

The Victorian Era 1832-1901

Contexts: The Woman Question, Industrial Growth, Evolution

Queen Victoria reigned from 1837 to 1891

- signified stability and continuity
- national pride
- Prince Albert orgz'd World's Fair, celebrating industry at the Crystal Palace 1851
- 1837 coronation; 1887 Golden Jubilee; 1897 Diamond Jubilee
- England & Empire: DUTY, FAMILY & PROPRIETY

Age of Energy & Invention: railways, steamships, photographic negatives

Age of Doubt: crisis of faith (evolution)

Age of Reform: Factory Acts, The Woman Question

Age of Empire: India, South Africa, West Indies, Crimea

The Woman Question:

Coventry Patmore, "The Angel in the House"

John Ruskin, "Of Queens' Gardens"

Women as objects to be worshiped: this is both objectifying / glorifying
domestic bliss; home = sacred place
female idleness = status symbol separate spheres
Becoming a nurse or governess were some of the few options for employment

Industrialization: Ways to cope with industrialized city life (dirty, crowded cities, struggling working class): Individualism, Utilitarianism, Sweetness and Light

Victorian poetry:

J.S. Mill's definition of poetry:

Essay "What is Poetry?"

mere eloquence vs. true poetry

"heard" vs. "overheard"

"all poetry is in the nature of soliloquy" / spontaneous

Significance: leads us to think about the Dramatic Monologue

What is a **dramatic monologue**?

1. speaker is not the author
2. we learn about the speaker's true character through his interactions with others- SPYING
3. the slow reveal (dramatic) provokes interest

This is a monologue even though there is a conversation (we only hear 1 side)

Browning: "Porphyria's Lover"

pathetic fallacy (nature takes on the psyche of the speaker)

"My Last Duchess"

Pre-Raphaelites

“sister arts”: painting / poetry

John Ruskin: The Pre-Raphaelites have 1 principle: “absolute, uncompromising truth in all it does.” Adherence to nature; painted outdoors; interest in Arthurian themes.

- genuine ideas
- study nature
- produce a good picture

The Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood resisted the many rules and strict conventions of academic painting.

William Morris, “The Defence of Guenevere”

poet, painter, businessman, and a designer of furniture

dramatic monologue in iambic pentameter

Guenevere’s side to the story. She is unapologetic and uses her beauty as a justification for her deeds. → Aestheticism

D.G. Rossetti

“The Blessed Damozel”: 7 stars, the gold bar, her warm bosom

Are there meaningful symbols or just realist detail?

We learned about Rossetti’s use of models and their repeated representations in different pieces. Question of Rossetti’s models (the same few used over and over again) represented as saintly religious or legendary beings versus just fleshly women.

Buchanan fired back with a disgusted review criticizing at “D.G. Rossetti and The Fleshly School of Poetry”: they “writhe, giggle, squirm,” etc.

Christina Rossetti

Goblin Market

Different readings:

a rape story / a children’s moralist warning story

a warning about the dangers of commerce (Victorian market culture)

story of Christian redemption (Lizzie as Christ figure, offering up her body to the sinner)

Laura is the fallen Eve figure

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

“The Runaway Slave at Pilgrim’s Point”

“The Cry of the Children”

moral, political poems aimed at social reform.

they indict England and America, supposedly “free” countries, of barbarism

contrasts the parenting of animals in nature with the cruel parenting of humans

calls on the men (fathers and brothers) to help right these wrongs

Aestheticism and Decadence

Walter Pater, *Essays*, 1867: Father of the Aesthetic movement

- unlike Ruskin and Matthew Arnold, who thought art could be morally useful, Pater moved away from art as a moral statement or a means for teaching.
- “L’art pour l’art” – Art for Art’s sake (Walter Pater)
- Cult of beauty emphasizing pleasure and sensuality > teaching as the purpose of art
- no real association between art and morality

Pater was a critic, not a poet. First and foremost, one must understand their own impression of an object.

Question of **style**: meaning doesn’t adhere to a work of art; there is no truth “out there”; all we can do is refine our sensibilities.

For Pater, criticism *is* art. The critic is an artist.

