

VICTORIAN LITERATURE

Victorian literature is that produced during the reign of Queen Victoria (1837-1901) or the Victorian era. It forms a link and transition between the writers of the romantic period and the very different literature of the 20th century. The 19th century is often regarded as a high point in British literature as well as in other countries such as France, the United States and Russia. Books, and novels in particular, became ubiquitous, and the "Victorian novelist" created a legacy of works with continuing appeal.

VICTORIAN AGE: GENERAL VIEW

The Victorian Age was a very exciting period with many artistic styles, literary schools as well as political and social movements. **There were also rapid change and developments in nearly every sphere**, from advances in medical, scientific and technological knowledge to changes in population growth and location. **It was a time of prosperity**, imperial expansion and great political reform. But today we consider it as an age of contradictions. For example while the high middle class tried to improve the public morals, many poor people were forced to live in inhuman conditions. Dignity and restraint were contrasted to prostitution and child labor. The age began with confidence and optimism, which lead to an economic boom including growing prosperity. At some point the prosperity gave way to uncertainty and doubt regarding Britain's place in the world.

Victorian Morality

The middle class people living in the Victorian age based their life on a set of values that supported sexual repression, low tolerance of crime, and a strong social ethic. Due to the enormous impact and importance of the British Empire, many of these values were spread across the world. Moreover the Queen and her husband's moral code was rather high.

Prudery and Repression were dominating features in the big picture of the Victorian period. Nevertheless verbal and written communication about emotions and sexual feelings were mostly discussed in the language of the flowers.

Homosexuality was illegal and regarded as gross in the Victorian Era. Nevertheless there were many famous men from the British Isles, who were notorious homosexuals. The most famous one was probably Oscar Wilde. Towards the end of the century large trials were held on the subject of homosexuality.

Victorian Family Life

Families were most important to Victorians. They were rather large compared to families nowadays, with an average of five or six children and their organization was also very patriarchal. Victorians encouraged hard work, respectability, social deference and religious conformity.

Upper and middle class families usually lived in big and comfortable houses. Each member of the family had its own place and the parents made sure the children were taught to 'know their place'. For the parents the upbringing of their children was the most important responsibility. They believed that a child must know the difference between right and wrong in order to become a thoughtful, moral adult. Consequently, when a child did something wrong it would be punished for its own good. A common saying in that time was 'Spare the rod and spoil the child' in which the Victorians believed.

The father was the head of the family and the household. He was mostly strict and obeyed by everyone. The children did not dare to talk back to him. They always spoke politely and respected him by calling him 'Sir'. When the father demanded peace and quiet time, he would retreat to his study and the rest of the family was not allowed to enter without permission.

The mother would spend her time planning dinner parties, visiting the dressmaker, or calling on her friends. She did not engage in household chores like cleaning, cooking, or washing clothes.

Many children out of poor families died of diseases like scarlet fever, measles, polio and tuberculosis, which are all curable today.

Science

The Victorian Era was a time of enormous scientific progress and ideas. Darwin took his 'Voyage of The Beagle' and later published 'The Theory of Evolution'.

The Great Exhibition took place at Crystal Palace in London in 1851, exhibiting technical and industrial advances of the age.

Medicine and Physical Science continued to develop and improve throughout the century. There were significant changes that increased the specialization in surgery and hospital building. Also there were notable breakthroughs in anesthetics. Queen Victoria was the most famous patient publicizing anesthetics by taking Chloroform for the birth of her son in 1853. Modern Psychiatry began with men like Sigmund Freud. Furthermore by the end of the century a radical economic theory was developed by Karl Marx and his associates.

Politics

The Victorian time saw the beginning and spread of political movements, most importantly socialism, liberalism and organized feminism. The social classes were reforming. The old hierarchical order was changing with the growing of the middle class. The composition of the upper class was changing from pure aristocracy to a combination of nobility and emerging wealthy gentlemen of commercial class.