

Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde

During the era of Western literature, writers have created pairs of characters who frustrate each other, both visibly and stylistically, with melodramatic differences. Each pairing has a distinctive stronger and weaker side, and usually one outlives the other, resulting in either a positive or a negative outcome. In the famous novella, *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* by Robert Louis Stevenson (also known as a "shilling shocker"), this pairing exists in one living body, and yet the struggle is exaggerated because both aspects of this identity are equal in strength. Ultimately, Stevenson emphasises that it is Jekyll who holds the decisive power of life or death over Hyde; however, he will eventually lose to Hyde as both personas die in his form. Hyde's "love of life is wonderful," but he is aware of Jekyll's "power to cut him off by suicide". It is the awareness of each other, which confirms that neither can exist alone. Therefore, this creates the eponymous villain who is made up of the amalgamation of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde.

The extent to which Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde are actually a single, human being is debatable. Arguably, the significant contrast between these two personalities is substantial enough to suggest that they are single, separate personas. Stevenson makes a marked contrast in this novella, implying that all of humanity has an alter ego that is concealed under an unassumingly neutral façade. However, it is also arguable that in order to understand the significance of both Jekyll and Hyde, we should consider these two as constituting one, single character. Ultimately, this interrelationship gives the novella a powerful driving force throughout, encouraging the reader to cite them as a single being. Strangely, the relationship is compared to that of a father and son; "Jekyll had more than a father's interest; Hyde had more of a son's indifference" and that of a mother and son as Hyde was "caged" in Jekyll's body, "where he heard it mutter and felt it struggle to be born". This sense of inseparability accentuates their intertwined relationship, which makes the character more interesting overall.

Critics have suggested that this novella could have been an attack on Victorian society and its hypocrisy. The most significant alarm of this novella is the duality of man; "man is not truly one, but truly two". The source of evil, which is evident in everyone as Stevenson claims, is camouflaged. With the concept of a single body containing both the scholarly Dr. Jekyll and the corrupt Mr. Hyde, Stevenson's novel envisions an inseparable link between civilization and

savagery, good and evil. Jekyll's attraction to the freedom from limitation that Hyde enjoys could have reflected Victorian England's secret attraction towards savagery. As the Western world was becoming increasingly exposed to other kinds of people and their ways of life, it found aspects of these cultures within itself, and both desired and feared to indulge them. These aspects included open sensuality, physicality, and other so-called "irrational tendencies". Even as Victorian England sought to assert its civilization over and against these instinctive sides of life, it found them secretly fascinating. Indeed, society's repression of its darker side only increased the fascination. As a product of this society, Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde manifests the same fascination; but also questions it.

As a respectable member of society and an honourable man, Jekyll cannot fulfil his evil desires. Consequently, he works in developing a way to separate the two parts of his soul and free his evil characteristics. Rather than separating and balancing these forces of good and evil, Jekyll's potion only allows his purely evil side to gain strength. Jekyll is in fact a combination of good and evil, but Hyde is only the embodiment of pure evil. Thus, there is never a way to strengthen nor separate Jekyll's pure goodness. Without counterbalancing his evil identity, Jekyll allows Hyde to grow increasingly strong and eventually take over entirely. The struggle to contain Hyde becomes the novel's main driving force, constantly having the reader question whether or not Jekyll can succeed to defeat Hyde.

This overpowering dominance of Hyde, first as a dormant force within Jekyll which becomes authoritarian, holds various implications for our understanding of human nature. Hyde is described as resembling a "troglodyte" or a primitive creature, which may indicate Hyde's animalistic and instinctive nature. Perhaps Hyde is actually the original, authentic nature of man, which has been repressed but not destroyed by the weight of civilization, conscience, and societal standards. Perhaps man does not have two natures but rather a single, primitive, amoral one that remains just barely constrained by civilization. Furthermore, the novel suggests that once those civilised bonds are broken, it becomes impossible to restore them. Even in Victorian England, which considered itself the height of Western civilization, Stevenson suggests that the dark, instinctual side of man remains strong enough to consume anyone who, like Jekyll, proves foolish enough to unleash it. In addition, Jekyll's experiment reduces his being to its most basic form, in which evil runs freely without considering the constraints of civilization.

With reference to Albert Camus in his essay "The Myth of Sisyphus", "the sight of human pride is unequalled". It is Jekyll's pride in his secret existence of sensuality and "love of life" which postpones the self-destructive tendency temporarily. However, as soon as Hyde begins to appear without Jekyll's physically drinking the potion, Jekyll can no longer allow the "brute that slept within" to emerge on his own. Both Jekyll and Hyde are ultimately aware of each other, and interact through necessity. To each, the other's freedom is practically vital in order to stay "alive", and yet Jekyll finally achieves that almost unattainable freedom, but only through suicide.

