

### **Illness as a Symptom of Monstrosity**

Throughout colonial history, racially motivated scientists have striven to compile experimental data proving the existence of intrinsic biological deviations in humans that privilege certain races over others. Though scientific racism examined many morphological differences between colonized ethnicities, it also endeavored to correlate decaying health, whether physical or psychological, with substandard, or even subhuman, morality. In essence, the experiments performed during the colonial era proposed that the failure of colonized individuals to properly function within European communities results from inner monstrosity recognizable through human anatomy. Further, individuals targeted by scientific racism express recognition of their own deviance through illness. Fundamentally, persons ostracized from their communities - especially those having corporeal irregularities - monstrate themselves according to broad claims based upon scientific racism's falsified evidence. The physically punishing and socially inhibiting impacts of deteriorating health that instigate further ineffectiveness in society then confirm the belief in one's own monstrosity. These themes of scientific racism color the strifes of fictional characters developed during the time period, demonstrating the vast social impact of racially motivated experimentation. Claire de Duras's Ourika, Charlotte Brontë's Jane Eyre, and Robert Louis Stevenson's The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde each examine how underlying deviance of monstrous characters manifests physically through illness, associating self-perceived monstrosity with socially inhibiting physical defect.

#### **Ourika: The Terminally Ill**

First, during Claire de Duras's active years, scientific racism enabled the monstrating of colonized, or native, individuals to combat spreading fears of the negative consequences of introducing native individuals to European society, thus displacing them from their home space. Claire de Duras uses skin color, the most commonly referenced physical marker of a displaced or native individual, to highlight Ourika's dissemblance from the French, aristocratic community. Even further, while physiology allows society to identify perceived monsters, illness allows individuals to recognize themselves as monstrous and, in this case, literally unable to subsist in European air. Without illness, the deviant character would continue functioning normally, perhaps oblivious to their own monstrousness. Thus, physical health allows native characters to recognize that they are displaced and, therefore, threats to their society while society recognizes specific traits of the physique as the primary markers of deviance. Indeed, Ourika's terminal illness stems from her recognition of herself as a living violation of societal norms.

To begin, failure to secure a marriage to a man of equal social rank marks Ourika's ineffectiveness in white, European society as an inherently deviant, native female. Though "held up as the most clever and endearing of children," Ourika's black skin prevents her from marrying into her own aristocratic class (Duras 7). However, Ourika's own privileged childhood impedes her marriage into a lower, less educated social sphere. In other words, wealthy social spheres reject Ourika solely based upon her skin color while Ourika herself denies bourgeois social spheres in light of her uncommonly advanced level of education. Stuck in a middle ground between classes, she takes on an outcast role that alienates her from the community. That is to say, all sects of white society ultimately view Ourika as existing outside traditional categorizations making her deviant and, therefore, monstrous. To eliminate the threat of Ourika's native monstrosity, the public ostracises her, essentially eliminating her ability to obtain financial

security through marriage. In other words, as a consequence of her dissociation from both upper and lower social classes, Ourika experiences an inhibiting exile that hampers her capacity to operate effectively within her society.

Next, Ourika's internal acknowledgment of herself as an offense to existing social orders provokes the self-monstration illustrated by her disgust at her reflection. When contemplating her mirror image, Ourika "exaggerated [her] ugliness to [her]self," believing herself to be "dependent, despised, [and] without resource" (Duras 12). In drawing a connection between her physique and her failure to properly function in society, Ourika effectively blames her social oppression on her body. As a result, the deviance projected onto her becomes incorporated into her view of self, precipitating Ourika's self-effacing attitude. This unnatural sense of one's own repulsiveness portrays Ourika's belief in the monstrous identity fabricated for her by society. In effect, she distorts her uncommon characteristics into signs of malignant deviation from societal norms, ultimately paralleling society's disgust by berating herself. Fundamentally, years of psychological abuse relating to Ourika's physical appearance provoke the development of her severely negative images of self. From these self criticisms comes Ourika's recognition of herself as a deviant individual experiencing the effects of self-monstration.

