**The Victorian Era (1837-1901): the British Imperialism and American Awakening**

1833 Abolition of slavery throughout Empire

1836 First train in London

1837-1901 Queen Victoria’s reign

1845-46 Irish famine

1850 The Height of the Industrial Revolution

1861-65 The American Civil War

1857 Indian Rebellion

1882 Occupation of Egypt

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| Culture  | The growth and expansion of the empire (“the empire where the sun never sets”)Victorian double standard and hypocrisy The Industrial Revolution and economic prosperity  |
| Poetry  | Alfred Tennyson: *In Memoriam* (elegy)Robert Browning: “My Last Duchess”; “Andrea del Sarto” (dramatic monologue)Elizabeth Barrett Browning Matthew Arnold: “Dover Beach” Gerard Manley Hopkins: sonnets with sprung rhythm and heavy alliteration Christina Rossetti: pre-Raphaelite aesthetics (medieval themes + romance) |
| Novels  | Serialized novels Bildungsroman Charlotte Brontë: *Jane Eyre*Emily Brontë: *Wuthering Heights* (gothic)Elizabeth Gaskell: *North and South* Charles Dickens: *A Tale of Two Cities*; *Great Expectations* (impoverished people, especially orphans, in London) William Makepeace Thackeray: *Vanity Fair* (upper-class social mores) Robert Louis Stevenson: *Treasure Island*; *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* George Eliot: *Mill on the Floss* Thomas Hardy: *Jude the Obscure* Rudyard Kipling: *The Jungle Books* (Anglo-Indian literature)  |
| Plays  | Comedy of mannersOscar Wilde: *The Importance of Being Ernest* (English decadence, art for art’s sake)  |
| American Lit. | Mark Twain: *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*; *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*Harriet Beecher Stowe: *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* Nathaniel Hawthorne: *The Scarlet Letter* Herman Melville: *Moby Dick*, *Billy Budd* Henry James: *Portrait of a Lady*; *The Turn of the Screw*; *The Ambassadors* Walt Whitman: *Songs of Leaves* Emily Dickinson’s poetry  |

The Victorian era was a period of dramatic change that brought England to its highest point of development as a world power. The rapid growth of London, from a population of 2 million when Victoria came to the throne to one of 6.5 million by the time of Victoria's death, indicates the dramatic transition from a way of life based on the ownership of land to a modern urban economy. England experienced an enormous increase in wealth, but rapid and unregulated industrialization brought a host of social and economic problems.  Some writers such as Thomas Babbington Macauley applauded England’s progress, while others such as Mathew Arnold felt the abandonment of traditional rhythms of life exacted a terrible price in human happiness.

The early Victorian period (1830–48) saw the opening of Britain’s first railway and its first Reform Parliament, but it was also a time of economic distress. The Reform Bill of 1832 extended voting privileges to men of the lower middle classes and redistributing parliamentary representation more fairly. Yet the economic and social difficulties associated with industrialization made the 1830s and 1840s a “Time of Troubles,” characterized by unemployment, desperate poverty, and rioting.  The Chartists, an organization of workers, helped create an atmosphere open to further reform.  The “condition of England” became a central topic for novelists including Charles Kingsley, Elizabeth Gaskell, and Benjamin Disraeli in the 1840s and early 1850s.

Although the mid- Victorian period (1848–70) was not free of harassing problems, it was a time of prosperity, optimism, and stability.  The achievements of modern industry and science were celebrated at the Great Exhibition in Hyde Park (1851). Enormous investments of people, money, and technology created the British Empire.  Many English people saw the expansion of empire as a moral responsibility, and missionary societies flourished.  At the same time, however, there was increasing debate about religious belief.  The Church of England had evolved into three major divisions, with conflicting beliefs about religious practice. There were also rationalist challenges to religion from philosophy (especially Utilitarianism) and science (especially biology and geology). Both the infallibility of the Bible and the stature of the human species in the universe were increasingly called into question.

In the later period (1870–1901) the costs of Empire became increasingly apparent, and England was confronted with growing threats to its military and economic preeminence.  A variety of socialist movements gained force, some influenced by the revolutionary theories of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels.  The literature of the 1890s is characterized by self-conscious melancholy and aestheticism, but also saw the beginnings of the modernist movement.

The extreme inequities between men and women stimulated a debate about women’s roles known as “The Woman Question.”  Women were denied the right to vote or hold political office throughout the period, but gradually won significant rights such as custody of minor children and the ownership of property in marriage.  By the end of Victoria’s reign, women could take degrees at twelve universities.  Hundreds of thousands of working-class women labored at factory jobs under appalling conditions, and many were driven into prostitution.  While John Stuart Mill argued that the “nature of women” was an artificial thing, most male authors preferred to claim that women had a special nature fitting them for domestic duties.

Literacy increased significantly in the period, and publishers could bring out more material more cheaply than ever before.  The most significant development in publishing was the growth of the periodical.  Novels and long works of non-fiction were published in serial form, fostering a distinctive sense of a community of readers.  Victorian novels seek to represent a large and comprehensive social world, constructing a tension between social conditions and the aspirations of the hero or heroine.  Writing in the shadow of Romanticism, the Victorians developed a poetry of mood and character.  Victorian poetry tends to be pictorial, and often uses sound to convey meaning.  The theater, a flourishing and popular institution throughout the period, was transformed in the 1890s by the comic masterpieces of George Bernard Shaw and Oscar Wilde.  Very different from each other, both took aim at Victorian pretense and hypocrisy.

(http://www.wwnorton.com/college/english/nael/victorian/review/summary.htm)