

REVEALING THE REAL CHARACTER OF MR. ABNEY IN “LOST HEARTS”
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<p>Abstract:</p> <p>“Lost Hearts” was one of his best-known works by M. R. James. It was initially published in 1895 and featured in a short stories collection book entitled <i>Ghost Stories of an Antiquary</i> in 1904. This study aims to discover the natural character of Mr. Abney, who played as a side character in the short story. Besides that, this study also seeks to discover the characteristics of him. This study found that the real character of Mr. Abney, the side character in the story, is a psychopath. The bad characteristics of Mr. Abney are compatible with the psychopathic traits. Furthermore, his two good characteristics, which are generosity and kindness, are just manipulative tricks or traps to lure the children into his acts.</p> <p>Kata kunci: <i>psychopath, character, characteristics, Lost Hearts, M. R. James</i></p>

INTRODUCTION

The world of writing has developed entirely from time to time. Up to the current era, horror is a favorite genre, in addition to romance. For example, many horror books by famous writer Stephen King are read by the masses, like “IT”, “Carrie”, and “Pet Semetary”. Furthermore, those works even have adaptations to a movie and hit hundreds to millions of views. Sadness, spookiness, gloom, fear, and other elements of horror can be incorporated into various types of literary works, such as poetry and prose in general.

Among horror writers is Dr. Montague Rhodes James, or M. R. James in short, an English author, a medieval scholar, and a King’s College provost in Cambridge. He has contributed to adding horror or gothic library in the form of short stories. He said that he was a big fan of ghost and horror stories; he enjoyed reading them and putting horror as the primary genre of his literary works back then. “Lost Hearts” was one of his best-known works. It was initially published in 1895 and featured in a short stories collection book entitled *Ghost Stories of an Antiquary* in 1904. Lost Hearts is a story about an orphan boy, Stephen Elliot, who moved into his distant cousin’s house, Mr. Abney. He, Stephen, thought Mr. Abney was weird and hiding something from him. This story was told in the first-person point of view that knows everything. Indeed, the story must have been told by the “I” person, but they only serve as the narrator as the whole story focuses on Stephen’s day.

There is one previous study related to a short story by M. R. James entitled “Lost Hearts”. It is a comparative thesis entitled *Evil and Innocence: Children in Ghost Stories* by Elizabeth Gaskell, M. R. James, and Susan Hill, written by Johan Erikson in 2014. The thesis compares the work of each author mentioned in the title. The works are *The Old Nurse’s Story* (1852) by Elizabeth Gaskell, *Lost Hearts* (1895) by M. R. James, and *The Small Hand* (2010) by Susan Hill. The writer claimed that those three stories diverge from the conventions of Gothic horror stories by including a child or children as the victim or the ghost (Erikson, 2014).

Since only one previous study analysed “Lost Hearts,” this study has focused on that short story without any comparison to other works. It aims to discover the real character of Mr. Abney, who played a side character in the short story, through his characteristics and traits. Therefore, this study provides two sections that show the characteristics and traits related in the text versus in reality.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

New Criticism

New criticism is a theory that criticises a literary work by examining the text. This theory was developed in America. The author and the reader are not considered when analyzing the work. If an issue is found in a work, the critic can look up an argument to support the ideas of that issue in the text. The evidence of the issue should be from the text itself because New Criticism looks at the intrinsic elements but slightly differs from Russian Formalism theory, which analyses the aesthetical things from the text, such as the style and the language.

After 1949, New Criticism could be applied to a novel and a short story, not just a poem or poetry. Thanks to Mark Schorer, who extended his central precepts to include an analysis of prose fiction in his essay entitled *Fiction and The “Matrix of Analogy”* (1949) (Carter, 2006). New criticism did not involve the author, so the things that can be analyzed are character and characterization, plot, storyline, frame, and setting. Schorer revealed that imagery and symbolism are present in all forms of fiction and go beyond the author's meaning or intentions. He showed that the meaning of the text often contradicts the surface sense (Schorer, 1949). This theory seemed like the deconstructive approach. However, Schorer stated that prose fiction always manages to integrate all apparent contradictions into a coherency (Carter, 2006).

Psychoanalysis

Like its name, psychoanalysis must be related to psychology or studying the brain and behavior. In literary criticism, it is a study that shows the relationship between literature, the unconscious mind and our conscious actions and thoughts. Sigmund Freud, an Austrian psychologist, invented the theory of psychoanalysis. This theory loads understanding a human being by his past along with his consciousness, pre-consciousness, and unconsciousness, continued by his kind of sex and aggression. Freud also defined the personality of a human being into three parts, which are:

Id

Id resides entirely in the subconscious. It is also closely related to the pleasure principle. The pleasure principle seeks instant gratification so that the id will find the most immediate way to fulfill the need. Some examples of id are hunger, thirst, sex, and anything that comes into mind suddenly as a signal of the body's needs. An example is a person who eats anything he has found before his eyes—no need to think that the food is owned by someone else.