Every moment some form grows perfect in hand or face; some tone on the hills or the sea is choicer than the rest; some mood of passion or insight or intellectual excitement is irresistibly real and attractive to us, — for that moment only. Not the fruit of experience, but experience itself, is the end. A counted number of pulses only is given to us of a variegated, dramatic life. How may we see in them all that is to be seen in them by the finest senses? How shall we pass most swiftly from point to point, and be present always at the focus where the greatest number of vital forces unite in their purest energy?

To burn always with this hard, gemlike flame, to maintain this ecstasy, is success in life.

Criticism should be an art; so should eating and living.

Pater believed in a heightened consciousness and appreciation of the beauty of the moment. This was a whole aesthetic and moral creed.

Oscar Wilde, Preface to *The Picture of Dorian Gray*
The Importance of Being Earnest (pp. 1733-1741 only)

Decadence goes one step further: “**Art over life**”; dandies

Wilde embodied the movement that Pater began. Fin de siècle.

Images of the Aesthete, Oscar Wilde

<http://www.vam.ac.uk/content/videos/c/cult-of-beauty-the-aesthetic-movement-1860-1900/>

- Wilde was a student of Pater’s at Oxford; he purposely reinvented Pater’s ideas and made them paradoxical. “Art is better than life because life only imitates art.”
- Didn’t draw any distinction between life and art. Find beauty anywhere, especially in the most unexpected places. Wilde loved to shock and contradict.
- Jailed in 1895 for homosexuality; romance with Lord Alfred Douglas.
- Poem by Douglas was used as evidence in court against them.
- Wilde has a love of paradox and inversion.

See aphorisms in the Preface to *The Picture of Dorian Gray*.

Fin-de-Siècle (End of the Century) = 1890s Literature

world weary, pessimistic, cynical

ENNUI: the problem with the thrill of living in the moment and assaulting your senses is the dulling of the senses that this inevitably leads to. You end up seeking only what is bizarre, grotesque, or exotic beauty.

egomania

Belief in beauty above all else.

Robert Louis Stevenson's *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*

note the language of addiction; each time he needs stronger and stronger substances to achieve the same effect

The Victorian Novel

19th century novels: Greater attention to characters of lower classes

Theme of the self-made man / class mobility

realist description / realism / realist detail

burgeoning middle class readership

D.H. Lawrence essay, "Why the Novel Matters"

The novel reflects the totality of our life; it shows our life: **"The novel is the one bright book of life.** Books are not life. They are only tremulations on the ether. But the novel as a tremulation can make the whole man alive tremble. Which is more than poetry, philosophy, science, or any other book-tremulation can do. ... The novel is the book of life."

Realist novels are self-contained fictional universes that also represent an external world of historical events and social forces.

The presence of agency / choice are the most characteristic factors of realism.

Scenes of decision making impart the world view that we can change our society, focusing on the betterment of the working class, social reform, and social change.

Victorian Texts

Coventry Patmore, "The Angel in the House" – poem

John Ruskin, "Of Queen's Gardens" – prose

J.S. Mill, "What is Poetry?" – essay (eloquence versus poetry)

Browning, "Porphyria's Lover" - poem (dramatic monologue)

Browning, "My Last Duchess" - poem (dramatic monologue)

Elizabeth Barrett Browning, "The Cry of the Children"

Elizabeth Barrett Browning, "The Runaway Slave at Pilgrim's Point"

Christina Rossetti, *Goblin Market* – long poem

D.G. Rossetti, "The Blessed Damozel" - poem

William Morris, "The Defense of Guenevere" – poem (dramatic monologue)

Robert Buchanan, "The Fleshly School of Poetry: Mr. D.G. Rossetti" – critical review, journal article

Oscar Wilde, Preface to *A Picture of Dorian Gray* – preface to a novel

Oscar Wilde, *The Importance of Being Earnest* – play

Robert Louis Stevenson, *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* - novel

Charles Dickens, *Great Expectations* (novel)

Themes and terms:

Separate spheres

Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood

Fleshly School

Dramatic monologue

Arthurian themes

White Man's Burden

Aestheticism

Decadence and dandies

Ennui

Gothic

Fin-de-siecle

Realism (and the realist novel)