

ENGLAND DURING THE REIGN OF QUEEN VICTORIA (1837-1901)

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Abstract

The arrival of a very young girl, the Queen, at the head of the great English state in the early 19th century, was followed by a great chain of changes in all realms of life, not just in England. This study therefore seeks to provide a brief overview of developments in the Victorian era, particularly in the field of culture, through a review of prior literature.

Developments fuelled by the industrial revolution, the absence of major wars, the rise of gender equality, and in particular cultural developments, represent the bright part of the Victorian era. As Albanian literature is generally poor in relation to the Victorian era, we consider that this study will provide some basic information on this. Anyone that might have an interest in developments in the Victorian era can use the findings of this research, which have a general content, with an emphasis on developments in Victorian literature.

Keywords: The Queen, Victorian era, industrial revolution, political situation, literature, poetry.

1. Introduction

It was a very different Britain at that time—a Britain without any rapid means of communication, without trains or steamers, motors or bicycles, without telegrams, telephones, postage stamps, envelopes, postcards—a Britain without gas or electric light or even matches (Synge, 1919). Despite this technological situation in England, during the reign of Queen Victoria England was passing through an important phase of its political and cultural development. According to M. Forster (1989), England during the Victorian age, apart from others in Europe, preceded social changes in relation to the emancipation of women's rights, creating preconditions for the arrival of great figures in English and world art such as Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Christina Rossetti etc. Based on the above-mentioned facts, the Victorian age is undoubtedly one of the most important periods in the history of Western civilization and especially of English civilization.

The most important part of this study will focus on the interrelationship between the power of Queen Victoria and the important development in English civilization, in particular in the art and especially in the literature of this important part of the world. Victorian literature is the body of poetry, fiction, essays, and letters produced during the reign of Queen Victoria (1837–1901) and during the era which bears her name. It forms a link and transition between the writers of the romantic period and the modernist literature of the twentieth century (New World Encyclopedia, 2016).

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The influence of Queen Victoria power on English civilization, starting from political and technological development, with a special focus on art developments, namely in literature, without excluding the role of women. All this will be discussed in three sections that will talk about a short and general history of the Victorian age, English literature during the reign of Queen Victoria.

1.1 Aims and methodology: This paper aims to:

- inform the reader about the Victorian era
- encourage the reader to research about the importance of the Victorian era
- highlighting the link between industry and literature

Methodologically, this research derives from the literature review method, and is constructed using the panoramic method.

2. A brief history of the England During the reign of Queen Victoria

2.1 Alexandrina Victoria (1819-1901): Queen Victoria was born on 24 May 1819. She was the granddaughter of George III, and her father, Edward was fourth in line to the throne. But when the prince of Wales died early, his brothers sought to get married and maintain the line of succession. Edward married Princess Victoria from Germany, and the couple had just one child, Alexandrina Victoria, who was born at Kensington Palace in 1819. As a young girl, Victoria's father died, followed six days later by King George III. The throne then passed to King William IV, but he died early too. This left Victoria to be crowned at the age of 18, in June 1837. Queen Victoria was to reign until her death on 22nd January 1901 (Pettinger , 2014)

Her coming to the throne, except for representing a personal challenge to the Queen Victoria, it was a relatively new thing for England to. The royal court and the whole of England were preparing for her coming. According to Synge, (1919) heir after heir to the British throne had died, and by the time that the little Princess Victoria was twelve years old, it became evident that she would succeed her uncle. For this great post she was educated with care by her widowed mother, so that when the change came it found her prepared to discharge her office with a high sense of public duty.

In the early part of her reign, she was influenced by two men: her first Prime Minister, Lord Melbourne, and then her husband, Prince Albert, whom she married in 1840 (Royal Household at Buckingham Palace, 2019). In general, this was the shape with which the Queen Victoria continued to dominate throughout her life. Even though her life fluttered between the throne and her death as she was tried to be killed 8 times but she survived the attacks (World history edu, 2019). Referring to History, (2010) after an extremely successful 63-year reign, the longest in British history, Queen Victoria was 81 years old, and despite all the assassinations, on January 22, 1901 she died after some natural health changes in the royal palace of England.

2.2 The general political situation : First of all, there is a general agreement that during the reign of Queen Victoria the English empire experienced a dramatic rise in view of the overall strengthening of the English kingdom. Victoria restored dignity to the English monarchy and ensured its survival as a ceremonial political institution (History, 2010). According to Synge, (1919) before the Victorian period, England was characterized by a slow development in the political and economic spectrum. With the reign of Queen Victoria, things began to change drastically. In addition to cultural development, England had been dynamically following global developments in relation to the technological and communications revolution.

