

# Victorian Age

1830-1901

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

- 1824--Death of Byron/founding of Westminster review (Benthamites)
- 1830—William IV takes throne
- 1832--First reform Bill
- 1837--Queen Victoria
- 1887--Queen's Golden Jubilee
- 1901--Queen Victoria's death
- 1914--Beginning of WWI (Edwardian and Georgian Periods)

# Queen Victoria/Victorian Temper

- Speed of change: growth & transformation/transition—past to present. (Clock) Time (opening paragraph)
- Victoria's character and the characteristics of Victorianism (5-6; 653-54) (*QVE I*: 7:30-10:07)
- Historical Self-consciousness
- “Close thy Byron; open they Goethe” Move from introspection (Romanticism) to moral purpose—practical, real, tangible (5)
- Reaction against Victorianism—(7)

# Victorian Issues: Industrial Revolution (1830-48—Time of Troubles)

- Technological innovations—railroad/manufacturing (7)/Speed, (clock) time—structures and orders life. (*QVE I*: 21:00-25:32)
- Enclosure Acts--economic transformation. By 1865, urban population in England is roughly 50% greater than the rural population. Shift from rural to urban living. (*QVE I*: 10:16-13:20)
- Reform Bills--1832, 1867, 1884: Social class (7-8)
- Higher standard of living//Creation of urban cities and slums/the Condition of England Question (8)/Laissez-faire economics.
- Chartism (8)
- Corn Laws (8-9) (*QVE I*: 26:40-28:10)
- 1848--Continent--threat of revolution (9)

# Victorian Issues: Mid-Period (1848-70)

- Optimism of the Great Exhibition (1851)--Britain as “the workshop of the world.” (10) Time of “comfortable tolerance and equanimity.” (*QVE I*: 48:26-53:20)
- British empire (11-12) (*QVE I*: 53:21-57:12)
- Debates about religion (12) and science (13-14)
  - Low Church: Evangelicals, Dissenters
  - Broad Church: Inclusive, Moderate (Latitudinarians)
  - High Church: Tractarians
- Utilitarianism (12, 72-3)
- Geology: Age of the earth (13)
- Evolution: Nature of human beings (13-14)
- Victorian Medievalism--looking to the past (nostalgia, check against the social ills of progress/validation of progress)

# Victorian Issues: Late Period (1870-1901)

- Problems abroad--the price of maintaining an empire--Crimean War, Sepoy Rebellion (Indian mutiny/*QVE I: 1:27*→), Jamaica Rebellion, massacre in Sudan, Anglo-Boer wars--rise of other countries competing with Britain (14-15)
- Social and political unrest: growth of labor (15-16)
- Nineties: Critiques of Victorianism and its values. Victorian standards “breaking down”/Beginning of modernist movement (16-17)

# Role of Women/Literacy

- The Women Question—Reform and debate throughout the age. Legal rights, educational and employment opportunities. What was the role of women in society? The proper relationship between men and women? Do inherent qualities define gender? Separate Spheres Doctrine (19)/New Woman (20)
- Literacy, Publication, and Reading: Methods and Technology/Education/Growth and development of a reading culture/Literature: Delight? Instruct?—social problem (21)

# Genres

- 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 Values/Attitudes

The very nature of these dichotomies can be questioned. Use them as a general starting point for thinking

- Speed/Transition/Present vs. Stability/Tradition/Past
- Faith/Optimism vs. Skepticism/Anxiety
- Technology/Science vs. Imagination/Nature/Religion
- Individualism vs. the Authority of Society/Culture
- Masculine/Public Sphere vs. Feminine/Private Sphere