

The Victorian Age (1830-1901)

- named for Queen Victoria (1819-1901), the longest reigning monarch (63 years) until Queen Elizabeth II (70 years)
- a time of enormous social and technological change: end of slavery, Reform Act (1832), construction of first steam-powered railway, etc.
- British Empire continued to expand, governing a quarter of the world's land mass (including much of Africa) and a quarter of its population
- origins of modern consumer culture as society continued to shift from an agrarian to a manufacturing base; first “modern conveniences”
- organized religion further supplanted by growth of science and other systems of thought: Utilitarianism, Darwinism (natural selection), etc.
- the novel dominated, though poetry, drama, and non-fiction were also influential genres as literacy and availability of books grew (NAEL E3-25)



Queen Victoria (1819-1901)

I NEVER, NEVER spent such an evening!!! MY DEAREST DEAREST DEAR Albert ... his excessive love & affection gave me feelings of heavenly love & happiness I never could have hoped to have felt before! He clasped me in his arms, & we kissed each other again & again! ... [T]o be called by names of tenderness, I have never yet heard used to me before—was bliss beyond belief! Oh! This was the happiest day of my life!

Queen Victoria. Private journal, 10 February 1840

- ascended the British throne at age 18; reigned for 63 years
- projected a grand image despite her modest 5-foot stature
- married first cousin Albert in 1840 and had 9 children; deeply mourned his passing in 1861
- prodigious letter, journal writer
- survived 8 assassination attempts
- reigned over 20 prime ministers
- became synonymous with moral rectitude, but did not utter “We are not amused” (Wikipedia)

The First Reform Act (1832)

- an Act of Parliament of the United Kingdom in 1832 that introduced major changes to the electoral system of England and Wales
- long title: An Act to amend the representation of the people in England and Wales; short title: Representation of the People Act
- reapportioned constituencies to address unequal distribution of seats (until then, only about 200,000 wealthy male landowners could vote)
- expanded franchise by broadening and standardizing the property qualifications to vote to include small landowners, tenant farmers, and shopkeepers (householders who owned £10 or more in property)
- formally excluded women and colonized people from voting; some lower-middle-class men could vote, but most working men could not
- represented only the first step in a larger set of reforms to modernize and democratize voting rights (NAEL E7)

The British Empire by the Numbers

- **1/4**: amount of the world's land mass governed by the British Empire at its height
- **1/4**: amount of the world population governed by the British Empire at its height
- **412,000,000**: number of people governed by the British Empire at its height
- **94**: number of present-day countries in British Empire at its height
- **10%**: percentage of Africa under formal European control in 1870
- **90%**: percentage of Africa under formal European control in 1914
- **1807**: year of slavery abolition
- **1833**: Slavery Abolition Act
- **2010**: slavery a criminal offence
- **1858**: Parliament takes control of India from East India Co.
- **1876**: Victoria assumes Empress of India title

The Crystal Palace and the Great Exhibition



Great Exhibition

- full title: Great Exhibition of the Works of Industry of All Nations
- international exhibition in May-Oct. 1851 to display some of the technological advancements of the Industrial Revolution
- organized by Prince Albert
- first in a series of World's Fairs
- exhibits included the Koh-i-Noor diamond, a fax-machine precursor, and a leech-powered barometer (NAEL E11)

Crystal Palace

- constructed of cast iron and plate glass in Hyde Park, London, to house the Great Exhibition of 1851
- designed by English architect and engineer Joseph Paxton; constructed over 39 weeks
- 1,851 ft long, 128 ft high, 990,000 ft² in area (three times the size of St Paul's Cathedral); used 293,000 panes of glass
- relocated and rebuilt after the Exhibition; burned down in Nov 1936 (Wikipedia)

Utilitarianism and Natural Selection

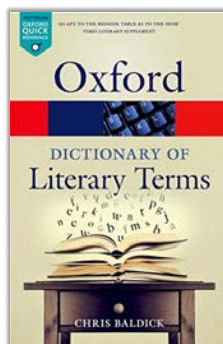
Utilitarianism

- developed by English philosophers Jeremy Bentham (1748-1832) and James Mill (1773-1836)
- contends that humans seek maximum pleasure and minimum pain, and thus a morally correct action is one that provides the greatest pleasure to the greatest number of people
- challenged role of suffering, grace, and faith in traditional Christian systems (NAEL E15)

Natural Selection

- developed by English biologist Charles Darwin (1809-1882) in the treatise *The Origin of Species* (1859)
- the process whereby an organism adapts to its environment by means of selectively reproducing changes in its genotype
- challenged the principle of Creationism and the primacy of human beings in the universe (NAEL E16)

realism



- a mode of writing that gives the impression of recording faithfully an actual way of life
- characterized by detailed accuracy of description (*verisimilitude*) to reflect the problems of life, the existence of a real world outside the text
- rejects idealization, escapism, extravagance, excess, etc.
- associated chiefly with the 19thC novel (Dickens, Eliot, etc.) (Baldick 303-04)

The Victorian Novel



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