Queen also had many issues, mostly political, that she had to deal with. English colonies in the Far East, child labor abuse, nationwide poverty, free trade, emigrants in Australia and New Zealand, war in the Crimea, the great exhibition, and other domestic and foreign policy issues. The first troubles in the new reign came from the colonies. Britain as yet took little interest in those sons and daughters who had left her shores to make fresh homes beyond the seas. There was no Colonial Secretary, no Colonial Office. Any difficulties with our distant possessions were settled by the War Office. But the queen managed to stabilize and manage the unrest and unpleasant situations she found among the colonies that consistently shook her rule.

In addition to problems with foreign policy, at the beginning of the Victorian period England was facing serious internal problems of social nature. While many men, women and children were suffering in Afghanistan, a large number of British children were suffering in their homes. They worked many hours a week and worked hard as chimney sweepers, also children were employed in coal-mines, calico factories, button factories, glass, hosiery, and tobacco factories. But with the strong support of Lord Ashley, a powerful nationwide campaign was launched to promote children's rights in Britain.

This campaign was supported by the queen and gave all the workers in the country more freedom to enjoy life, more leisure in their homes, more rest for their bodies. So, all through her long reign, the conditions of child life became better and better. Queen Victoria found the economy in a situation where English population and demand for goods had grown to the point where England could not produce enough for its own needs, including basic products. During her reign the queen made a political decision to abolish the tax thus unblocking the economic crisis in which England was deepening. In general, the aforementioned issues characterize the political and economic developments in the Victorian period of England.

2.3 Social effects of the industrial revolution: Just as it is impossible to write the history of England without particular emphasis on the Victorian era, it is also impossible to write about the Victorian era without a particular emphasis on the industrial revolution. Especially when writing about the negative effects of the Victorian period, as the dynamics caused by this revolution created difficult situations to manage and negative points in the overall picture of this era. According to Black & Eugene C (1973) the rapid and mass opening of large factories, thanks to industrial development, caused a social effect especially on the lower class of population which represented the general class of workers.

They had to engage in hard work with poor security conditions or were completely excluded from the economic system. Thereof, equally stricken were the craftsmen whose market was occupied by factory-manufactured products as they were forced to close private businesses and work for a monthly wage. Whereas on the opposite side of society, the so-called 'Aristocratic Class' mainly represented by business owners, was experiencing rapid enrichment and living a life of luxury as a result of exploiting what was known as technological development. Thus, setting a better standard of living for a considerable number of Britons. Thanks to this they also developed a style of fashion which was known as Victorian fashion.

3. English literature during Victorian age

According to S. Arenas (2015) new circumstances created in 19th-century England after Queen Victoria's arrival, as summarized above in this paper, changes in the fields of economics, politics, the military, and especially the culture and industry, inevitably influenced developments in the field of English literature, as well as in the world literature, evoking realism, romanticism and aestheticism. Since virtually all Victorian literature revolves around these three movements, any interpretation of it is impossible unless we understand the spirit of these movements.

According to Lessire et al. (2002) *Aestheticism* began as a revolt of artists and writers seeking to unblock the continuing influence of economics, religion and politics through the way the English people viewed life. In a word, they were trying to push a new aesthetic criterion into the lives of the English. It is worth noting that the great writer Oscar Wilde was one of the most influential aesthetes. *Realistic Movement* was used throughout the Victorian Age as a way to not only criticize the treatments done to the most vulnerable side of its society, but also to expose the necessity to rethink the social values that surrounded its whole context and that came along as a consequence of Industrialism.

All this interference was accomplished through realistic methods in all genres of art with a particular emphasis on literature. Oscar Wilde and Charles Dickens are the main names representing this movement. *Romanticism*, although originally an American-born approach, after more than half a century it found the time and the way to appear in English art. Through powerful romantic elements in literary works, human fear, hope and ambition were represented. As such in Victorian times, it found extraordinary support even from the realistic movement that was co-existent with it. This movement, along with others, was best represented and concretized in literary works through Emily Bronte (Arenas, 2015).

3.1 Prose: According to the New World Encyclopedia (2016), the novel was the major literary category of 19th century literature. Shortly before the Victorian period, the novel gained extraordinary popularity. Jane Austen and Walter Scott through the novels gave special push to social satire and historical fiction. Novels began to be written in continuation, as the public had an interest in following up literary histories. The nineteenth century is often regarded as a high point in European literature and Victorian literature, including the works of Emily and Charlotte Brontë, Robert Browning, Wilkie Collins, Charles Dickens, George Eliot, Thomas Hardy, A. E. Housman, Rudyard Kipling, Robert Louis Stevenson, Bram Stoker, Anthony Trollope, and Oscar Wilde remain widely popular and are part of the core curricula in most universities and secondary schools.

