

# Comparison of dr. jekyll and mr. hyde and the tragedy of dr. faustus

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Because humans have innate tendencies to do both right and wrong, Robert Louis Stevenson's mysterious, yet captivating novella, *Jekyll and Hyde* contrasts the danger of unrestrained pursuit of knowledge — observed in Dr. Jekyll's obsession with his evil identity— with the use of knowledge in the pursuit of power as explored by Christopher Marlowe's bold, yet insightful play, *The Tragedy of Dr. Faustus* — as Dr. Faustus aspires to compete with God's might — suggesting that science, and knowledge as a whole, must be pursued in both restraint and caution. In order to gain a better interpretation of a piece of literature and its themes it can be extremely useful to compare it with another work. The juxtaposition between two works allows the reader to gain a heightened understanding of each author's respective purpose in writing their piece. In comparing *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* to *Dr. Faustus* the reader is able to truly understand the degree of impact that science can have on society and its people. The two works enhance each other as they depict toxic addictions to power and knowledge, the value of internal struggle, and the battle between the creator and the created.

*Dr. Faustus* and *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* both bring up the battle between the conflict between the creator and the created. In Christopher Marlowe's play, *Dr. Faustus*, the main character is constantly at war with God. Dr. Faustus rejects his assigned role in society, constantly aspiring to be more than human and achieve a god-like status. He is willing to go to extreme ends in order to grow in power in his attempt to grow stronger than his own creator, God. Dr. Faustus even goes as far as to ask the devil for help in his attempt to grow in power, almost guaranteeing his damnation. Dr. Faustus' struggle represents a refusal to remain confined to the role assigned to humans at

birth. Dr. Faustus conflicts with God because he believes that he is capable of achieving more, yet he also still fears God in some respects. Moreover, in Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, Dr. Jekyll is at war with his creation Mr. Hyde. All throughout his novella Dr. Jekyll struggles with suppressing his creation, “Both sides of me were in dead earnest; I was no more myself when I laid aside restraint and plunged in shame, than when I laboured, in the eye of day, at the furtherance of knowledge or the relief of sorrow and suffering,” (Stevenson 10). This quote reveals Dr. Jekyll’s inability to successfully inhibit his dangerous side that is Mr. Hyde. Dr. Jekyll has spent all his time pondering over a way to contain his evil creation of a separate personality, even abandoning the use of the potion that transforms him into this monster, yet when it’s all said and done this creation has already grown beyond control. This battle between the creator and created, between two sets of identities even leads the reader to become confused as to the motives of Mr. Hyde’s crimes, as Bernard O’Keefe writes in his new criticism, “Such vagueness leads the reader to speculate about the true nature of Jekyll’s hidden crimes. Even the ones we do witness seem open to interpretation,” (O’Keefe 10). Dr. Jekyll and his alternate identity have become so entangled that the degree of evil that both are capable of is hard to comprehend. Dr. Jekyll’s corruption to the cruel nature of Mr. Hyde reveals the true importance of the battle between a creation and its god; the creator will foolishly believe that he has the power over his creation, while the creation will always strive to achieve dominance over its creator. The juxtaposition between the two works, Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde and Dr Faustus, allows the reader to understand the conflicts that can occur within a hierarchy. Dr.

Faustus alludes to the religious struggle that a person of faith can endure while aspiring to achieve their own goals, while Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde alludes to the struggle of a man and an addiction in the physical world.

Furthermore, the combination of these two works is crucial in understanding the thematic idea of power. Both Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde and Dr. Faustus combine to create a greater understanding of the intoxicating danger that is associated with a lust for power. Through these two pieces the reader not only learns of the tendency to be addicted to power, but power's ability to corrupt man. Power is like a drug; enjoy it enough and it will become a lifelong addiction. In Dr. Faustus, he becomes obsessed with becoming an entity even stronger than God, striving to take his necromancy to levels unheard of. Dr Faustus believes that, " A sound magician is a demigod." (Marlowe, act 1 scene 1). Dr. Faustus believes that in sacrificing his eternal salvation, and ensuring a sentence for hell that he is able to grow stronger than any mortal or even God. Faustus is able to develop a hubris that ultimately proves to be his own demise; Faustus' achievements in necromancy inspire his own arrogance, causing him to believe that he is untouchable, even by God. Faustus proves his arrogance when he states, " Shall I make spirits fetch me what I please?" (Marlowe 1). This conceited nature leads to his own damnation. William Hamlin, an author of historical criticism, believes that arrogance is what leads to, " Faustus's state of imminent and irrevocable damnation, and thereby construct[ing] a superficially logical critique of Faustus's tendency to cast doubts, to turn his thoughts toward God," (Hamlin 7). This historical criticism alludes to Faustus'