Finally, Ourika's terminal illness physically embodies her belief in her own monstrosity as well as her disillusionment from white, European society. In other words, Ourika's failing health forces her to recognize herself as displaced into a society in which she violates classical stereotypes of affluence. Ourika's literal inability to survive in her community mirrors her psychological and socio-economic exile. Thus, the doctor's recognition that "some dark presentiment warned that it was too late...[that] Death had marked down its victim" further illustrates Ourika's complete failure to function in society (Duras 5). In a sense, the illness

confirms the deviant nature Ourika suspects of herself through oppression of her faculties in the private sphere of the nunnery. Unable to operate effectively in either the public sphere of elite European social classes or the private sphere of religious seclusion, the reality of Ourika's inhibiting monstrosity becomes unavoidable. The limitations placed on Ourika by her health confirm her displacement in society, preventing her from ignoring the inherent deviance of her identity. Essentially, even the purity of the monastery cannot cure the displaced Ourika of her deviance, eventually leading to her death. At the crux, Ourika's terminal illness symbolizes her recognition of herself as an irreparable violation to traditional societal criteria.

In summation, Ourika's illness exists as a mirror reflecting her understanding of herself as unable to function properly within her community due to her identity as a displaced individual. As a result, Ourika's social exile becomes linked with her decayed physical state, suggesting that underlying deviance, the cause of her ostracization, manifests itself physically through illness in addition to her non-European characteristics. This linkage between native persons and deviance concurs with the time period's scientific racism. In essence, Claire de Duras demonstrates how scientists surveyed illnesses in native persons and extrapolated their observations to stereotypes about the nature of monstrosity, implying that monstrosity exists intrinsically in displaced natives. In other words, patriarchy instilled fear in the general European population through scientific racism to instigate the exclusion of displaced individuals from society, and, therefore, eliminate the threat they pose to traditional social hierarchies. Effectively, Ourika's terminal illness stems from her recognition of herself as a monstrous threat to conventional French society, illustrating scientific racism's ability during the colonial era to associate an inability to effectively function in society with underlying deviance through illness.

**Jane Eyre: Bertha the “Lunatic”**

Second, as cultural mixing continued throughout the 19th century, scientific racism targeted displaced natives, especially those who succeeded in infiltrating the idealized European family. During Charlotte Brontë's lifetime, racist experimentation existed to discourage interracial marriages and, therefore, maintain cultural purity. As a result, displaced characters posing threats to the traditional European family recognize their own illness, whether mental or physical, as evidence of the monstrosity society accuses them of. That is to say, illness allows an individual to recognize his/her own displacement, especially under the broad, stereotypical claims of scientific racism. In Charlotte Brontë's work, Bertha's mental illness mirrors her self-perceived monstrosity as an individual displaced into European society from her birthplace in Jamaica.

To start, both her confinement and her husband's adultery demonstrate Bertha's failure to properly function as a non-European female in European, patriarchal society. Rochester “kept [Bertha] in very close confinement” within her own home while denying her existence entirely and engaging in an extramarital relationship (Brontë). Her physical isolation from society hampers her ability to express herself verbally or physically. In other words, Bertha's confinement induces an exile in which Bertha's ability to interact with her environment or others becomes nonexistent. Even further, the severe restrictions placed on Bertha's feminine agency, a woman's capacity to act or express herself, extend to her failing marriage. Through his renouncement of his wife, Rochester succeeds in repressing Bertha's agency within the white, European community. Rochester's engagement to Jane Eyre disrespects Bertha's rights such that Rochester treats Bertha as subhuman, illustrating her failure to function effectively even in the context of interpersonal relationships. In essence, Bertha's societal repression inhibits both her

self-expression and her marital success. This repression, taking the physical form of Bertha's confinement to the attic, demonstrates Bertha's incapacity to operate in European society as a displaced, native woman.

Continuing, Bertha's recognition of herself as a trespasser within her society incites self-monstration highlighted by her physical appearance and coinciding behaviors. Despite her shows of physical strength in overpowering Mr. Rochester and various visitors, Bertha allows herself to be restricted to the attic under the care of Grace Poole. In addition, Bertha's wanderings occur only at night in the upper levels of her home. These demonstrations of personal restraint suggest Bertha sees within herself a deviant creature living in violation of her own home. That is to say, Bertha accepts society's perception of her as a threat to social hierarchies due to her identity as a displaced, native woman. In consequence, Bertha furthers her own monstration by embracing herself as subhuman in comparison with white, European society. Rather than attempt to assimilate, Bertha allows her appearance to degenerate into an animalistic state in which Jane Eyre, the epitome of white society, perceives Bertha as a "beast" that "growl[s] like some strange wild animal [with] a quantity of dark, grizzled hair, wild as a mane" (Brontë). Bertha's disheveled appearances mirrors her concept of self, especially in contrast with Rochester's upstanding position as a white male in society. Recognizing herself as physically separated from her society by her physical appearance and her confinement, Bertha disassociates from her society by ceasing any attempt to conform. Instead, Bertha embraces the time period's existing stereotypes of the colonized native as subhuman by allowing her appearance and level of autonomy to regress into an animalistic state. Thus, both Bertha's actions and appearance symbolize her understanding of self, illustrating her belief in her own monstrosity. Fundamentally, Bertha views herself as subhuman due to her status as a displaced individual

unable to correctly function in society and, in consequence, partakes in self-monstration. As a result, Bertha portrays her perception of herself as a violation to European society through her decline into a bestial state of being.

