

How far does Stevenson present Hyde as a fearful and dangerous character?

In Robert Louis Stevenson's "Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde," the ambiance of fear and peril is intricately interlaced with the depiction of Hyde, especially noticeable in the given extract. Stevenson utilizes striking imagery, disturbing descriptions, and the responses of other characters to establish a tangible feeling of terror associated with Hyde.

In the excerpt, Stevenson portrays Hyde using language that conveys a sense of threat and disgust. For example, when he describes Hyde as having a "pale and dwarfish" look, it instantly distinguishes him from the other characters, indicating a departure from the ordinary that creates discomfort. The term "dwarfish" suggests a physical abnormality that alludes to something unnatural about Hyde. This peculiarity adds to an escalating sense of dread, as it implies that he is not merely a man but something far more malevolent. The choice of the word "pale" further highlights the lifelessness linked to him, stirring fears of mortality and the eerie.

Stevenson also depicts the responses of other characters to Hyde, which enhances the sense of fear. For example, Mr. Utterson, characterized as rational and composed, is nevertheless affected by an "unexpressed" terror upon hearing Hyde's name. The term "unexpressed" indicates a profound fear that goes beyond simple words, demonstrating how Hyde evokes a primal dread even in the most rational individuals. This response reinforces the notion that Hyde embodies a fundamental threat not only to himself but to society at large.

Furthermore, in the pivotal scenes of the play, particularly when Hyde viciously attacks Sir Danvers Carew, Stevenson employs graphic language to intensify the atmosphere of brutality and dread. The portrayal of Hyde's behavior as "ape-like" and filled with "fury" depicts him as a being driven by instinct rather than as a refined human. This analogy to an animal not only strips Hyde of his humanity but also links him to primal urges and aggression, amplifying the feeling of peril. The use of the word "fury" implies an uncontrollable wrath, suggesting that Hyde functions beyond the limits of societal expectations, which is alarming for characters such as Utterson and Dr. Jekyll, who are constrained by those very norms.

Furthermore, Hyde's capacity to navigate the streets of London effortlessly enhances the sense of peril. Stevenson notes that he experienced a "strange unpleasant sensation of deformity," which implies that Hyde's existence is disconcerting not only to those who meet him but also to himself. This awareness of his grotesque nature introduces additional layers of terror, as it indicates that Hyde recognizes his influence on others and takes pleasure in it. The city itself transforms into a character within this story, now corrupted by Hyde's presence. The murky, shadowy streets of London act as a setting that intensifies the wickedness linked to Hyde, symbolizing the moral decline that lies beneath the facade of Victorian society.

In summary, Stevenson's depiction of Hyde is crucial in establishing a sense of fear and peril throughout "Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde." Through his physical descriptions, the responses of other characters, and the violent deeds associated with Hyde, Stevenson constructs a character that represents the most sinister elements of human nature. The ambiance he generates not only mirrors the personal dread that Hyde evokes but also acts as a critique of the wider societal anxieties of the era, emphasizing the duality of human nature and the fragile veneer of civilization that can be effortlessly disrupted.