

Victorian Age

1830-1901

Beginning/Ending: How does one determine the scope of the Victorian Age?

- 1824--Death of Byron/Westminster review (Benthamites)
- 1830—Liverpool, Manchester Railway
- 1832--First reform Bill
- 1837--Queen Victoria
- 1838—Abolition of Slavery
- 1887--Queen's Golden Jubilee
- 1901--Queen Victoria's death
- 1914--Beginning of WWI (Edwardian and Georgian Periods)

Queen Victoria/Victorian Temper

- Victoria's character and the characteristics of Victorianism
- Historical Self-consciousness
- “Close thy Byron; open they Goethe”
- Queen Victoria's death: reaction against the distinct notion of Victorianism

Victorian Issues: Industrial Revolution [1830s & 1840s—Time of Troubles (pp. 8-10)

- Technological innovations—railroad/manufacturing / Speed, time
- Enclosure Acts--economic transformation. By 1865, urban population in England is roughly 50% greater than the rural population
- Reform Bills--1832, 1867, 1884
- Chartism - :”People’s Charter” (p. 10—illustration)
- Higher standard of living//Creation of urban cities and slums/the Condition of England Question / Laissez-faire economics / Hungry Forties
- Corn Laws / Irish Potato Famine
- 1848--Continent--threat of revolution

Victorian Issues: Mid-Period [1850s, 1860s, & 1870s (pp. 10-13; 3-6)]

- Optimism of the Great Exhibition (1851)--Britain as “the workshop of the world.”
- Free trade / improved conditions for working classes
- British prosperity: Empire building/Colonialism—India & East India Company / Price paid by indigenous populations
 - Effects of “British imperial aggression” (p. 4)
 - Writers of various ethnic and religious traditions shape and are shaped by British (Victorian) literature
 - Victorian writers focusing on local/regional influences on romantic love, childhood, natural world, and everyday life (the meaning of Britishness) were aware of life in the colonies, whose writers also participated in the shaping of colonial and British culture (pp. 5-6)
- Challenges to Great Britain’s global position: Germany and the U.S. / growth of labor as political and economic force
- Victorian Medievalism--looking to the past (p. 12—illustration)

Victorian Issues: Late Period [1880s & 1890s (pp. 13-14)]

- Problems abroad--the price of maintaining an empire--Crimean War, Sepoy Rebellion (Indian mutiny), Jamaica Rebellion--rise of other countries competing with Britain
- Social and political unrest: growth of labor
Critiques of Victorianism and its values
- Nineties: Victorian standards “breaking down”/Beginning of modernist movement

Waning of Belief (pp. 14-15)

- Debates about religion and science
 - Low Church: Evangelicals, Dissenters
 - Broad Church: Inclusive, Moderate (Latitudinarians)
 - High Church: Tractarians
 - Geology: Age of the earth (Lyell)
 - Evolution: Nature of human beings (Darwin)

Women and the Politics of Domesticity (pp.16-19)

- Political and legal rights / reforms: employment, education
- The Women Question—Reform and debate throughout the age. Separate Spheres Doctrine / New Woman (p. 532)
- Social class: Middle class and working-class women
- Victorian middle-class home: “gendered division of ethical labor” (p. 19).

Genres/Literary Innovations (pp. 19-25)

- Literacy, Publication, and Reading: Methods and technology/Education/Development of a reading culture
- Short Fiction/Novel
 - Realism(s)
 - short fiction – periodical publication
 - Age of the novel (e.g., Dickens)
- Poetry
 - As during the Romantic Period, “highest pinnacle”
 - Variety and innovation (e.g., dramatic monologue)
 - Role of the poet/artist? Didactic? Art for art’s sake?
- Prose
 - Didactic purpose – instruct readers and encourage debate about social issues
 - Style – how something is said
- Drama/Theater
 - Melodrama/adaptations of fiction
 - End of the age – satires of Victorian values (e.g., Oscar Wilde)

Victorian Attitudes

The very nature of these dichotomies can be questioned. Use them as a general starting point for thinking. What additional dichotomies can you think of?

- Speed/Transition/Present vs. Stability/Past
- Faith vs. Skepticism
- Technology/Science vs. Imagination/Nature
- Individualism vs. the Authority of Society/Culture