

The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde

A novella written by Robert Louis Stevenson

Context and Ideas

What did the Victorians believe and fear?

Victorian Ideas about Civilisation and Progress

- Period of rapid change
- Many beginning to question progress and civilisation that had defined the era
- The duality (one body containing the two) of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde (good and evil) represents the close link between civilisation and savagery
- Victorians were attracted to non-western cultures secret fascination – instinctual side of life (anathema to Victorians who repressed this darker side)

The Fear of the Primitive (and its potential to break out from self-control)

primitive, savage, animalistic self vs civilised, respectable, controlled self

Primitive – doesn't understand social conventions and taboo

- is easily frightened , quick to fight
- in adults = lust and desire
- no understanding of law

Representation:

Mr Hyde is personification, not simply of evil, but of the primitive human urges (an extreme version of what we seek to repress within ourselves).

Whereas Utterson and Lanyon (and others) represent society and civilisation

In the novella characters seek to get rid of Hyde. They find him repugnant, and vehemently dislike him – even want to kill him.

Scientific Progress – Evolution and Darwinism

- Man no longer a divine creation – descended from apes (what do we think now?)
 - Animals were the brutal and primitive what about man? (people fear Hyde and his ape-like primitive behaviour) – troglodyte not man made in likeness to god
 - Christian beliefs that underpinned society being questioned – faith and identity in crisis
- Fantastic experiments = shocking (so much so they kill Lanyon and lead inevitably to Jekyll's too)
- Dark experiments lead to destruction, despair and death

