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Clarifying Some of Vladimir Nabokov’s Critiques

Nabokov explains that *Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* is not a mystery or detective story but is similar to a poem. He explains that Stevenson’s novel is “a fable that lies nearer to poetry than to ordinary prose fiction.” (Nabokov 184).

According to Nabokov’s criticism Stevenson got his inspiration from a dream “… in which he had visualized it much in the same way … as magic cerebration had granted Coleridge the vision of the most famous of unfinished poems.” (Nabokov 184).

Nabokov compares this novel to a wine to show its similarities to poetry, “There is a delightful winey taste about this book,” and uses flowery language to make *Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* seem like an expensive wine or cheese tasting (Nabokov 185).

In this critique Nabokov gives three points that are “obliterated by the popular notions” about this book (Nabakov). Firstly, that Jekyll is not one-hundred percent good nor is Hyde one-hundred percent bad. Bth characters are Jekyll and both are Hyde only in different concentrations. Secondly, that “Jekyll is not really transformed into Hyde but projects a concentrate of pure evil that becomes Hyde.” (Nabakov 185). And thirdly, “there are really three personalities – Jekyll, Hyde, and a third, the Jekyll residue when Hyde takes over.” (Nabokov 185).

Dr. Jekyll’s house is an allegory to Jekyll and Hyde because his house is presented much like a person’s represents themselves to the rest of the world. The front end that everyone can see is kept up but the back of the house is a run-down laboratory in which Hyde has a key. This is much like any person, people like to show only the good or praiseworthy and do not like to show the dirty or negative sides of their lives or personalities.

When a blood vessel burst in Stevenson’s brain he “… cried out to his wife: what’s the matter with me, what is this strangeness, has my face changed?” (Nabokov 188). The link to Stevenson’s last moment and Jekyll’s life is how they could both feel something inside them, something that might be changing the way they look, and something uncontrollably taking over that will kill them in the end.

No, I do not have any food allergies.

Citations

Nabokov, Vladimir. “A Phenomenon of Style”. *Lectures on Literature,* ed. Fredson Bowers. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1980.

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