LESSON 6.
ROMANTICISM AND VICTORIANISM IN ENGLISH LITERATURE

Introduction to the cultural and historical context of the Victorian period

AIM OF THIS UNIT:
The unit offers an introduction to the cultural and historical context of the Victorian period to facilitate the comprehension of the late 19th century literary works which are to be discussed in the following chapters.

KEY FIGURES:
Queen Victoria, Charles Darwin, Thomas Alva Edison, Nikola Tesla, Alexander Graham Bell, Benjamin Disraeli, William Gladstone, John Stuart Mill, Thomas Robert Malthus, Karl Marx, Sigmund Freud, Havelock Ellis, Friedrich Nietzsche, John Ruskin, Lewis Carroll, Florence Nightingale, Emmeline Pankhurst, Jack the Ripper, Gilbert and Sullivan

COMPULSORY READINGS:
Browse through *The Victorian web*. An online digital database on literature, culture, and history in the age of Victoria. Founded and edited by George P Landow, Professor of English and History of Art, Brown University.
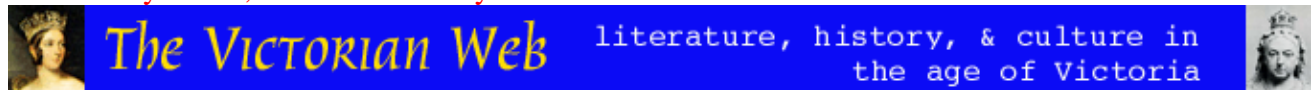
KEY WORDS & TOPICS:
- Pax Britannica, Belle Époque, Britain as a leading Imperial Power,
- Industrial Revolution, Urbanisation, Mechanical Age, technological and scientific progress, the war of currents, (steam engines, phonograph, daguerreotype, post-mortem/spirit photography)
- Democratisation, socialism, Representation of the People Act/Reform Act of 1832, Fabian society, Communist manifesto, Marx, class struggle
- suffragettes, the Woman Question, the Angel in the House/ the Fallen Woman, madwoman in the attic
- Exploitation/Idealisation of children, child labour, the cult of the child, three Rs
- Rising bourgeoisie, idea of self-made man, inventions, etiquette, conduct books, prudishness/ erotic counterculture, bathing cabinets, *The Pearl*
- Darwinism, the survival of the fittest, natural selection, degeneration, moral Darwinism, Galton's eugenics, Gall's phrenology, physiognomy
- the Great Exhibition, the Crystal Palace, Victoria and Albert Museum
- Pseudo-sciences, The Royal Society of Psychic Research, mesmerism, galvanism, spiritualism
- Cult of beauty, aestheticism, arts and crafts movement
- Arts: combines Romantic imagination with Neoclassical idea on public role of art
- Colonisation, exoticism, orientalism, *Arabian Nights*
- Religion: secularisation, age of doubt, simultaneously existing contradictory belief systems: faith, fantasy, scientific hypothesis –epistemological crisis
- *Punch* humour magazine, comic operettas, vaudeville theatre
- Golden age of the novel: fantasy+realism, escapism+politics, prophecy+pragmatism

THE VICTORIAN AGE: A PERIOD OF POWER AND PARADOX

The cultural historical period of the Victorian era gains its name from the long reign of **Queen Victoria** from June 1837 to January 1901.[1] The era was preceded by the Georgian Regency Era and followed by Edwardian era, and its latter half overlaps with the Continental European Belle Époque. This complex and rich epoch, commonly referred to as the **second English Renaissance**, saw a great expansion of wealth, power, and cultural productions (see Landow), as well as rapid techno-scientific progress, economic development, and revolutionary ideas which elicited epistemological crises and associated Victorian consciousness with a conflicted frame of mind.

