☯ Opposites Attract ☯

The Struggle Between the Civil and Savage Man

Civil and Savage are to be considered two literal individuals, not characteristics. From across a crowd room they see each other, and Civil becomes almost instantaneously intrigued as to the thought process of Savage’s mind. Civil takes a step closer, takes another step, and another and then finds itself engulfed in the embrace of Savage, fighting to escape, and continually pulled in farther until the two become one. Civil and Savage continually struggle to be the prevalent personality of each personage. The story of focus begins with a man, representative of pure evil, estranged from society, and one whom people have passed judgment on concerning his physical appearance, and the sense of deformity his face creates without any dominant malformation. Exploration deeper into the plot uncovers the truth of the man, Mr. Hyde, who is the sinful and malevolent personality, embodied in a separate being, of Dr. Jekyll, an upstanding citizen in society. Through Jekyll’s experimentation and scientific studies of the mystic and divine, he is able to create a severance into two separate bodies of the good and evil, or rather the civil and savage, that exist within. He is his own test subject and develops an addiction to the role he can become through a vial of the concoction he has brewed, which ultimately leads to his demise. In the novella, Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, the author, Robert Louis Stevenson, develops the idea of a struggle between the civil and savage being, how all people are inevitably both personalities, and how temptation can cause the civil aspect of an individual to become engulfed in the addiction of the iniquitous and inconsiderate actions of the savage man.

Civil and Savage are two quite unique characters, completely opposite of one another and yet to become acquainted. They stand across the room from one another, as if too timid to meet. But the curiosity of one, just like the curiosity of Dr. Jekyll, will cause him to take a few steps forward. Jekyll represents the high class and respectable person that exist as the prevailing trait for most people. Hyde is Savage, pure evil in its finest. The doctor has “learned to recognize the thorough and primitive duality of man,” (57) suggesting that he has come to recognize that everyone consists of two natures that are polar opposites of each other. He discovers that “even if [he] could rightly be said to be... either [civil or savage], it was only because [he is] radically both,” (57). This proposes the idea that Stevenson has tried to develop, that all individuals are inevitably good and evil, civil and savage. Jekyll and Hyde are two separate beings of the same man, and what dwells in their body also dwells in each of ours. Jekyll is able to keep his own personality apart, and discovers the fact that, at first, he has developed a conscience for each personality. This is noted when he says that “Hyde alone... was guilty. Jekyll was no worse; he woke again to his good qualities seemingly unimpaired; he would even make haste, where it was possible, to undo the evil done by Hyde. And thus his conscience slumbered,” (62). Jekyll was more disciplined in the beginning, and it truly was a scientific experimentation of the unknown, and an experiment only. It is still within his grasp for Jekyll to control the affairs of each of them. Nevertheless, When Jekyll forgets to nourish the compassion and understanding of his original personality is when the real struggle ensues. By failing to remember to nurture the civil man, the savage begins to gain control, and a singular conscience between Hyde and Jekyll begins to develop.

Now Civil takes a few steps closer to Savage, feeling intrigued, almost as if this introduction could spawn an interesting relationship. Jekyll says so himself that as he undergoes the transformation from his natural appearance to the appearance of Edward Hyde that “there [is] something strange in [his sensations], something indescribably new and, from its very novelty, incredibly sweet. [He feels] younger, lighter, happier in body... [and] an unknown but not innocent freedom of soul,” (58-59). Jekyll, from the swallow of his concoction, has become young again through Hyde. He is fascinated and begins to develop a stronger interest in the nature of the savage being, carless of emotions and opinions of others, and curious as to all he could do in this new body. Whatever crime or misdeed that is carried out by either man, speaking as if they are separate, the other can swiftly “pass away like the stain of breath upon a mirror,” (61). However, now a singular conscience begins to develop and the savage man starts to take control. We can make observation of the conscience of two personalities becoming one in the same when Jekyll expresses to Mr. Utterson, his lawyer and companion, “Mr. Utterson... this is very good of you, this is downright good of you, and I cannot find words to thank you in,” (19). This citation implies that Jekyll is letting go of the mannerisms and proprieties of the civil man he once was, and assuming some of the qualities and behaviours of Hyde. Eventually, the mind of both merges together and every transgression that Hyde makes, Jekyll starts to feel twinges of guilt for. This is evident when Jekyll promises himself that he will give up Mr. Hyde, after he has killed Sir Danvers Carew. Dr. Jekyll has started to make the realization that he generates the actions of Hyde. But the temptation of the immoral personality and guise that Dr. Jekyll can assume is exceedingly strong and Jekyll becomes too vulnerable to resist.

Savage pulls Civil in, engulfing it in an embrace, first sweet, but now the loving embrace turns into and overbearing and strangling hold, to which Civil will find it difficult to escape, and Savage will not let go of. Civil’s case becomes as if “to be tempted, however slightly, [is] to fall,” (65), suggesting that Civil, or Jekyll, has grown a weak resistance to the pangs of addiction as he becomes Edward Hyde. No matter how normally Henry Jekyll tries to exist as, he is still “cursed with [his] duality of purpose,” (67). Savage has won. Jekyll’s personality has taken to the back burner and Hyde’s savage personality has been brought to the forefront of the once separate beings that now have amalgamated. When Jekyll pledges to himself that he will give up his habit of transformation he instead, “in his own person... once more [becomes] tempted to trifle with [his] conscience; and it [is] as an ordinary secret sinner that [he] at last [falls] before the assaults of temptation,” (67) suggesting that Jekyll’s thoughts and actions are becoming similar to Hyde’s, and that a singular conscience has developed completely. He can no longer break free of the temptation that Hyde has created in his own mind. This is inexorable, as the only way to keep the civil personality from becoming savage is to not have explored the savage mind as in Strange Case of Jekyll and Hyde. It becomes too difficult for two personas to subsist in one tabernacle and one must trample out the other. Hyde has taken a few steps forward from trampling the little child under his feet at the beginning of the narrative, even surpassed the trampling and stamping of his feet upon Sir Danvers Carew. Hyde has now trampled under his feet his succeeding benefactor, Dr. Jekyll. The addiction has run its course, and temptation has run amuck.

The plotline consists of this. Jekyll successfully separates himself from the evil that exists in every person. But does he really? Is it successful? Instead, Jekyll has brought to the forefront the pure evil that lives in each individual. In the end, who dies? Jekyll. Hyde may have been the one to lie dead on the floor, but he is only a personality of Jekyll, not Jekyll himself. In the end Savage always overcomes Civil. The civil persona may be able to keep itself apart from the savage at first, but will always succumb to the savage man. And once the good in a person has come into the grasp of evil, the struggle that ensues will not be effortless to escape from. Robert Louis Stevenson has successfully captured and presented the fact that all men are inevitably good and evil, moral and immoral, civil and savage. He has demonstrated that in a struggle between the two personalities, the civil personality will almost always yield to the savage personality. There is no longer civil and savage. There is no longer good and evil. There is no longer Jekyll and Hyde. There is only one, and only the strongest of the two survives.