

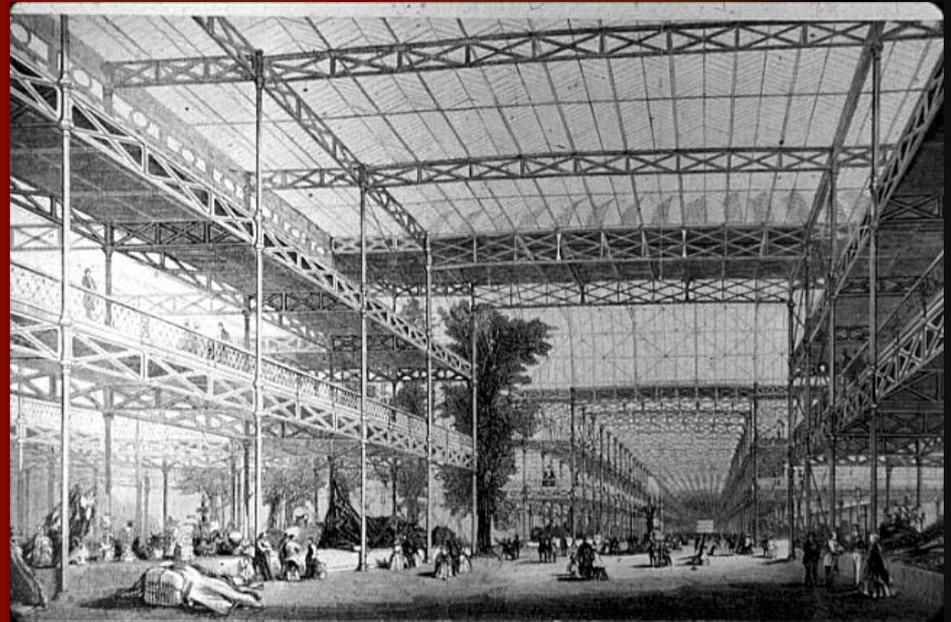
The Victorian Age, 1832-1901

<http://www.victorianweb.org/>

Dr. Alan Haffa

Queen Victoria and Prince Albert

- 1851, the first “world’s fair” at London, “The Great Exhibition of the Works of Industry of all Nations,” organized by Prince Albert; term Victorian was first used to describe the country’s pride in its economic and governmental success
- Crystal Palace as a symbol of this accomplishment



Meaning of Victorian

- V. = England, Empire, Duty, Family, and Propriety
- Social conduct that is rigid, formal, and restrained, at least in public
- Sexual prudery
- Formal Manners
- Strict Gender Roles

Characterizations of the Victorian Age

- William Thackeray: "We are of the time of chivalry...We are of the age of steam."
- Sir Henry Holland, 1858, "We are living in an age of transition."

Important Demographic Facts

- Population in England doubled between 1800 and 1850.
- 1800, 1/5 lived in big cities; by 1890s, 3/4

Technological Change

- W.R. Greg, "The most salient characteristic of life in this latter portion of the 19th century is its SPEED," in *Life at High Pressures*, 1875.
- Trains in 1830s
- Subway in London, 1863
- Photography, Henry Fox Talbot, 1839
- Telegraph and phonograph

Utilitarianism

- Jeremy Bentham and John Stuart Mills; the notion that one should always act so that the Greatest Good is accomplished for the Most People
- Bentham: "All poetry is misrepresentation." He could not see the practical value in colorful or evocative words
- Contrasting View: Oscar Wilde, "there is no such thing as a moral or immoral book. Books are well written or badly written."

Challenges to Victorian Attitudes

- Feminism and the demand for greater power and opportunity for women; Queen Victoria herself was against feminism
- Fear of Social Change: not only did women not vote, but the majority of men did not get to vote and workers were beginning to clamor for worker's rights
- Although religiously conservative, this was the era of Biblical scholarship that introduced the theory of multiple authorship; in Geography, that showed the earth's age to be much greater than 5,000 years; in Biology, Darwin and the theory of Evolution

Social Conditions

- 6 day work week with 10-12 hour days
- No safety regulations in workplace
- Child labor
- No healthcare or pensions for working class
- Unsanitary water
- In Manchester, 1841, average life expectancy for working poor was 20!