PAX BRITANNICA AND BRITAIN'S IMPERIAL CENTURY

In the age of **Pax Britannica**, a long period of prosperity and peace, the **British Empire** became a leading imperial hegemonic power due to colonial conquests all over the globe and remarkable technological, scientific, economic progress within the borders of the UK. Between 1815 and 1914 it added 10,000,000 square miles (about 26,000,000 km^2) with roughly 400 million new subjects to its territory. Victoria became Empress of India in 1877. The Royal Navy earned an unchallenged power over the key naval trade routes. They occupied Egypt, as well as the Chinese Markets after opium wars, and New Zealand became a British colony in 1840. This entailed the worldwide spreading of the English language, the British imperial system of measures (foot-pound-second), and the rules for commodity market based on the English common law. The British Empire had no real international rival left: after the victory over Napoleonic France, the British (together with the French) defeated the Russians in the Crimean War (1854-6), protecting the Ottoman Empire, and they also triumphed over South Africa in the Boer War (1899-1902).

CLICK HERE For an elaborate map of the British Empire in 1886, imperial British dominions marked in pink

---

[1] The long reign of Queen Victoria was surpassed only by her great-great-granddaughter Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth 2, who became in 2017 the first British monarch to celebrate a Sapphire Jubilee, commemorating 65 years on the throne.

INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION AND TECHNOLOGICAL PROGRESS

The late 19th century was the heyday of the **Second Industrial Revolution,**[2] also known as the **Technological Revolution of the Mechanical Age**. It was marked by

- o rapid urbanisation (people moving to cities in search of better livelihood),
- o mechanisation (manual labour's replacement by machine based manufacturing),
- o industrialisation (increase in the number of factories, in production capacity);
- o an extensive mass utilisation of electricity, petroleum, and steel;
- o the emergence of cutting-edge technological inventions as steam powered ships, railways, internal combustion engines, and electrical power generators;
- o major changes in agriculture, manufacturing, transportation.

Multiple reasons contributed to the second Industrial Revolution, concomitant with imperialism and capitalism, the two most decisive power-technologies of the times.

1. The financial profit gained from the colonies fuelled the era's industrial investments.
2. The effective national border control blocked the spread of diseases, it reduced epidemics and infantile mortality, hence augmented the available labour power.
3. Britain emerged from the Napoleonic wars as the only European nation unaffected by financial problems and economic collapse.
4. Protestant work ethics, entrepreneurial class' belief in progress, engineering ingenuity
5. Democratic access to technological innovations, scientific discoveries

The economic progress had a positive effect on socioeconomic and cultural conditions. Many inventor-entrepreneurs recognized the potentials of mass production and large teamwork in the first industrial research laboratories.

VICTORIAN TECHNOLOGICAL INVENTIONS			
DATE	**INVENTION**	**INVENTOR**	**HYPERLINK: LEARN MORE**
1826 1838	photography daguerrotype	Joseph Nicéphore Niépce Louis Daguerre	Look at Victorian photography at the *Victoria & Albert Museum*'s website
1826	telephone	Alexander Graham Bell	
1825	1st passenger steam train	John Stephenson	
1839	paddle steamboat	Isambard Kingdom Brunel	Look at William Turner's paintings of steam powered vehicles
1850, 1852	sewing machine +1st public flushing toilet in London	Isaac Singer	
1863	underground railway (tube) opens in London		Read about *Railways in Victorian Fiction* on British Library's website
1872	penny farthing bicycle	James Starley	
1873	typewriter	Christopher Sholes	
1877	phonograph	Thomas Edison	Listen to Edison's first phonograph recording here
1880	electric light bulb	Thomas Alva Edison	
1894	moving images (cinematograph)	Lumieres Brothers	Watch the Lumieres Brothers' first films here
1895	X rays	W KRoentgen	
1895	wireless radio	Guglielmo Marconi	

---

[2] The First Industrial Revolution caused the growth of industries (coal, iron, railroads, textiles), while the Second Industrial Revolution meant technological progress.

