Jekyll and Hyde Context

**Life in Victorian England**

**The Victorians were overwhelmingly Christian**, and the Church governed and was in control of many aspects of their lives. Victorians were expected to follow the rules laid out in the Bible, and if they didn’t they would be judged accordingly. **Many held the belief that sins like sex before marriage, murder, and even theft would send you to hell.** Despite the appearance of a society that followed the rules and was ‘good’ and ‘proper,’ **under the surface many were living double lives. Under the surface, it was a corrupt (dishonest) society. Drug taking (mainly opium), violent crime, prostitution, adultery and pornography all went on but were hidden, making the rich who made claims to be living Christian lives, hypocrites (doing the opposite of what you claim to be doing).** Many married men had mistresses (other women) and some slept with prostitutes despite this being against the teachings of the Bible.

The Victorian era was described by the British Prime Minister Benjamin Disraeli as ‘two nations’ – because **the divide between rich and poor was so large**. Although there were increasingly rich and prosperous members of society life for the poor was difficult. **The poor suffered living with brutal factory conditions, low wages, and crowded cities rife with crime**. **Jekyll and Hyde was written just before the Jack the Ripper murders, and captures some of the crime occurring on the streets of Victorian London.** Many at the end of the 1880s (fin de siècle) were concerned with some members of society (particularly the rich) beginning to rebel against the strict rules of Victorian life – instead seeking their own pleasures (hedonism) like drinking, drug taking and sex outside of marriage. Some members of the church feared there would be a collapse of morals and civilisation.

**The Victorian Bachelor/Gentleman**

A very traditional family was promoted in the Victorian Era – where the woman was the centre of the ‘private sphere’ (the home) and responsible for the household and children, and men worked for a living and were the ‘breadwinner.’ This was the norm and expectation, **but there were a number of Victorian bachelor’s (single men) who never married and preferred the quiet and solitude of living on their own**, many who are depicted in Victorian literature such as Sherlock Holmes.

**Often these men would frequent ‘gentleman’s clubs’ and formed friendships with other single men.** **Sometimes men were called ‘confirmed bachelors’ – which was often used as a polite or subtle way of suggesting they were gay.** ‘**Victorian Gentlemen’ was an important cultural role model, where a man had a proper, respectable appearance and behaviour.** The actions and decisions of a man were crucial in determining his quality as a person. The guidelines to how a gentleman should act are unlimited. The gentleman of the Victorian era were expected to act from the "impulses of his kind heart." Proper men were to create pleasurable conditions for all those in their care. **They were supposed to show a lot of respect and kindness to the people around them, which is why it caused a huge scandal when someone who had a respectable and important job was reported to have acted in a sinful way**. There was an enormous pressure put on gentlemen to treat every person in the room correctly and properly, and to portray good manners.

**Science vs Religion: The Influence of Darwin**

The Victorians were great church goers. Everyone was expected to attend some form of religious worship on Sunday.

At the time, scientific discovery was upsetting what some people believed, and this fear of the new and unfamiliar led to books like Frankenstein being written. In it, a scientist uses his knowledge to accidentally create a monster – **many people believed science was dangerous and a threat.**

People’s beliefs were also challenged **by Charles Darwin’s theory of evolution.** This showed that different species had evolved through a process called **‘natural selection’**, **in which animals pass on their strongest characteristics, meaning their offspring are better suited to the environment they live in** – for example Darwin believes that giraffes that grew long necks survived as they can reach leaves to eat – animals evolved to survive.

This theory was deeply disturbing for many people, as it challenged their religious beliefs: **Darwin’s theory completely goes against the Bible’s teachings, in which God created Adam and Eve.** Many people felt they were being forced to choose between their long-held religious beliefs and science – and many believed that science was meddling in matters that only God had control over. Rather than being innocent creatures created by a powerful god, **this theory meant that we had evolved from more primitive (less sophisticated and more animalistic) creatures by accident** **– something many people found appalling** because it showed we were more closely related to the animal kingdom than people had assumed. The theory was also misunderstood by many who believed that this meant we were evolved from monkeys and apes – which we are not.

In 1869, Scientist Thomas Henry Huxley coined the term **“agnostic”** a person who neither believes nor disbelieves in the existence of God, holding instead that it is simply impossible for humans to possess the knowledge of such matters**. This was shocking and controversial due to the amount of people who believed in God and heaven and hell.**

**The Subconscious**

Shortly after Jekyll & Hyde was written, a famous psychoanalyst called Sigmund Freud developed a theory about human nature. He thought our personalities could be divided into three different parts, and that we were unaware of this:

*****The Id****: this is the animalistic wild part of the brain. It seeks pleasure and avoids pain – basic urges lurk here****The Ego****: the decision making part of the brain. It uses reason and logic to make the Id behave.****The Superego****: the voice that includes society’s values and morals – this keeps the Id in check*

Again this was shocking because it suggested we have animalistic tendencies that we couldn’t control.

**During the Victorian era, many were exploring how the strict, religious and moral nature of Victorian England led to repression (where you have to hide your true/feelings emotions) to fit in with societies’ standards - which promoted a life where sex before marriage, homosexuality, and the pursuit of pleasure where frowned upon and living a moral, religious and reserved life was favoured. This led to an exploration into the ‘duality of man’ – the idea that men led ‘dual’ or two different lives/had two different personalities.**