

Michal Macura's BA thesis is an attempt to view R. L. Stevenson's shorter fiction in the light of the issues that were most closely connected with the writer's own life experience and with the situation of Victorian England and Scotland, its ideas, assumptions and expectations. He is well aware of the fact that the critical reception of Stevenson's work has not been unproblematic and that its position in the literary canon was for a long time rather precarious, so the thesis is also an act of reassessment and appreciation.

Given the relative scarcity of relevant critical sources, the main argument is based on the study of Stevenson's own ideas concerning the role of the modern writer, as they are expressed in his essays on the art of writing and the moral questions of the time. The presentation of Stevenson's humanistic idealism, especially with regard to the writer's obligations to society, is a valuable prerequisite for an analysis of Stevenson's tales and short stories. The stress is, indeed, put predominantly on moral issues as they are the most important ones in Stevenson's writings and also prevalently addressed in his essays. The question is to what extent the other major concern of Stevenson's, the formal (stylistic) properties of a work of art, are part of these issues; whether or not a neat representation (using specific form of expression) is part of the writer's duty to present the world and his mind truthfully.

The body of the thesis is a close analysis of four texts: "Markheim," *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*, *The Ebb-Tide* and "The Beach of Falesá". In "Markheim" the parts commenting on the symbolical meanings of various motifs are of special significance: the motif of mirroring, the house as exteriorization of the protagonist's soul, or the ambivalent character of the visitor. In *The Strange Case* the focus is more on the ambiguity of the social role of middle class members and the text is read more as criticism of the moral conditions of Victorian England, which result in the "split condition" of modern man. The other two texts are distinguished from the previous two by their specific concern with the colonial issues, with the life (seemingly) at the edge of civilization, yet even here the moral questions are seen as prominent. What connects these adventures with the other texts is, according to Macura, the heroes' inability to harmonize their notions of morality and the nature of their deeds. Apart from this, he appreciates Stevenson as one of the first European writers who were able to provide an unbiased view of the aboriginal world.

Macura's thesis provides a good critical insight into the works of one of the most popular nineteenth-century writers and presents them as complex explorations of moral and psychological issues, often controversial and never simple. I consider his reading of Stevenson very appropriate and useful, recommend the thesis to be accepted for defence and suggest the preliminary classification as výborně.

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