PANORAMIC TABLEAUX OF VICTORIAN LIFE

William Powell Frith, *The Railway Station*, c.1862-1909.

Sir Luke Fildes, Applicants for Admission to a Casual Ward (1874)

Ford Madox Brown, *Work*, 1852-63, Click here for a larger version

DEMOCRATISATION AND SOCIALISM

Throughout the Victorian era, England became a **real democracy**. Its **voting- and educational system were reformed**, social reform movements gained increasing ground, with the spreading of **trade unions**, **suffragettes**, and **socialism**.

The **Representation of the People Act** was designed in 1832 to reform the voting system and "take effectual Measures for correcting diverse Abuses that have long prevailed in the Choice of Members to serve in the Commons House of the Parliament." It granted seats in the House of Commons to large cities that sprang up during the Industrial Revolution, and took away seats from the "rotten boroughs" with very small populations. It increased the number of individuals entitled to vote, augmenting the size of the electorate by 50–80%. 1 in 5 adult males could vote.

Women dissatisfied with their exclusion from the public sphere, also started to fight through organised protest for their rights to vote, study, inherit, divorce, hence gain a full citizenship. The first wave of feminist movements dates to the militant women's organizations of the **suffragettes**. (Women's suffrage means the right to vote in elections.) The **WSPU (Women's Social and Political Union)** was founded by **Emmeline Pankhurst** in 1903 and engaged in direct action and the nonviolent resistance of civil disobedience. They tried to storm the parliament, chained themselves to railings, went on hunger strikes, some of them committed even more radical attacks against patriarchy: **Emily Davison** jumped in front of the king's horse at Epson Derby and **Mary Richardson** slashed with a meat chopper Velazquez's Rokeby Venus painting as a rebellion against women's oppression by the male gaze.

The suffragette campaign was suspended with the outbreak of the First World War in 1914; a 1918 act gave the vote to women over 30 with certain property qualification, and eventually The Representation of the People (Equal Franchise) Act of 1928 allowed all women the vote from age 21.

An increasing number of **workers' trade unions** were formed to act as bargaining agents and legal representatives for a unit of employees in all matters of law and rights. They sought control over working hours, wages, working conditions, benefits, etc. The democratising aspirations of socialism constituted a part of the Zeitgeist. **Karl Marx**, German-Jewish philosopher political economist, sociologist, humanist, political theorist, revolutionary, communist icon wrote *The Communist Manifesto* in 1848. He famously opined that "The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of **class struggles**" and argued that capitalism produces internal tensions which will inevitably lead to its destruction. Just as capitalism replaced feudalism, capitalism will be displaced by bourgeoisie's fall, a communist classless society emerging after the transitional period of socialism, in which the state would be nothing else but the revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat. In the **Fabian Society** founded in 1884, middle class British intellectuals promoted socialism (with outstanding literary figures among them, including Havelock Ellis, Edith Nesbit, Quaker Edward R Pease, Virginia and Leonard Woolf, HG Wells). They advanced the principles of **social democracy** via gradualist, reformist rather than revolutionary means; and aimed to transform society by setting an example of clean, simplified living for others to follow. These efforts laid the foundation of the Labour Party.

The **public education system** was reformed in the newly industrialised, urbanised nation states. By the 1850s free elementary level education became available to masses of children. Schools were either state funded, or operated in conjunctions with religious institutions, local churches or voluntary societies. While wealthy children could also have private tutors at home, ragged schools, run by charities, gave poor children free meals and clothing and taught them a trade such as shoemaking or domestic skills. The education act of 1870 decided that it was crucial for the future prosperity of the nation that a quality education be provided to its youngest. School was proclaimed to be the cure for the

Thomas Faed. The Dame's School, 1879

social ills of the times, providing youngsters with the foundation needed to become obedient, moral citizens. Lessons followed the **three "R"s**: Reading, wRiting, and aRithmetic; by the end of the century some schools added to their syllabus sports like cricket, needlework, drawing, craft work, map drawing, geography, history, religion, gardening and music.

