

Starting with this extract, how does Stevenson present Mr Hyde as an unusual and frightening character?

Within this extract and the rest of the novel, Hyde is portrayed as unusual and frightening because he possesses distinctive features and mannerisms which the members of the Victorian society find disconcerting and at odds with their values and morals. This can lead to the other characters themselves behaving and reacting in unusual ways, mirroring Hyde's effect on people.

The extract begins by focusing on Lanyon's initial reaction to Hyde, which is to keep 'my hand ready on my weapon.' This adverbial phrase indicates that Hyde makes people feel threatened and intimidated, even without behaving in an aggressive manner. At this point in the novel, Lanyon is not aware that he's in the presence of Hyde, and yet he still feels the need to protect himself. This could demonstrate how Hyde represents a threat to the Victorian morals and standards of life. Lanyon feels instinctively that he must act in self-defence, although he cannot himself explain why.

When Lanyon does get to look at Hyde, he is 'struck' by his 'shocking' appearance. The verb 'struck' has connotations of a violent attack on Lanyon, suggesting Hyde's appearance is unusually aggressive and frightening. The adjective 'shocking' links to the idea of the fear that Hyde provokes in people.

Later in this paragraph, Lanyon describes experiencing an unusual 'personal distaste' upon seeing Hyde. He hints that after his meeting with Hyde he has come to realise that this is lies 'much deeper in the nature of man'. The abstract noun 'nature' in this links to the idea that Hyde is unnatural and something society feels they must reject. Lanyon hints at his fear of what Hyde represents when he says his rejection of Hyde was based in a 'nobler hinge'. The adjective 'nobler' allows the reader to link Lanyon's fear of Hyde to the moral and principles of Victorian society. Hyde personifies the evil side to all people's personalities, and therefore Lanyon's 'noble' fear of this shows that he is standing by his notions of supporting respectability and propriety. This links to his disapproval of Hyde's dress later in the extract, which he describes as 'laughable' due to the overlarge proportions of the clothing. The adjective 'laughable' implies not only fear, but rejection and contempt that Victorian society had for anyone not meeting the expectations of appearance and 'normality'.

Lanyon's fear of Hyde in the extract can also be linked to the focus of the era upon the works of Charles Darwin and evolution. Lanyon describes Hyde using the concrete noun 'creature', implying that part of his fear of Hyde is linked to his feeling that Hyde is not quite human. This is then linked to the suggestion that Hyde is in some way a devolved form of man, perhaps closer to an 'ape-like' species. Victorian society had been shaken by the idea that man had evolved from beasts, and perhaps became more intolerant of anything animal like as an attempt to distance themselves from beasts. Lanyon's description therefore implies fear of Hyde, as he is too animal-like.