In tandem with Bertha's corporeal and behavioral decline exists Bertha's mental illness, the material summation of her inability to function in a community in which both she and her society view her as a monstrous deviant. Defined as "a lunatic," Bertha "yelled and gave a spring" in an arson-suicide, according to Rochester's narrative (Brontë). The extent of Bertha's insanity, which eventually triggers her suicide, emphasizes Bertha's literal inability to survive as a displaced native in European society. Even further, Bertha's limitations as a mentally ill woman, best illustrated by her incapacity to effectively operate outside the private sphere of Thornfield Manor, serve as proof to Bertha of her own deviance within her society. That is to say, Bertha's mania represents the materialization of her self-determined deviance. Without her mental illness, Bertha's confinement would be groundless and, therefore, she would continue functioning as any other individual in her community. However, Bertha's mental instability presents itself as a symptom of her self-perceived and socially-perceived monstrosity, preventing such a continuation of normal functions. Consequently, Bertha's mania exists as an indicator of Bertha's natural, undeniable deviance as a displaced native. Ultimately, Bertha's ineffectiveness within her society as a deviant native manifests in the form of mental illness as physical proof for Bertha of her own monstrous nature.

Altogether, Bertha's understanding of herself as monstrous due to her status as a displaced, native woman and therefore a threat to the purity of the idealized European family prompts onset of her mental illness. The illness, mirroring her self-perceived deviance, furthers the association between health and underlying monstrosity forged by scientific racism. By

characterizing Bertha in this manner, Charlotte Brontë portrays the lurking fear of mental illness as an indicative of inherent monstrosity in the mid 19th century. Rather than rely simply on outward appearances, society turned to mental instability as a representation of one's ability to properly function in society. Even further, the measure of one's displacement and racial purity depended greatly on one's effectiveness within their community. Thus, those subjected to mental illness suffered social inhibitors for which society labeled them as deviant and, therefore, threats to social norms. In effect, scientific racism achieved the formation of connections between self-perceived monstrosity due to the social impediments of mental illness and underlying deviance of displaced individuals.

### **The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde: Hyding the Homosexual**

Third, as threatening individuals become less identifiable through physical traits as colonial empires progressed through the early 20th century, as is the case with homosexuality, scientific racism aims to further emphasize the importance of illness as an indication of inner monstrosity. More specifically, scientific racism associates physical decay with moral decay. In the case of Mr. Hyde, the physical manifestation of Dr. Jekyll's homosexuality, society contributes failing health to homosexuality. Thus, with the aid of scientific experimentation, patriarchy succeeds in portraying homosexuality as a disease. Just as with Ourika and Bertha, the effects of homosexuality within Robert Louis Stevenson's work allow Dr. Jekyll to recognize himself as monstrous due to his deviance from societal norms. In essence, Mr. Hyde personifies Dr. Jekyll's self-monstration as a clandestinely homosexual individual living in a society which views homosexuality as a disease.



Essentially, the perception of Mr. Hyde as abominable and devilish in appearance confirms Dr. Jekyll's inability to adequately operate in a homophobic society without also repressing his socially deviant sexuality. In particular, Mr. Utterson characterizes Mr. Hyde as the image of such excessive "disgust, loathing, and fear" that he cannot find the correct words to describe Mr. Hyde's exact appearance (Stevenson 60). Mr. Hyde's physical deformities prevent him from forging relationships and force him to act nocturnally in order to avoid conflict. As a result, Hyde fails to successfully execute normal daily activities. Instead, Hyde restricts himself to acting alone and in secret during night hours, showing a complete incapability properly function within his own society. As the homosexual portion of Dr. Jekyll, the failures of Hyde within the English community represent the downfalls that Dr. Jekyll would encounter should his homosexuality become a public affair. Thus, Dr. Jekyll, under his true identity, would be hampered and unaccepted within the community by his sexuality. In essence, European society would view Dr. Jekyll as living in sin and, therefore, violating the traditional social constructions to which Dr. Jekyll's actions must conform. Consequently, society would view Dr. Jekyll as they view Mr. Hyde - a deviant individual whose appearance and behaviours serve as further proof of monstrosity. In this fashion, society exiles individuals perceived as threats due to their deviance from social norms based on physical markers such as those described in Mr. Hyde's (and, by association, Dr. Jekyll's) characterization. Therefore, the inhibitors that prevent Mr. Hyde from successfully functioning in European society parallel the inhibitors that would also oppress an openly homosexual Dr. Jekyll. At the crux, the vile description of Mr. Hyde, and the social consequences of his appearance, verify the ineffectiveness within the community that Dr. Jekyll would experience if he were to cease the repression of his homosexuality.