SCIENTIFIC REVOLUTION and A CRISIS OF BELIEF

The era's most important scientific discovery was certainly naturalist, biologist, geologist **Charles Robert Darwin**'s evolutionary theory. In 1831 young Darwin joined the crew of **HMS Beagle** as the ship's naturalist for a trip around the world, to study the transmutation of species (the altering of one species into another), surveying the coast of South America and the Galapagos. He became a popular author due to the journal he published of this voyage. But more importantly the journey determined his whole career in so far as it provided him "the seeds" of the theory he worked on throughout his entire life. He outlined his cutting-edge ideas, we now refer to as Darwinism, in his book *On the Origin of Species* (1859). In an unprecedented manner he argued that all species of life have evolved over time from common ancestors through the process of **natural selection**, **adaptation** strategies, and the

survival of the fittest. (This means that favourable heritable traits become more common in successive generations of a population of reproducing organisms, while unfavourable heritable traits gradually disappear due to the differential reproduction of genotypes.) The theory established the foundation of biology by offering a **unifying logical explanation for the diversity of life**.

It also meant a radical **challenge for the Victorian frame of mind** to consider that mankind has possibly not been created in the image and likeness of God as the Biblical understanding of life previously has suggested, but rather originates from or is related to lesser lifeforms, primitive beasts. Tellingly, contemporary caricatures of the ***Punch*** humour magazine portray Darwin as a chimeric creature with a human head and an ape's body, and framed by the slogan "Man is but a worm." The religious worldview was overwhelmed by a more secular, scientific one, and provoked a genuine **epistemological crisis**, a recognition of the insufficiency of the interpretive models used to make sense of reality, of man and his lifeworld. The Romantic idealisation of Mother Nature as a gentle cradle of fallible humans was replaced by the horrendous vision of "**Nature red in tooth and claw**" as *poet laureate* Tennyson put it. Anxieties about **degeneration**, a deviation from the normal course of development, or a fall back on the Great Chain of Being were fictionalised in Victorian fantastic novels. (Think of the monstrous figure of Mr Hyde, or the mutants inhabiting the island of Dr Moreau.) Critics have convincingly argued that Darwin's idea of **sexual selection** (the intraspecific competition between the individuals of one sex's males for the possession of female mates) and his research ***On the expression of the emotions in men and animals*** (1871) affected the in-depth psychological exploration of interpersonal relationships in literary genres as far-fetched from scientific scrutiny as sentimental *Bildungsromans* and novels of manners.


LISTEN	Click on the hyperlink and listen to simulated soundscape of the Beagle voyage on the website of *The American Museum of Natural History*'s excellent Darwin exhibition.

By today, it is clear that the Darwinian theory of evolution by natural selection has laid the foundations of modern biology: it has enabled us to decipher our genes, to fight viruses, and to understand Earth's fossil record and rich biodiversity. However, other branches of Victorian biology akin with Darwinism are regarded today as morally dubious, scientifically unjustifiable pseudo-sciences. **Franz Joseph Gall**'s **phrenology** predicted mental states, and set up whole criminological typologies by judging people by the shape of the skulls, while **Francis Galton**'s (Darwin's cousin) **eugenics** aimed to improve the quality of the population genetic stock through selective breeding. (This social philosophy came to be associated with the Nazi ideology's deprivation of reproductive rights those deemed unable to live up to the Aryan ideal).