This novella also deals with the link between the law and the unexplained. The Victorian era along with being the era of societal change and upheaval, was also the era of the emergence of science. Scientists were rather dismissive of the supernatural, which is why Dr Lanyon had avoided Jekyll for 10 years due to his "fanciful" and "wrong minded" ideas. Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde stand alone in this novella, as they could represent scientific emergence that challenged the law. Surrounding characters such as Utterson and Dr Lanyon (despite being a scientist himself) represent typical, Victorian society, whereby people were forced to abide by the law, which could be suggested to have narrowed their insights on what the truth actually was. Their inability to envision anything that was beyond consciousness was their greatest disadvantage; they became powerless in dealing with the "unexplainable" that Jekyll had unleashed, the unspecified "appetites" that he had longed to satisfy.

However, one could argue that Jekyll was victimised, and rather us as readers criticise him as a villain, we should sympathise with him as a victim. The Victorian era was a time of repression, and Jekyll could represents someone who wanted to break out of this repression, yet still keeping a good reputation. Jekyll did not want to lose control over Hyde who he believes to be "primitive" and thinking that if he dies, Hyde, his creation, should die with him. This could demonstrate to the reader that in some way Jekyll was an unwitting victim as he eventually became unhappy with this state, although this could be seen as an unhappiness due to loss of control. Interestingly, Hyde's final victims, when he commits suicide, are both himself and Jekyll. In the end, neither victim is innocent. Undoubtedly, Hyde is guilty of many crimes, but Jekyll is guilty by proxy as he created Hyde, let him run free and they inhabit the same body. Perhaps in this way, Stevenson is suggesting that to those who promote and commit senseless violence, there will be punishment. Even though some readers may argue that Hyde had influenced Jekyll's negative and hostile

attitude as he himself embodies those traits, we as the readers may come to realise that Jekyll does not intend to stop the chaos that he was creating, even as he himself came to the realisation that Hyde was becoming more powerful. Even at the end, Jekyll claims, "it was Hyde, after all, and Hyde alone that was guilty" which almost negates all the sympathy a reader may have had towards him.

In conclusion, this amalgamation of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde I consider to be my favourite literary villain. Surely, both of them actually constitute one single villain; both sides equally contribute to evil. I strongly feel that whereas Stevenson may have wanted to highlight the fact that there is such thing as duality of man, which in itself would have outraged Victorian society, what this novella could really reflect is that the temptation to rebel and embody evil is much more tempting than embodying goodness. Stevenson enhances the richness of this novella by leaving us to look for the ultimate answer within ourselves. What is evil, and should we be more perceptive of our own duality?

Who is your favourite villain in literature and why?

Iago

Despite *Othello* being written over 400 years ago, Iago, the antagonist is my favourite villain because his actions are very relevant to 21st century politicians and leaders. The concept of jealousy, that means we can never fully appreciate what we have and will never find happiness, is especially prominent now. Even today we despair at the damage Iago caused as a result of his envy, however many people are still not content with their lives, because they are constantly comparing themselves with others and are always envious of them. Iago was jealous of Othello because he was more successful and had a more beautiful wife; Iago felt that 'the Moor' did not deserve this. Yet, Iago failed to see all that he himself had – a loving wife, Emilia, and incomparable intelligence.

In his play, Shakespeare highlights Iago's intellectual ability and his potential to do good, however, the point surely is that Iago chooses to use it to cause utter chaos. Wily Iago manipulates gullible Othello into believing that his wife, Desdemona, is committing adultery, when she is not. Iago's ability to use people to get what he wants, whilst disturbing, is also somewhat remarkable. It seems to me that Iago sees people, especially those who have something he wants, as 'piñatas'! Iago plans to break Othello, then once broken, he will take Othello's successes for himself. This is exactly the way a piñata works - once cracked; the prizes stashed inside pour out. In Iago's case - Othello's life is his prize. Iago's inability to feel regret is a superlative trait for a villain and perhaps controversially, Shakespeare, through Iago, highlights how evil can actually win over good.

'The Moor is of a free and open nature...'

The enjoyment Iago receives from destroying Othello is uncomfortable for the audience, but also reveals Iago's underlying artistry in manufacturing discontent. His scheming involves a sense of craftsmanship; he takes as much pride in each small advancement as in the final culmination. He enjoys the whole journey of Othello's degeneration and muses over Othello's suffering contentedly. Shakespeare shows how Iago pauses to reflect on his creation, similarly to an artist painting and admiring his work. Iago is an artist in damage and is extremely talented in causing it, even Othello, a noble figure of great authority, does not suspect anything. From the start of the play, Iago knows that Othello has married 'above his social position' and exploits this to make Othello feel unworthy. Shakespeare, through Iago, highlights racism in its most brutal form. Unsurprisingly, racism was probably taken for granted in Jacobean England. Since it was likely that most of the audience held racist prejudices, the fact that a 'white' Christian was more devilish than a 'black' Ottoman contradicted their expectations significantly and was surely extremely controversial. Unlike some of Shakespeare's other villains whose evil seems associated with madness and a lack of control, Iago's fearsome 'sanity' is his means of power. Iago uses this and his immeasurable intelligence to find reasons to hurt Othello. Was he Shakespeare's first sociopath?

Shakespeare plays with the concept of justification allowing Iago to state,

'I hate the Moor,

And it is thought abroad that 'twixt my sheet

He's done my office. I know not if 't be true,

But I, for mere suspicion in that kind,

Will do as if for surety.'