Additionally, Dr. Jekyll's inability to comfortably express his homosexual self except through the actions of Mr. Hyde illustrates Dr. Jekyll's own belief in the monstrous nature of his sexual identity. In fact, Dr. Jekyll's embarrassment in relation to his sexuality causes him to "conceal [his] pleasures" in hopes of preserving his upper crust lifestyle (Stevenson 110). Dr. Jekyll recognizes his desires as offenses to the social class he occupies and, in consequence, believes them to be unnatural offenses indicative of a deeper monstrosity. In addition, Dr. Jekyll recognizes that Mr. Hyde can enjoy pleasures which Dr. Jekyll would normally be penalized for and, therefore, makes efforts to completely repress all socially loathable behaviours to the actions of Mr. Hyde. In other words, Dr. Jekyll expresses his homosexual self only vicariously through Mr. Hyde. This, combined with Dr. Jekyll's apparent shame and conscious concealment illustrates Dr. Jekyll's own belief in the deviance of his sexuality, spurring his self-monstration. Rather than endure social exile, Dr. Jekyll chooses to acknowledge himself as monstrous for his desired deviation from the traditional marital scheme of husband and wife favored by patriarchal society. Essentially, Dr. Jekyll's need to fulfill his homosexuality but restriction of those passions to the actions of Mr. Hyde demonstrates Dr. Jekyll's recognition of his homosexual self as lying outside the bounds of traditional society and, therefore, threatening existing societal orders. Fundamentally, Dr. Jekyll's shame regarding and repression of his homosexual self depicts his belief in the monstrous nature of his own identity.

Furthermore, Dr. Jekyll's decaying health corroborates his self-monstration by demonstrating what society recognizes as the physical impact of homosexuality, ultimately convincing Dr. Jekyll of his own deviance. Namely, Dr. Jekyll appears "pale and shaken, and half fainting, and [begins] groping before him with his hands, like a man restored from death" after transforming back into himself from Mr. Hyde (Stevenson 109). The physical toll Mr. Hyde

has taken on the body of Dr. Jekyll supports society's view of homosexuality as a disease, providing evidence for the racist scientific experiments conducted against homosexuals. Therefore, Dr. Jekyll, as a scientist himself, begins to recognize his deteriorating health as a symptom of his underlying homosexuality. In addition, the social isolation Dr. Jekyll must subject himself to in order to conceal his decayed health serves as proof to him of his own failure to join society. Rather than continue his relations, Dr. Jekyll must forfeit all human contact as a consequence of his sexuality, preventing him from ignoring the monstrous effects of his sexual preferences. In other words, Dr. Jekyll's solitude physically divides him from his community, mirroring the separation incurred by his homosexuality. Ultimately, this illustrates Dr. Jekyll's conscious recognition of his sexuality as monstrous. At the crux, Dr. Jekyll's declining health in light of his self-monstration decisively convinces him of his own deviance.

In short, Dr. Jekyll's illness comes in the form of his condemning homosexuality which materializes in the character of Mr. Hyde. Its existence represents Dr. Jekyll's belief in the monstrosity of his own sexuality, especially in light of Mr. Hyde's inability to function in the London community. The 20th century treatment of homosexuality as a disease along with scientific racism's assertion that physical characteristics seen in Mr. Hyde signify homosexual preferences demonstrates society's rising fears of monstrosity occurring in white men rather than just native individuals. In essence, homosexuality represents the ultimate overturning of the traditional family scheme, completely eliminating reproduction. As such, homosexuality poses the greatest threat in the 20th century to the continuance of patriarchal society. Fearing the collapse of gendered, racial hierarchies, scientific racism strove to identify physical traits which marked homosexual monstrosity while personal knowledge of sexual preference allowed individuals to experience self-monstration. Scientific racism created strong ties between

homosexuality and femininity as epitomized by Mr. Hyde's unmanly appearance, small stature, and feminine hands. Consequently, homosexuals found themselves emasculated to the point of femininity creating a shaming culture within the white community illustrated by Dr. Jekyll's self-induced exile. Collectively, the racist scientific experiments of the 20th century illustrated homosexuality as a disease that indicated underlying monstrosity perceived by the public through physical femininity while perceived by one's self through emasculating shame about one's sexual illness and its associated socially inhibiting isolation.

