ENG 3368: Correspondence
Course Sample
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ENG 3368
The English Novel

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Lesson One

Lesson 1: Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde

Discussion

Robert Louis Stevenson was born in Edinburgh, Scotland, in 1850. His family designed and built lighthouses. He did not want to be an engineer like his father, so he became a lawyer, and quickly turned to writing instead. He developed tuberculosis and traveled widely in Europe and America seeking cures and convalescence. His famous novels are Treasure Island, Kidnapped, The Master of Ballantrae: A Writer's Tale, and Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde.

The novel is written in the third person point of view, being told by a narrator about somebody else. If Utterson were telling it about himself it would be in the first person. The novel is structured in a traditional way. The plot is based on cause and effect, with this cause leading to that effect, each following the other in proper sequence. However, in this novel, although plot drives the narrative forward, questions of character turn out finally to hold the deeper meaning. That is to say, the question of what happens next turns into why did he do that? I think Stevenson has masterfully balanced plot and character in this short novel, in making that shift from a plot base to a character base. So, this is a mystery story that turns into a horror story, deeply rooted in character, told in the third person.

Your understanding of a novel's main idea, or meaning, should be determined by your interpretation, based on close reading of the novel and support from the characters' actions or actual key quotations from the text. To me, the meaning of this novel has to do with the relationship between Jekyll and Hyde. But I don't want to give that away before you read it, so I won't tell you what the meaning is to me. I will say that Stevenson wrote the first draft of the story in three days, almost without stopping to do anything else, after he had a nightmare. I will also say that since it was written, this short novel has been extremely popular. The popularity of the novel suggests to me that people identify in some way (positively or negatively, or both) with the novel, and the nightmare at its basis suggests to me that the issues are found deep in the unconscious. That would give it a deep meaning indeed.

The plot outline is not complex, although it is suspenseful. Mr. Utterson, a lawyer, becomes concerned about the apparent friendship that one of his gentlemanly clients, Dr. Jekyll, has with an ugly and repulsive man named Mr. Hyde. Dr. Jekyll has left everything in a will to Mr. Hyde, and Mr. Utterson is the lawyer for the will. When Mr. Hyde murders someone and goes into hiding, Utterson attempts to dig deeper into the friendship, but Jekyll will tell him nothing, except that he is finished with Hyde forever. However, Jekyll becomes more and more reclusive, and one day his servants bring Utterson to Jekyll's residence because they think there has been a murder behind closed doors and are afraid to investigate. Utterson and the head butler, Poole, break down the door after hearing Mr. Hyde's voice on the other side. They find Hyde dead, as well as letters explaining the relationship. You need to read the novel to find out what the relationship was.
Lesson 1: Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde

Written Assignment 1

Before we discuss Written Assignment 1, let me remind you that you need to be able to reach the five main objectives for this lesson. Many of the objectives are stated in the discussion above. What I did not do is provide quotations from the text that you might be asked to identify, but let me give you an example so you can see what I mean. Here is a quote: “If he be Mr. Hyde,” he had thought, “I shall be Mr. Seek.” If I asked which book that comes from and who is doing the thinking, the answers would be Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde. and Utterson is doing the thinking. The quote comes early on, when Utterson decides to find out who Hyde is.

Here is your assignment: So we can begin our dialogue, and I can get an idea of where you are coming from, in about one full page (250-300 words) tell me what you thought of this novel. You make the ground rules for the essay. I’ll read it, and we’ll be off and running with my reply. This response will receive full credit. Provided you write 250-300 words, write in sentences, and make an honest attempt. For the next lesson, I will give more complete guidelines, but here I want to get to know you as you really are through your writing.

Recall from the syllabus that this assignment is graded on a pass/fail scale. You must pass this assignment (along with Written Assignments 2, 3, and 4) in order to pass the course and take the midcourse exam.

To submit the assignment, click the Assignments link in the menu bar at left. Then, choose Written Assignment 1 and follow the instructions.

After you have completed Written Assignment 1, you may advance to Lesson 2.
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