These names, and others, generally represent prominent 19th-century English and world literature novelists, including the Victorian era. The works of the abovementioned authors, Victorian prose in general, had the same purpose. Through the stories represented by characters who loved work, they were persistent, followed by love and destiny despite their suffering and difficult lives. Good morality and one's ability to change for the better were the key messages of Victorian prose (Victorian-Era, 2019).

3.1.1 Sub forms of prose : Although the novel was the most representative form of Victorian literature, other forms of prose, especially drama and essay, were also developed. Initially plays written in Victorian times were concentrated on arousing emotions rather than promoting critical and artistic thinking. However, 1860 was the year of the great turning point in English drama, when T.W. Robertson pioneered a new realist drama, an achievement later celebrated by Arthur Wing Pinero in his charming sentimental comedy *Trelawny of the "Wells"* (1898), and the peak of English drama development until that time was in the 1890's, when in addition to others Oscar Wilde brought his world-famous drama *The Importance of Being Earnest* released in 1895.

After this, influenced by the Norwegian playwright, England began to produce a new genre of serious "problem plays". In support of this new spirit in English drama J.T. Grein founded the first independent theater, which later featured the plays of the great playwright George Bernard Shaw and translations of Ibsen (Styan, 1960). Except the novels and dramas that were leading by development, other genres of prose as well, including the essays, newspapers and other forms had not stalled but developed in the same spirit.

3.1.2 The Distinguished Novelists and Playwrights: Listed below you can find some of the most famous novelists and playwrights of this period, as well as some of their most powerful works. These authors are selected because it is believed that their works in the best way represent the characteristics of Victorian literature. Charles Dickens is considered as one of the greatest novelists of Victorian. *Bleak House*, published in 1853, remains one of the most representative novels of Victorian literature. Somewhere through the character Esther Summerson, elaborated in the first-person perspective, with a sharp satire, he touches on the weak points of the legal system of the time.

And unlike the usual writing style, Dickens in the second part of the novel writes in the third-person perspective, turning it into his masterpiece, but not the most famous one. Charles Dickens was also a great playwright of that time. He is best known for his play *The Frozen Deep*. Emily was the greatest of three Brontë sisters, but she was silent and reserved. Her only novel, *Wuthering Heights* published in 1847, is told through a multi-layered narrative which resembles a Russian doll, as one narrator gives way to another, and we find ourselves being transported back to the time when Heathcliff, a waif from Liverpool, was brought to live at *Wuthering Heights* by Catherine Linton's father.

The destructive and all-consuming love story between Heathcliff and Cathy forms the main part of the novel, though the book actually follows three generations in all. The book is even credited with popularising the dialect word 'gormless' (Interesting Literature, 2014). William Makepeace Thackeray is also a novelist, best known for his novel *Vanity Fair*. *Vanity Fair* is a novel without a Hero, which is also an example of a popular form in Victorian literature: the historical novel, in which very recent history is depicted. Thackeray's disparaging eye ranges over rampant materialism, snobbery, and the brutal internal logic of the social hierarchy (New World Encyclopedia, 2016).

Robert Browning was a famous English poet and playwright. He was a master of dramatic verse and is perhaps best known for his 12-book long form blank poem *The Ring and the Book*, where he presents the story of a Roman murder trial in 12 books. By vividly portraying a central character against a social background, his poems probe complex human motives in a variety of historical periods (Biography, 2019).

3.2 Poetry: An important part of Victorian literature undoubtedly remains poetry. Everything written in verses in the form of poetry during Queen Victoria's reign is known and categorized as Victorian poetry. From medieval fables and legends to Victorian-era developments dominated by debates over the rivalry between religion and science, they represented areas of interest in Victorian poetry (Victorian-Era, 2019). According to Negri (1999), Alfred, Lord Tennyson, Thomas Hood, Edward Lear, Robert Browning, Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Edward FitzGerald, Emily Brontë, Dante Gabriel Rossetti, Oscar Wilde, Rudyard Kipling etc, in the anthology of Victorian poetry, this string of names represents the main bearers of creation in Victorian poetry.

Bringing poems that promote values based on sensory elements. Most of these poets use imagery and the senses to convey the scenes of struggles between Religion and Science, and ideas about Nature and Romance, which transport the readers into the minds and hearts of the people of the Victorian age, even today.