struggle with remaining in God's light and his internal battle which causes him to wrongly decide between intense momentary satisfaction and eternal salvation. Moreover, the reader is able to observe power's tendency to corrupt man through Dr. Jekyll's experiments with science. Dr. Jekyll was an upstanding citizen, revered for his hard work and status in his community. Yet his experimentation with his own evil nature led to his eventual corruption and demise. When Jekyll states, " You must suffer me to go my own dark way," he reveals his drunken obsession with the power that his transformation into Mr. Hyde awards him. (Stevenson, 6). The reader further observes the negative effect of power through Jekyll's actions in the book. He enjoys the liberation that the persona of Mr. Hyde brings him, leading him to continue transforming and cause damage to society. Eventually this power ascends to a level beyond both Jekyll and his science's control, causing Hyde to consume Jekyll, leading to his death. These two works both depict the nature of a growing addiction to power. Both men in these stories pay the dire and ultimate consequences for giving into their primal urges for power. While Faustus seeks power for status, and Jekyll seeks it for liberation, there is no difference in the consequences that these two men face upon their death. These two works corroborate the idea that power leads man to evil and serve to show the reader that reaching for power can lead to things man was never supposed to discover and cause their own damnation.

Lastly, these two works combine in order to depict the nature of internal battle and strife. In both Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde and Dr. Faustus there are internal struggles present. Does Dr. Jekyll choose to allow his evil side take

pleasure in enacting evil? Does Faustus finally find God and Repent? Each piece details the harmful effects of conflicting arguments being made in the character's head. Dr. Faustus is plagued throughout the play between the dilemma of momentary gratification and eternal salvation. Faustus can see his power levels grow, yet he knows that in giving into this power he is straying further from God's light. Throughout the play, Faustus has a multitude of chances to repent and seek God's forgiveness in hopes of gaining entrance to heaven. Faustus reaches a point in the play where he believes that he is at a point of no return in respect to God's love, " My heart is hardened; I cannot repent. Scarce can I name salvation, faith, or heaven," (Marlowe, 2). Faustus believes that since he has strayed so far from God, he may as well indulge in the pleasure on Earth, because his damnation is inevitable. Faustus' decision to embrace evil signifies his loss of his own internal battle, in this decision Faustus forgoes whatever good nature may be left and embraces his own evil. Dr. Jekyll faces a somewhat similar internal conflict. Yet, Jekyll's differs from Faustus' because Jekyll's is a conflict between two personalities. Throughout the novella we can see an internal conflict growing within Jekyll as he attempts to appease both his good and evil personalities. Dr. Jekyll recognizes the evil that his alternate personality is capable of and yet he has a difficult time restraining from indulging in this liberating evil. However, Dr. Jekyll reaches a point in the novella where he tries to give up his evil nature, Mr. Hyde, by refraining from using the potion which transforms him. This attempt to become sober from evil fails when Jekyll states " I am the chief of sinners, I am the chief of sufferers also." (Stevenson 6). In this quotation the reader can interpret the

duality of man, as Jekyll cognitally recognizes his two sides battling at the expense of his own health. This quote also implies that Mr. Hyde has grown beyond Jekyll's ability to control, evident when he transforms into him without even taking the potion. So while one side of Jekyll indulges in the pleasure of sin, his other side weeps in the sorrowful suffering which proceeds the sin. In fact, Kevin Mills, an author of new criticism, likens Jekyll's transformation to the conversion of a man to christianity. Mills state that the, " continuity-in-discontinuity would later find its way into the strange, unsettling description of self-division in Jekyll and Hyde," meaning that Jekyll is consistently struggling at the hands of his diverging identities. These two works juxtapose in order to create a heightened understanding of the theme of duality of man and the nature of conflict. As one indulges in one side of their mind, it is always at the expense of another part of them, the tradeoff always persists.

Although never explicitly explored in any of the author's pieces, I believe it is significant and remarkable that each character endured their journeys alone, embodying the ideas of the outcast and isolation. Neither man endured their unique struggle with a companion and I believe this isolation allowed them to be further seduced by expansive knowledge and suffer the dire consequences. In conclusion, power's ability to corrupt, the obsession with knowledge and a refusal to accept one's role in society inspire evil all combine between the two works to truly educate the reader on the nature of their decisions in life. Evil merely a manifestation of the pursuit of related goals. One does not seek to become evil, yet while chasing something else it

is possible to become evil inadvertently. The pursuit of knowledge appears to be noble, but it leads to an inevitable corruption and tragedy. The pairing of these two works allows the reader to truly understand the cliché concept that “actions have consequences.” Through the actions and fates of Faustus and Jekyll the reader is able to infer that pleasure is a temptation that one must resist in order to find eternal salvation, even at the expense of short term happiness.