Ego

It is the one who stays in consciousness. It is closely related to the reality principle. The reality principle is trying to satisfy the id or the needs in a realistic and socially appropriate way. For example, a person is hungry and sees someone who has a lot of food in his hand, so he tries to make a good compromise with him, such as bartering with him or just asking him to share the food in half.

Superego

It represents moralistic and idealistic principles, which control the actions of a human being to be as good as they seem to society. An example of this is when a person is hungry. That person will have the food in a good way, not steal the food because it is immoral.

Psychopathology

Psychopathology is the study of psychological and behavioral dysfunction, distress, and disability. According to the Father of Psychoanalysis, Sigmund Freud, psychopathy is a type of personality that has less of a superego. The people who have been diagnosed with psychopathy lose their morality in them. These people mostly could not think or distinguish right from wrong. They ignore others or society thinks of their abnormal behavior. Whatever they do is just right for them, no matter what. Besides the inability to distinguish right and wrong, there are other signs of a psychopath, according to the Healthline website:

- a. Not empathetic and remorseful,
- b. Having behavior that conflicts with several norms,
- c. Disregard for others' safety and responsibility
- d. Manipulating others,
- e. Hurting others,

However, the signs of a psychopath, according to Freud, are simple. A psychopath must have boundless egoism and a strong destructive urge.

DISCUSSIONS

The characteristics of Mr. Abney

Generous

The post-chaise had brought him from Warwickshire, where, some six months before, he had been left an orphan. Now, owing to the generous offer of his elderly cousin, Mr Abney, he had come to live at Aswarby..." ("Lost Hearts, p. 2)

Analysis: The text said Mr. Abney was generous towards his distant cousin, Stephen. Mr. Abney offered Stephen to move into his house because Stephen had become an orphan. He thought that it was better to live with him than live alone in Stephen's house. Aside from the residence problem, living with Mr. Abney will also help alleviate Stephen's food and clothing needs. Mr. Abney was generous because he helped Stephen a lot during his difficult time.

Kind

Whatever may have been expected by his neighbours, certainly, Mr Abney — the tall, the thin, the austere — seemed inclined to give his young cousin a kindly reception ... (“Lost Hearts”, p. 2)

Analysis: The text said Mr. Abney was kind to Stephen by giving an excellent reception. A conversation between him and Stephen follows this sentence. He asked about Stephen and his condition. His bunches of words and questions show he is friendly and kind.

‘Good?— bless the child!’ said Mrs Bunch. ‘Master’s as kind a soul as ever I see! ... (“Lost Hearts”, p. 3)

Analysis: This was from Mrs. Bunch's point of view. She was shocked that Stephen would ask whether Mr. Abney was a good or bad person to her. He would excessively answer that question by giving a little story about Mr. Abney and two kids that he was helping at that time, even though the answer could be simpler than that, such as nodding as a ‘yes’ followed by her statement or answer that Mr. Abney is a good person and he is kind.

Deceptive or Manipulative

‘Stephen, my boy, do you think you could manage to come to me tonight as late as eleven o’clock in my study? I shall be busy until that time, and I wish to show you something connected with your future life which it is most important that you should know. You are not to mention this matter to Mrs. Bunch nor to anyone else in the house; and you had better go to your room at the usual time.’ (“Lost Hearts”, p. 8)

... The final “victim” — to employ a word repugnant in the highest degree to my feelings — must be my cousin, Stephen Elliott. His day must be this March 24, 1812. (“Lost Hearts”, p. 10)

Analysis: The first part of Mr. Abney’s request for Stephen is the fake form of him. The request was too detailed. The detailed time (night and 11 o’clock), the place (Mr. Abney’s study), and the reasoning were followed by how secretive their meeting was so that no one could interrupt them. He tried to lure Stephen into his study so that Stephen could have died there. Furthermore, Mr. Abney would have accomplished the instruction of collecting the three hearts from three different souls. His action of manipulation was good. No one in the house would suspect him of killing two kids and planning to kill another kid, Stephen.

Violent and Ruthless

Mr. Abney’s dark secret has been discovered in the part of the resolution of the story, especially in Mr. Abney’s specific papers on the table of Mr. Abney’s study,

... The first step I effected by the removal of one Phoebe Stanley, a girl of gipsy extraction, on March 24, 1792. The second, by the removal of a wandering Italian lad, named Giovanni Paoli, on the night of March 23, 1805. The final “victim” — to employ a word repugnant in the highest degree to my feelings — must be my cousin, Stephen Elliott. His day must be this March 24, 1812. (“Lost Hearts”, p. 10)

Analysis: This act of Mr. Abney shows that he was violent and ruthless. He has finished doing a heart removal from Phoebe (the first victim) and Giovanni (the second victim) without Stephen knowing before. Looking at the intention of Mr. Abney to kill Stephen after killing two underaged kids is enough to show that he was ruthless, he has no heart at all. He preferred to kill Stephen, who has a relationship as distant cousins, rather than repenting not to continue the act and not to do it again.