THE RISING BOURGEOISIE

The most influential social class the Victorian era was the rising middle class, the so called **bourgeoisie.** The industrious urban middle class made great fortunes throughout the Industrial Revolution, and converted their economic success into a political power (with the 1832 Reform Act) they used to shape society in their own image. An iconic figure of the bourgeoisie was the **self-made man**, the **inventor** or the **entrepreneur**, who – unlike the corrupt aristocracy – gained privileges based on hard work, prudence, perseverance, self-reliance, personal achievements and merits, instead of birth rights and inheritance. The bourgeoisie supported the educational reforms and free market to facilitate equal opportunities for the working classes who were granted the chance to realise their abilities through social mobility. A favourite figure of Victorian fiction is the **social climber** who uses his/her wits to rise higher in social hierarchy (see Pip in Dickens's *Great Expectations*, or Becky Sharp in Thackeray's *Vanity Fair*). ***Bildungsromans***, fictional biographical accounts of psychic, and moral development were also popular. The bourgeoisie contained a broad and heterogeneous layer of society, including businessmen, merchants, administrators, civil servants, teachers, doctors, lawyers, government officials, as well as clerks and assistants who helped these institutions to operate, united by their belief in possibilities of **individuality, improvement, and progress**.

The bourgeoisie lived well: they enjoyed abundant domestic help, varied and substantial food, access to personal transport, education, regular holidays, commodious houses with reasonable sanitary services, and a liberal purchase of commodities and culture. Their financial stability allowed them to dwell in a variety of leisure time activities: to travel, visit museums, or attend concerts. The era marks the rise of tourism and the foundations of public art collections like **The Victoria and Albert Museum, the Science Museum, and the Natural History Museum**.
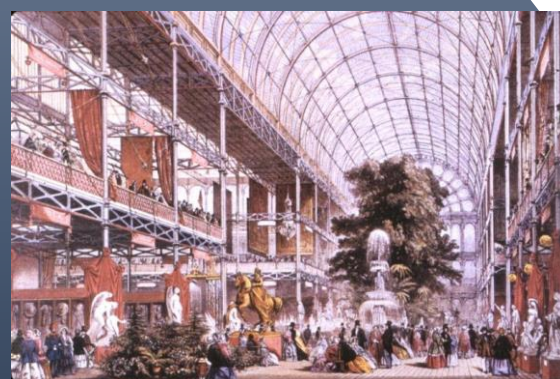
THE GREAT EXHIBITION, 1851
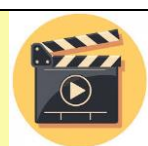
WATCH

EXERCISE

Click here to watch an illustrated tour of The Great Exhibition.

These museums were founded from the incomes of most widely attended exhibition of the era: **The Great Exhibition**, the first World Fair to showcase the greatest cultural and industrial innovations of century in 1851, in London. The show was organised in **the Crystal Palace**, an architectural wonder of the time, constructed of cast iron frame components and glass. (The building located in Hyde Park became a primary model of High Victorian design, a prototype of modern architecture, that was, alas, later destroyed in a fire.) The exhibition curated by the **Royal Society for the Encouragement of Arts, Manufactures and**

Commerce had 6 million visitors, meaning the third of the population. This unprecedented interest provoked a variety of anxieties: conservatives feared that the mass of visitors might become a revolutionary mob, radical Marxists criticised the exhibition as an emblem of the capitalist fetishism of commodities, traditionalist art critics like **John Ruskin** despised Crystal Palace as a model of mechanical dehumanisation by design. The rich range of exhibits included a precursor to today's Fax machine, daguerreotypes, the first voting machine, a Tempest Prognosticator (a barometer using leeches), the first public conveniences designed in the Retiring Rooms, and The **Koh-i-noor**, the world's biggest known diamond.

The bourgeoisie used **morality** to assert class dominance. Retrospectively we associate Victorians with prudishness, sexual restraint, moral austerity, and self-discipline. Our assumptions are based on the popularity of **conduct book genre**, which carefully prescribed normative models of good behaviour in all spheres of life, the widespread use of the **language of flowers** to express sexual feelings, or strange 19th century customs like squeezing women in whale-bone **corsets**, enjoying a sea-side outing in a **bathing cabinet**, or covering piano legs for fear of naughty thoughts. The feminine ideal of the time was the virginal, submissive **Angel in the House** – a term introduced by **Coventry Patmore**'s 1854 poem – a domestic goddess, who retained her asexual chastity even as a wife and mother, and devoted herself to sweetly sanctifying the home as a pure refuge for her menfolk from the urban pollution and corruption.

