the context Houghton presents is more of a self-deception than a way to avoid an accusation made by someone else. “We mean a process of deliberately ignoring whatever was unpleasant, and pretending it did not exist.” (Houghton 148).

When Houghton states, “So far as the motive was not virtue but the appearance of virtue, and what was condemned was not sin but open sin, the evasion was patently hypocritical," (149) he means that it was more important not to get caught doing something unbecoming than it was to not do something unbecoming because it was wrong. If a person from this time was never caught then their family and friends do not have to feel ashamed to know him/her. This is reminiscent of the common American phrase of, “You’re only sorry because you got caught,” spoken to a child who says, “Sorry,” after being forced to say it to a sibling.

I agree that people do this today, not just in the Victorian Era. People are still ashamed and attempt to hide a pregnant daughter, whisper about who does or does not show up to church, and judge others on their sexual orientation. People who break these rules do not break any natural rules, only rules constructed by human culture and the consequences are similar today (though not always quite as devastating).

My favorite Disney princess is Merida from *Brave* because she does not care if she breaks the social norms nor does she care about the consequences of breaking these norms. She sees inequality in the way marriage is done and facilitates the change to make it a more equal system. Merida is the opposite of the people spoken about in Houghton’s article.

Citations

Houghton, Walter. “Hypocrisy.” *Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*. Ed. Katherine Linehan. 2003. 146–149. Print.