Social Commentary and Reform (page 494-5)

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- F. Engels and Karl Marx: the “surplus labor value”
- Hungry 40s: Riots
- First Reform Bill, 1832: gave rep. to industrial towns in Parliament; still, 1/6 men voted; 1867, Second Reform Bill, 1/3 vote
- Repeal of Corn Laws, 1846, tariffs on foreign grain
- Factory Acts: inspections of machinery, children under 9 prohibited; 48 hour work week for children;
- 1871, Trade Unions legally recognized
- 1870: Education Act mandated nationally funded public education



Women

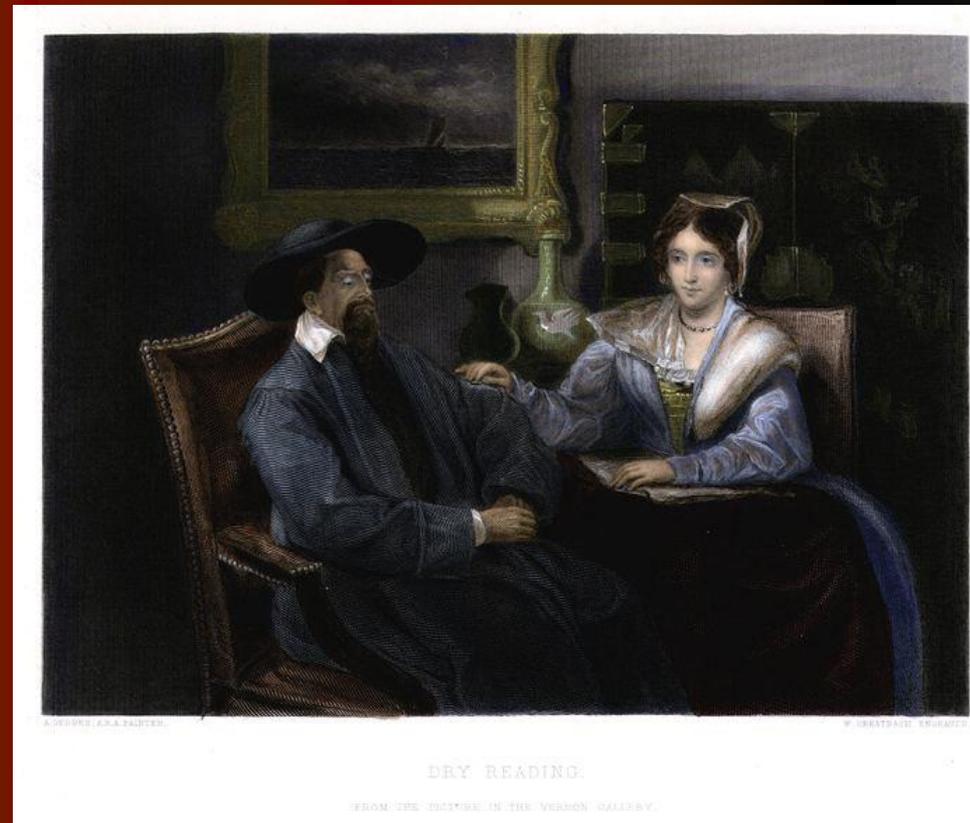
- Prior to 1870, married women had no rights
- While many women worked (1/3 workforce), especially in domestic service, the ideal for a woman was to suppress her own needs and to selflessly serve her children and society; to marry well and to stay at home
- Prostitution
- 1857: Divorce and Matrimonial Act; later acts protected women from assault and desertion
- 1870 and 1882; Married Women's property Acts, right to possess wages and property
- First Women's Colleges at Cambridge (1869) and Oxford (1879), though women were not awarded Oxbridge degrees
- By the end of the century women were moving into careers as teachers and nurses and office work

Empire

- “I contend that we are the first race in the world, and the more of the world we inhabit, the better it is for the human race.” Cecil Rhodes
- Queen: the mission of Empire was “to protect the poor natives and advance civilization.” Real Motive: advance British business interests
- Slavery: outlawed in 1833, but still traded with West India for sugar and US for cheap cotton
- “Irish Questions” and Potato Famine
- “Indian Mutiny” of 1857-59, a rebellion against the East India Company
- Wars: Crimean (1854-56); Second Opium War, 1860; Boer War, 1899-1902
- Rudyard Kipling, “The White Man’s Burden” of spreading civilization

Literacy and Censorship

- By the end of the 19th century, literacy was up to 97%
- Commercial Lending Libraries; comparable to video stores today
- Serial Novels and novels in parts; Dickens
- Family Reading Circle
- Pressure from Printers and Publishers to censor morally suspect material



Summary

- Victorian Age is a complex one, in which public morality reflects a strict Biblical religiosity; yet, the age also saw significant scientific and scholarly challenges to traditional religion and one in which private sexuality may not have matched public appearances
- Age of Empire and Rise of Industrialization; the public appearance of Empire as a burden of civilization, but the reality of Empire as a vehicle for economic exploitation
- Although Victorian values were against feminism and labor organizations, by the end of the era women and workers had made significant gains
- Some of the best writers of this era will reflect this complexity and will challenge Victorian norms (Oscar Wilde and Robert Browning); others will rest comfortable in the appearances (Tennyson), and others are harder to characterize (Jane Austen, M. Arnold)