Dante Gabriel Rossetti. *Found*. **1869**

However, the moral ambiguity and **double standards** of the era are perfectly illustrated by the fact that the other stereotypical feminine figure in the Victorian patriarchal imagination's binary set-up was the **Fallen Woman**, the sexually hyperactive female who offered and enjoyed promiscuous passions out of wedlock, the prostitute or the oriental fantasies' exotic enchantress, a mysterious combination of the cunning seductress and the tragic victim of circumstances: dangerous, despised, desired, and demonised. Paradoxically, while the Victorian bourgeoisie cherished the **cult of domesticity** – the cultural institutions and idealised vision of the happy home and family (Gorham 2013) – as solid foundations of its conservative ideology; the number of brothels was the highest ever in London at the time. A vivid **erotic counterculture** flourished in metropolitan region with erotic magazines like *The Pearl*, sexually allusive **vaudeville** theatre acts, child prostitutes and rent-boys roaming the London streets. Steven Marcus called the Victorians **sexual hypocrites** who struggled to "maintain a veneer of respectable society over an underbelly of pornography and prostitution;" while Michel Foucault pointed out that far from silencing sexuality as a taboo subject, the Victorians inaugurated a plethora of legal, demographical, medical, sexological discourses that allowed sexuality to become a legitimate subject of investigation and discussion. Several scandals of the era were connected to sexuality: **Jack the Ripper**'s serial murder of East End prostitutes, **Oscar Wilde**'s trial for

charges of homosexual "acts of gross indecency," or journalist WT Stead's campaign to raise awareness about **child prostitution** that involved kidnapped, drugging, and selling a girl to prove the point. Regulations to reclaim the Fallen Women for respectable society included the foundation of Magdalene Asylums, the Contagious Diseases Act, and the Criminal Law Amendment Act raising of the age of the consent from 13 to 16.
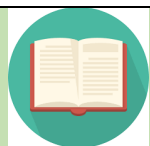
EXERCISE
Read an extract from John Ruskin's *Sesame and Lilies* (1865)
Click to browse issues of *The Pearl* **Magazine**, a monthly collection of erotic tales, rhymes, songs and parodies published in London between 1879 to 1880

READ

AMBIGUOUS MINDFRAMES IN AN AGE OF DOUBT

The Victorian era is a tremendously exciting period because of the simultaneous coexistence of multiple models for making sense of reality and a concomitant crisis and proliferation of beliefs. Victorian morality – that propagated sexual restraint, low tolerance on crime, and strict social code of conduct – was grounded in a religious world view. However, the late 19th century saw a **vibrant and competitive religious culture**. The predominance of the Church of England gradually decreased, legal barriers were removed that had previously excluded Christians (such as Catholics and Methodists) outside the Church of England from most public offices and degrees at Oxford and Cambridge. The non-Anglican Protestant denominations (including Baptists, Methodists, and Quakers) gained a new prominence (they represented nearly 50% of the worshipping nation!). Although the period was marked by the greatest burst of church building since the Middle Ages, Darwin's theory of evolution radically altered the understanding of the natural human lifeworld as grounded in the truth of the Bible. Many experienced a **crisis of Christian faith** as the convincingly-argued scientific theory made their old certainties crumble. A sense of mourning over God's non-existence (see philosopher Nietzsche's famous 1884 claim, "God is dead.") the undermining of spiritual values by atheistic connotations of Darwinism and socialism, can be tracked in Victorian poems, like Matthew Arnold's "Dover Beach" and Thomas Hardy's "God's Funeral," among others. Others opined that Darwin simply discovered a new law of Nature designed by God.