Mr. Abney's Characteristics and Traits Relate to Psychopathic Traits

The narrative of Mrs. Bunch and the text describe Mr. Abney at the beginning of the story as generous and kind. However, later in the resolution, Mr. Abney is described as manipulating, violent, and ruthless. Mr. Abney's true self is the same as a psychopath who lacks a heart and lies a lot towards others. His actions match any psychopathic traits.

Mr. Abney has committed a ruthless act not once but twice, and it was almost continued thrice. Mr. Abney was doing a heart removal on three kids who have not reached 21 years of age, which means below it. His act was not based on any health intention but was for himself to gain immortality, as the experts of this dark culture wrote, Hermes Trismegistus.

Not empathetic and remorseful

In the resolution of the story, specific papers of Mr. Abney showed the real intention of Mr. Abney for all these times,

... The first step I effected by the removal of one Phoebe Stanley, a girl of gypsy extraction, on March 24, 1792. The second, by the removal of a wandering Italian lad, named Giovanni Paoli, on the night of March 23, 1805. The final "victim"—to employ a word repugnant in the highest degree to my feelings—must be my cousin, Stephen Elliott. His day must be this March 24, 1812." ("Lost Hearts", p. 10)

Analysis: These specific papers of Mr. Abney represent that he was unempathy and remorseful. All he did was remove the heart organ from the two victims before Stephen (Phoebe and Giovanni) accomplished his goal, as Hermes Trismegistus said. However, an average human would not follow others directly, just their information, instruction, or suggestions. These sentences show that Mr. Abney thoroughly thought of himself, not even slightly thinking about others. He never thought of the feelings of these kids after murdering two underaged kids. He had no empathy nor any guilt at all.

Inability to distinguish between right and wrong

These brutal acts of Mr. Abney, as shown in specific papers of his, also represent his inability to distinguish between right and wrong. Murdering or killing someone is wrong based on social norms, and even every religion prohibits that act, but Mr. Abney's psychological issue could not help him at all. He thought all he did was correct in order to gain immortality, so he kept murdering until he got those three kids as the victims. His intention or goal changed him from behavior to personality. He would justify any means and acts if the instruction from Hermes Trismegistus said so.

Manipulating and hurting others

At the beginning of the story, Mr. Abney first appears. He looks kind in this conversation,

‘How are you, my boy?— how are you? How old are you?’ said he —‘that is, you are not too much tired, I hope, by your journey to eat your supper?’

...

‘That’s a good lad,’ said Mr Abney. ‘And how old are you, my boy?’

‘And when is your birthday, my dear boy? Eleventh of September, eh?’

That’s well — that’s very well ... Sure it’s twelve? Certain?’ (“Lost Hearts”, p. 2)

Analysis: Mr. Abney could hide his real self well, such as in the first meeting between him and Stephen. He asked too many basic questions to show some kindness, but all it was just behind the mask. The true intention was to ask Stephen’s age at that time because that question was asked twice to Stephen. He also wanted to ensure that Stephen was 12 or below 21. He asked these questions to record a little biography of his victims.

His fake kindness is also narrated by the housekeeper’s sentences, Mrs. Bunch,

‘Good?— bless the child!’ said Mrs Bunch. ‘Master’s as kind a soul as ever I see! ...’ (“Lost Hearts”, p. 3)

Analysis: Mrs. Bunch even fell for Mr. Abney’s trap. She happily glorified and then recounted his fake kindness to Stephen when he brought home two young kids and let them live in his house for free. She saw his acts as excellent without seeking the real reason behind those acts. She already respected him so much just by seeing that.

Having behavior that conflicts with several norms

The killing and lying behavior of Mr. Abney conflicts with the social norms. Every religion also prohibits killing and lying for everyone. Nothing normalizes the behavior of killing and lying because killing could take the rights of others, and lying would destroy the relationship between the person who lied and others. Besides that, the liar would get a big sin for lying.

Disregard for others’ safety and responsibility

Mr. Abney’s killing and lying for personal reasons represent that he disregarded others’ safety and his responsibilities. Mr. Abney did not feel sad or guilty at all. He was proud of himself instead. Without his guilt, his responsibilities could not be built at all. Instead of burying the victims properly, he left the bodies of the first victim (Phoebe) and the second victim (Giovanni) rotted and concealed in the locked old unused bathroom and the wine cellar. This act also represents that he had zero responsibility.

CONCLUSION

This study found that the real character of Mr. Abney, the side character in the story, is a psychopath. The bad characteristics of Mr. Abney is compatible with the psychopathic traits. Those characteristics are not empathetic and remorseful, inability to distinguish right and wrong, manipulating and hurting others, having behavior that conflicts with several norms, and disregarding others’ safety and responsibility. The quotations in the discussion part above show that Mr. Abney is not a good person; he is wrong. He is even a psychopath who could kill two kids not in an extended period. Furthermore, the two good characteristics him, which are generous and kind, are just manipulative tricks or

traps to lure the children, also Stephen, to believe in whatever he tells them. These two traits even trick the housemaid and butler into thinking he is indeed a good person.

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