Iago's acknowledgement of Othello's potential innocence foregrounds his own immorality. Despite this doubt, Iago still seeks revenge taking advantage of Othello's honesty. This careless exploitation of innocence is perhaps Iago's most concerning trait. Here, Iago is not unlike the devil. His desire for evil overrides good and his limitless hatred of Othello also mirrors the Devil's chastisement of Jesus. Iago may have been seen as a variation of the "Vice", a figure from medieval plays, with Shakespeare personifying evil here, by adapting a long held literary tradition. Samuel Taylor Coleridge said that the key to understanding Iago's character was "motiveless malignity". However, I think that Iago does have motives; namely as the *anti-hero*, it is Iago's envy of Othello that forms the focus of the play. Othello's success in war makes him an obvious target for Iago's professional envy and Iago is shown to be determined to strip Othello of this success. Moreover, Iago hates the fact that Othello has things that he does not, both victory and the ability to love and be loved. Instead of admiring Othello, Iago seeks to destroy him. Shakespeare draws upon the idea that passionate, deeply felt jealousy results in irreversible damage. Perhaps Iago could even be described as 'psychopathic'. The way Iago uses people also supports this idea. If Iago was a real person, he would be very frightening – just think what damage he could do today! Imagine Iago at the shoulder of today's world leaders... His ability to deceive those around him is so plausible and this is where he could still be dangerous. Could he be the originator of 'fake news'?

Like most of us, Othello lacked self confidence and was all too aware of his own weaknesses. Iago manipulated this with masterful ability leaving Othello no option but to believe in his lies. Iago drained all true emotion out of Othello, leading him 'by the nose' to forget the deep love that he and Desdemona shared. Therefore, despite Othello's 'chinks in armor', in actuality it is Iago's unbelievable mastery of appearance that made Othello fall. Shakespeare presents Iago as having no remorse, a terrifying trait for a villain. He comfortably seizes all he wants from Othello, whilst paying little consideration to the consequences. In this way Shakespeare addresses the vulnerabilities created by racism and its destructive effects – another concept frequently in our news bulletins today.

'Virtue? A fig! 'Tis in ourselves that we are thus or thus.

Our bodies are our gardens, to the which our wills are gardeners.'

Another reason for Iago's success is that he is shown to be sensitive to people's innermost feelings. Iago was able to hurt Othello inexorably because he understood him. Ironically, his 'friendship' with Othello seems to become stronger throughout the play. Shakespeare reveals Iago's potential in sustaining a relationship but spotlights the way he uses his potential solely to create turmoil. On stage Iago manages to deceive all those around him; both his inhumanity and his intelligence are highlighted through this. Iago gains Othello's trust by 'warning' him of Desdemona's adultery. Thus, Iago can control everything that Othello believes as he is the *playwright*! How ironic that Shakespeare shows Iago warning Othello of jealousy, the emotion of which Iago himself is unambiguously a victim.

'Oh, beware, my lord, of jealousy!

It is the green-eyed monster which doth mock

The meat it feeds on.'

The simple image of jealousy created as a 'monster' suggests that the feeling experienced is itself alien, grotesque and monstrous. The metaphor actually exhibits to the audience that the envy Iago feels is uncontrollable and perhaps limitless. Driven by one of the most powerful emotions known to man, Iago acts as a devil. Like Satan, Iago boasts of his wickedness and they end in similar ways. Possibly Iago's attitude makes him seem even wickeder, since he shows no repentance or remorse. Neither wholly achieves his goal - Satan fails to usurp God's power and Iago's depravity is finally fully revealed. In 'Othello' and 'Paradise Lost', the concept that one individual, regardless of intellectual or physical power is unable to absolutely succeed is strangely poignant. Undeniably Iago defeated Othello, but he also got caught, so was he successful overall? Shakespeare leaves the audience questioning this but also shows that Iago does not care for the problems he caused. Finally the ultimate wordsmith declares, 'Demand me nothing. What you know, you know. From this time forth I never will speak a word'; he takes refuge in silence. Perhaps this is his final victory and makes him more memorable than all Shakespeare's other villains. Iago aims to condemn Othello to perpetual suffering so the last scene is expressive of Iago's villainy. Othello has just been manipulated into murdering Desdemona for her 'treachery' yet still Iago will not enlighten Othello of her innocence. His silence is to ensure that the suffering never ends.

Arguably, in essence, Iago is not a villain. His inhumanity makes him worse than that! He is the ultimate manifestation of human faults. However, I think that Iago is partly driven by an ordinary human emotion, envy. Yet the extremities to which Iago is prepared to go to ensure that his plan is not uncovered are representative that he is driven by something more sinister than envy alone. Not knowing the exact reasons for his malevolence makes him even more fascinating to audiences and to me. *Citius venit malum quam revertitur*, evil arrives faster than it leaves, but Shakespeare stops evil from ever leaving. Shakespeare shows that the damage that Iago has caused is indelible. For he is not merely a villain; he is much more, he is a personification of the devil driven by the most human of qualities - envy. From Iago, we must learn that if we ever feel threatened by someone's successes, instead of feeding envy, we should focus on being the best we can be.