EXERCISE
What could this Victorian motto mean?
"My mind is no longer a Christian even though my body is."

THINK

TRIGGER WARNING. POSSIBLY DISTURBING CONTENT!
To get a better view of the Victorian obsession with afterlife, and the intersection of faith and technology click on the HYPERLINK and take a look at the unsettling art of POST-MORTEM PHOTOGRAPHY

On the other hand, perhaps because believing in something is more intellectually compelling then doubt, new faiths emerged as **Spiritualism** and Theosophy, which drew on Buddhism and Hinduism. Remarkably, Victorians often approached new religious practices with scientific scrutiny, by relying on technological inventions to study transcendental,

supernatural phenomena with rational means. **The Royal Society of Psychical Research** used scientific methods to analyse paranormal phenomena like communication with the spirit of the dead; Victorian **ghost photography** enjoyed a tremendous popularity; and **mesmerism** (animal magnetism) was used by faith-healers as a therapeutical method to shift within patients in a trance-like state the energy field of the invisible natural force possessed by all living things, including humans, animals, and vegetables. The typically Victorian **overlapping of contradictory belief systems** – the **blurring of scientific reality and fantasy** – is also illustrated by how new technological discoveries were used for strikingly different purposes: electricity was used for medical treatments, public lighting, and stage magic alike.

[*Under Victorian Microscopes, an Enchanted World*](#) & [*Victorian Spirit Photography*](#)

As the interest in natural history reached its peak in the Victorian era and many of the technological-scientific inventions were affordable to the bourgeois public, collecting natural specimens (fossils, bones, shells, plants) or gazing through the "magic glass" of the **microscope** became popular hobbies. People frequently turned to the language of the fantastic to describe their incredible encounters with the previously unseen natural realms. The trope of **nature as Wonderland** (the world popularised by Lewis Carroll's 1865 nonsense fairy-tale fantasy book about *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*) and a vocabulary drawn from fairy stories became widely used in natural history, biology, or geology books intended for child audiences but delighting adult readers alike. It seemed that scientific enquiries, religious faith, and the literary/artistic construction of fairy lands were alike in so far as they demanded imaginative agency, an open-minded belief in the invisible, an empathic trust in possibilities of transformations of all kinds (spiritual, physical, magical, and evolutionary). The **hunger for re-enchantment** in a secularised era is attested by the tremendous popularity of **Andrew Lang's Fairy Books**, the translations of *Arabian Nights*, and **Victorian fantasy** literature in general (MacDonald, Kinsgley, Carroll, Lear, Kipling, Nesbit) that flourished in opposition to the era's repressive social and intellectual conditions, and under the guise of children's literature boldly used non-realistic techniques of nonsense, dreams, visions, fictional worldbuilding to extend our understanding of this world (Prickett 2005).

The Victorian era is commonly associated with a **Cult of Childhood**, a flourishing of children's culture and literature. Up until the 19th century children were regarded as miniature adults, while the Victorian bourgeoisie invested its hope in the future generation, and started to recognise and admire children's unique characteristics that required protection, a separate time, space, and attention to develop. Children were primarily associated with **innocence, unrestrained imagination and an intimacy with Nature** that artists of the era found

exemplary, and a purity ever so rare amidst the corruption and dehumanisation of the industrialised world. In the post-Darwinian social reality permeated by religious scepticism, the Child replaced God as an **object of worship**. (See Thomas Gotch's painting of *The Child Enthroned*)

