

My father always enjoyed classics literature. He was very humanistically inclined and when I was a kid strongly encouraged me to read the classics.

I always enjoyed reading; although my interests were much more oriented towards science fiction and especially comic books. My father was always innovative and decided in order to perk my interest in reading the classics such as Homer's Iliad he would introduce me to Classics Illustrated: literary classics that were written in comic book form to appeal to kids.

I did start to read them and actually enjoyed stories such as The Three Musketeers, Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, and Julius Caesar. I even remember giving a book report on the latter, but then embarrassingly forgot who "the greatest Roman of them all" was, Julius Caesar or Brutus.

Nowadays, I suppose, people like me who used to read the Classics Illustrated read Cliff Notes, Spark Notes, or Wikipedia when they want a quick overview of a classic; so I decided to nose around these latter day references to see how they treated a story such as Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde by Robert Lewis Stevenson.

It was actually pretty interesting. Although I had read the story many years ago, some salient points stood out.

Victorian England was, of course, very interested in appearances and not making evident the dark side of human nature. Although Rousseau had argued that living in nature brought out man's goodness, others (remember Lord of the Flies?) had argued that it is civilization which promotes Man's Goodness over his evilness.

This is reflective in the urbane, civilized Dr. Jekyll who initially tries to purge his own dark impulses by experimenting on himself and, thus, creates another being, the evil Mr. Hyde. In attempting to liberate and purify himself, however, Jekyll notices that he actually takes delight in “liberated” Mr. Hyde until, of course, Mr. Hyde’s severe brutality becomes evident. Not only does Mr. Hyde have no conscience, he delights in his evilness and Dr. Jekyll begins to have second thoughts about what he has done.

At first Hyde is a latent force within Jekyll, but then becomes a dominant external force. And worse, Hyde begins to emerge involuntarily. Jekyll tries to engage in philanthropic works to keep Hyde submerged, but this is effective only temporarily. Jekyll must use special “potions” to try to keep Hyde submerged. In the end, Stevenson allows Hyde to win the battle.

A number of points stand out for me:

Just trying to look good in the eyes of others and denying that we have a darker side can lead to disastrous moral consequences.

The projection “the evil is out there” allows the evil to be more out of our control and, hence, more virulent. We have to accept the famous saying of Pogo: “We have met the enemy and the enemy is us.”

Not accepting our nature (which is capable of both good and evil) has echoes similar to the sinfulness of Lucifer who refused to accept his nature as a created being and, instead, wanted to be a god.

Although we all have failings and can act in a sinful way, it is the taking **DELIGHT** in our sinful acts that makes the Sin have a capital S.

Philanthropic acts are to be strongly encouraged; but they, alone, are not sufficient to keep our Mr. Hyde submerged. We need a "potion." What could that potion be for us?

The classics can be very enlightening. My father always wanted me to read The Iliad -- I think I'll do that. I just need to find the version from the Classics Illustrated.