### **Conclusion: Scientific Racism Through Time**

In summation, each of the authors, Claire de Duras, Charlotte Brontë, and Robert Louis Stevenson, strove to portray the negative effects of scientific racism on native and deviant individuals within European society during their respective lifetimes. All three writers illustrated the self-monstration instigated by society's restriction of those individuals in the public space as well as how this belief in one's own deviance took the physical form of socially restrictive illness. As public suspicions of monstrosity transitioned from displaced individuals to mixed race families to white men themselves, scientific racism adapted new characteristics to mark individuals viewed as threats to existing social hierarchies. Today, these traditions continue most notably in racial profiling both internally and internationally, especially as global transport becomes more easily accessible to the everyday civilian. The mass integration of cultures threatens traditional senses of national borders and racial purity. In a sense, many industrialized countries base large portions of their homeland security on stereotypes targeting minorities and individuals characterized by non-European traits such as darkened skin color. In addition, white individuals converting to or practicing Eastern religions such as Islam strikes even deeper fears

into the western public. Individuals appearing western yet acting in parallel with eastern, especially Islamist, persons often suffer accusations of mental insanity, radicality, and hysteria. Thus, the linkage of health, whether physical or mental, with monstrosity first created by scientific racism persists in modern society. Altogether, society's use of scientific racism as a weapon against threatening individuals endures throughout the colonial era into the modern world, as illustrated by Claire de Duras's Ourika, Charlotte Brontë's Jane Eyre, and Robert Louis Stevenson's The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde in which underlying deviance manifests physically through illness, associating self-perceived monstrosity with socially inhibiting physical defect.

### **Bibliography**

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Duras, Claire De Dufort, and John Fowles. *Ourika*. Austin: W.T. Taylor, 1977. Print.

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Sydney Terris  
Final Paper Abstract  
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**Title:** Illness as a Symptom of Monstrosity

**Thesis:** Underlying deviance and femininity manifest physically through illness to associate self-perceived monstrosity with socially inhibiting physical defect in Claire de Duras's Ourika, Charlotte Brontë's Jane Eyre, and Robert Louis Stevenson's The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde.

**Abstract:** During the relevant colonial periods, a need for physical markers to differentiate between upper crust, white male society and the "others," from homosexuals to displaced natives, increased. The era of scientific racism grew rapidly alongside the rising fear of failing to identify othered people. In Ourika, this is presented through Ourika's declining physical health which eventually leads to her death. Marked by her literal inability to survive in European society, Ourika's debilitating illness isolates her from society as an "other" who cannot subsist on European (and therefore white European) air. As such, Ourika's illness allows European society to identify her as monstrous, even without acknowledgement of her skin color. In Stevenson's work, Hyde's monstrosity as a homosexual is portrayed through his physical femininity and deviance from the stereotypical European visage. Short in stature, possessing

feminine hands, and existing only at night under moons symbolic of feminine agency, Hyde seemingly identifies more strongly with the feminine sphere rather than the masculine sphere. Further, stereotyped European stature and facial features (the specifics of which will be observed in more depth within the essay), Hyde becomes associated with the native others, furthering the idea that moral monstrosity and madness can be identified through physical markers seen as unmasculine in European patriarchal society. These same ideas will be applied to an analysis of Bertha as a “madwoman” in *Jane Eyre*. In essence, Mr. Ourika, Mr. Hyde, and Bertha all fall short of stereotypical European appearances (whether in health or physical features), allowing patriarchy to label them as feminine deviants and, therefore, monstrous, thus forming a connection between physical defect and moral defect.

### **Working Bibliography:**

Brontë, Charlotte. *Jane Eyre*. New York, NY: Penguin Group, 2008. Print.

Duras, Claire De Durtfort, and John Fowles. *Ourika*. Austin: W.T. Taylor, 1977. Print.

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### **Abstract Email Response:**

Sydney,

I really think you have something good here, but perhaps slant it differently.

The physiology of the monsters is what allows society to recognize them as deviant--what they look like.

The illness, though, I suggest it is more for the monster him/herself to make them recognize that they are displaced in society. Without the illness, they would remain functioning fine and well in society, perhaps oblivious to their own monstrosity.

Think about it and how it works with each character and differs between more masculine and feminine monsters. Is the madness combined with their death more settling or unsettling for male or female?

I would happy to speak with you either by phone or office hours about this or even email.

Best of luck!