Artists gained inspiration and spiritual elevation from **child friends**, and underage muses contributed to the rise of the golden age of children's literature. Mathematician **Lewis Carroll** improvised *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865) throughout a rowing expedition to entertain seven-years Alice Liddell, while the era's most famous art critic **John Ruskin** wrote his *Sesame and Lilies* (1865) – containing famous lectures on girls' education and aesthetics too – inspired by his pupil, "pet," ideal Rose la Touche who was nine when they met. These relationships between unmarried adult men and young girl children were not regarded with any suspicion at the time and had nothing to do with our post-Freudian fears of paedophilia. They were considered as mutually enriching bonds, proofs of the sensitivity of the artist-pedagogue. For the bourgeoisie the Child symbolised hope in the future, a promise of social mobility. Popular child characters of Victorian fiction included:
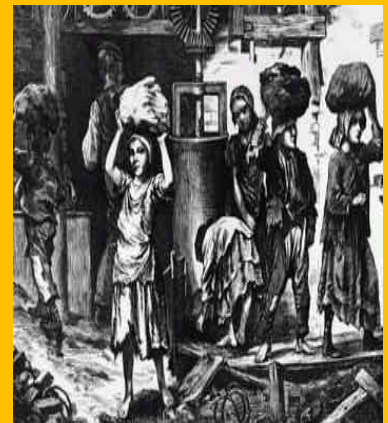

Gotsch. The Child Enthroned, 1879

1. **Orphan figures** who were free to shape their destinies unrestrained by the Father's Name. (*Bildungsromans*, the orphan ingénue, Bronte's Jane Eyre)
2. **"Child Christ" figures** "too good for this world" whose innocent sufferings touched readers' souls (sentimental novels, Andersen's Little Match Girl, Dickens's Little Nell)
3. **The good bad child** (Dickens's Artful Dodger)

The **class distinction** meant a double standard in the evaluation of the social prestige or neglect of children. The offspring of the bourgeoisie were idealised under the influence of Queen Victoria's setting domestic values at the heart of her tenure as a monarch. In the first 14 years of her reign she gave birth to 9 children, and hence strategically a pan-European dynasty as a model for a nation. On the other hand, working class youngsters were abused and exploited. They had to work under miserable conditions in mines, in blacking factories, as chimneysweeps, child prostitutes, or pickpockets controlled by criminal gangs.

Victorian Child Labour in Mines

Democratising socialist reforms tried to improve the life of these underage citizens with the 1842 Mines Act (that banned employment underground of boys under 10 and all girls), the 1848 Public Health Act (a response to the cholera epidemic), and the 1880 Elementary Education Act (that made schooling compulsory under the age of 10). The Victorians sought to establish emotional bonds with their children, but they also firmly believed that "Children should be seen and not heard in the company of adults." They

were aware of the tremendous tension between their social reality and their imaginary ideals. These tensions were reflected in the era's most popular literary genre, the **novel** that fused fantasy with realism, escapism with politics, and prophecy with pragmatism.

THINK	**TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE WITH A QUIZ BY CLICKING HERE** **https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLScvHlePnjxoBtzitH4btPImwgINjAbt4PcoNRQMjnm-wfpeDQ/viewform**

BIBLIOGRAPHY:

Briggs, Asa. *Victorian Things*. Strout: Sutton, 2003.

Cook, Chris. *Companion to Britain in the Nineteenth Century, 1815-1914*. Harlow: Longman, 1999.

Foucault, Michel. *The History of Sexuality*. London: Allen Lane, 1979.

Gorham, Deborah. *The Victorian Girl and the Feminine Ideal*. New York: Routledge, 2013.

Humble, Nicola and Kimberley Reynolds. *Victorian Heroines. Representations of Femininity in Nineteenth Century Literature and Ar*t. Hertfordshire: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1993.

Marcus, Stephen. *The Other Victorians: A Study of Sexuality and Pornography in Mid-Nineteenth-Century England*. New York: Taylor & Francis, 2008.

Prickett, Stephen. *Victorian Fantasy*. Hertfordshire: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 2005.

Steinbach, Susie. *Understanding the Victorians: Politics, Cultue and Society in Nineteenth Century Britain*. New York: Routledge, 2012.

Wilson, AN. *The Victorians*. New York: WW Norton, 2004.