

**THE VICTORIAN PERIOD**  
**LITERATURE**  
**(1837- 1901)**  
**PART (1)**

**Outlines**

- Victorianism as a term
- Phases of Victorianism

**Victorianism**

- As a term, Victorianism refers to a period that begins with the passage of the reform act in 1832 and extends to the death of queen Victoria in 1901.
- It seems it is difficult to give a fixed date for the end of Victorianism that certain specialists consider the last decay of the 19th century as a prologue for modernism.

**Phases of Victorianism**

- The Early – Victorian Period
- The Mid – Victorian Period
- The Late –Victorian Period

**The Early Victorian Period**

The early Victorian period is staged as the period of change, which is

- Social,
- Religious, and
- Scientific.

## **Social Change**

- In the socialist fields, there is an increase in the number of population due to services, social services provided by Victoria as a government.

## **Religious Change: Skepticism & Secularism**

- In the religious side, there is a controversy between science and religion. The spread of the scientific spirit both appreciates and strengthens faith or weakens it.
- On one side, there are those who believe that the spread of the spirit of inquiry destroys faith, because as human beings, we have no right to question the religious dogma. We have to obey God and religions principles. Unquestionably, in this case the skepticism and the experiments in science weaken religion.
- On the other side, there are those who believe that doubt leads to faith. The questioning of the religious principles will decidedly lead to faith, because the intention of science is to prove the truth. Therefore, we reach the truth about God and religion through the scientific experimentations. So is the case, science strengthens religion.

## **Scientific Change**

- Not only this change includes religion, but it also includes the development of science. In this sense, the 19th c. is the century known of its scientific innovations.
- It is the age where there is development in Biology, Chemistry, and most important of all in psychology of Freudism.

## **The Mid Victorian Period**

What are the fruits of this change?

- The fruits of this change are in the second phase of Victorianism.
- This period is known as the period of prosperity.
- This prosperity, however, extends to include all fields of life.

## **The Late Victorian Period**

- The last phase shows the decline and the decay in moral as well as of the ethical standard of Victorianism.
- Really, the last phase is nothing, but a transition period preparing of the appearance of Modernism.

## **Resources**

R. R., 2003. *Lecture: The Victorian Age*. (20/09). The University of Basra, Basra.

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**PART (2)**

**Outlines**

- Characteristics of Victorian Literature
- Types of Victorian Literature
- The Victorian Novel
- Aspects of Victorian Novels:
  - Realism
  - Naturalism

**Characteristics of Victorian Literature**

- Literature produced during this period reflects the “spirit of the times”:
- Expansion of newspapers and periodicals led to ongoing debates about current political and social issues.
- Victorian literature (especially novels) offered a realistic, day-to-day portrayal of social life and represented these issues in the stories of the characters. The novel became the dominant form of literature
- Suddenly, the once-silent female segment of society raised their voices. They could even appear onstage, acting in dramas (a privilege denied to them prior to this time).
- In literature, the early Victorian age can be said to be the age of critical realism. The critical realism of the 19th century flourished in the forties and in the early fifties.

## **Types of Victorian Literature**

**Novels:** dominant literary form; “social problem” novel, “domestic” novel. Novelists: Dickens & The Brontë Sisters

**Poetry:** influenced by Romantic period;

- Dramatic monologue: a lyric poem in the voice of a speaker who is not the poet. Poet: Alfred Tennyson

**Drama:** frivolous, romantic, witty; mocked contemporary values (satirical) – Playwrights: Bernard Shaw & Oscar Wilde.

**Non-fiction:** essays, criticism, history, biography, newspapers, and magazines

- “The Age of Periodicals”
- “The Age of Reading”

## **The Victorian Novel**

- Victorian novels seek to represent a large and comprehensive social world, with a variety of classes.
- Victorian novels are realistic; their major theme is the place of the individual in society, the aspiration of the hero or heroine for love or social position.
- The protagonist’s search for fulfillment is emblematic of the human condition.
- For the first time, women were major writers: the Brontës, Elizabeth Gaskell, and George Eliot.
- The Victorian novel was a principal form of entertainment.

## Aspects of Victorian Novels

- **Realism** – capturing everyday life as it really is lived; identified social problems: Charles Dickens (1812-1870) *Great Expectations*, Charlotte Brontë (1816-1855) *Jane Eyre*, Emily Brontë (1818-1848) *Wuthering Heights*, and Anne Brontë (1820-1845) *Agnes Grey* .
- **Psychological realism** – focused on inner realities of the mind: George Eliot's, which is a pseudonym for Mary Ann Evans (1819-1880).
- **Naturalism** – views nature and society as forces indifferent to human suffering. E.g. Thomas Hardy (1840-1928).

## Realism

- **Realism:** In realist fiction, the purpose of art is to present an objective representation of real life which reflects the daily habits, desires, and aspirations of the reader.
- Centered on the everyday experiences, moral progress, and inner struggles of the ordinary person, while showing the connection of this ordinary person's experiences to the broader world.
- Detailed descriptions of landscapes, cities, domestic interiors
- Why Realism? With the upheavals and revolutions of the 19th century, readers sought literature that represented their lives and offered them moral and ethical guidance.

## Naturalism

- Naturalism, the more pessimistic version of realism, powered the latter half of the 19th century.
- An accommodation to the rising authority of natural science.
- A delayed reaction to the failed revolutions of 1848.

- Characters' lives are governed by scientific determinism, i.e., heredity and environment.
- To show this determinism, naturalists often create weak and passive characters.
- Love and violence are partners. Violence dominates the lives of the naturalistic character.

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