3.2.1 The Distinguished Poets: Alfred, Lord Tennyson was an English poet who was often regarded as the chief representative of the Victorian age in poetry. To understand specifically the writings on Victorian poetry, Lord Tennyson's poetry "Mariana" should be read carefully.

According to Carter and McRae (1997), these aforementioned verses are a very good sample where one can observe the romantic element, anxiety and general depressive mood. However, poetry is extremely fluent, covered by a harmony that attracts the reader and keeps it curious. As such it epically represents Victorian poetry.

In addition to the romantic element, Victorian poetry, although at a disadvantage to the novel, has nevertheless helped socio-cultural change since the revolt against social class differences to gender inequality. Elizabeth Barrett Browning is a Victorian poet who represents this fact in the best way possible in her poetry “Aurora Leigh”. Through a rich phraseology filled with symbols, in sufficient rhyme and harmony, these verses succeed in capturing the author’s revolt regarding the mistreatment of women and gender inequality.

This and other poems like this of the Victorian era that found the ground prepared by Queen Victoria, have managed to create a new outlook and condition of the woman in English society (Avery, 2011). Christina Rossetti is one of the most famous female poets of the Victorian period both in range and quality. She excelled in works of fantasy, in poems for children, and in religious poetry. A major influence for her writings was her devout religious belief. In her poem called “The world” written in 1854, she magnificently describes the consequences of being attached to worldly pleasures rather than remembering the importance of spiritual devotion. The world here is presented as an attractive but deadly female figure (Avery, 2014).

4. The stance of criticism in relation to Victorian culture

4.1 Culture and science: The beginnings of the Victorian era were characterized by cultures with a strong sense of realism, especially in literature and art, while on the other hand it was the strong sense of nationalism and romanticism that characterized creativity in the fields of music and culture. This spirit developed until the middle of the 19th century, when something unexpected began to occur in English culture in general- the disintegration of musical tonality, the emergence of abstract art, the eruption of the ‘primitive’ into cultural styles and the arrival of modernism onto the artistic scene (Evans, 2010).

According to Pressbooks (2019), Victorian era England, as well as in the earlier ages expressed a nationwide interest in art in general. Attention was drawn to developments in music, literature, drama, and opera. Michael Balfe was the most popular British grand opera composer of the period, while the most popular musical theatre was a series of fourteen comic operas by Gilbert and Sullivan. Whereas English art’s most powerful point, theater, had a program of performances ranging from low comedies to high quality dramas including Shakespeare’s. Architecture, as well, flourished during this period.

The Gothic Revival architecture was noteworthy resulting in the clash between Gothic and classical ideals. Additionally, in 1851, the Great Exhibition which displayed the best innovations of the 19th century was also organized and it was the first of its kind. Photography also emerged during this period, the first photograph being that of Queen Victoria herself. She became the first monarch to be photographed (Victorian-Era, 2019). Early Victorian-Era of Life’s Realms, represents art influenced by realism. Late Victorian -When the Realities were obscured, was a time when the realistic aspects of early works were started to be made obscure. During this era the most common theme became feminism. Most of the paintings in that era depicted women, especially the subjects that involved fairies, landscapes and nudity (Garnersantiques, 2013).

In addition to the aforementioned developments, even the shorter version of English art cannot be written without mentioning the Pre-Raphaelite movement. It was born as a secret movement of some young painters who felt strangled by the standards set by the royal academy. Inspired by 14th and 15th-century Italian art, they brought to England the visual art of rich and vibrant paintings with abstract elements.

Pre-Raphaelite paintings often addressed subjects of moral seriousness, whether pertaining to history, literature, religion, or modern society. Thus, a secret movement became a public trend and left an indelible mark on the history of English art (Doyle, 2013). Not only in arts -19th century England saw a thorough change in every sphere of society including that of science. According to Synge, (1919) amid all the glorious achievements of Queen Victoria's reign, the wonderful discoveries in science must ever claim a foremost place. Thrilling indeed are the stories of this scientific age, breathless the rapidity with which one after another burst upon the public mind, changing old-world customs, transforming time-worn ideas, and revolutionizing the thought of centuries.

But which is considered as the most important thing in Victorian science is a closer study of plant and animal life led Charles Darwin to the new theories which he gave to the world in 1859 on *The Origin of Species*. His book gave rise to much discussion, but when in 1871 it was followed by *The Descent of Man*, which suggested that human beings and apes were descended from a common origin, a very storm of abuse burst forth. But though so fiercely attacked, the book had an extraordinary influence on literature, science, art, and religion during the latter half of the century. Natural History Societies, Philosophical Societies and various kinds of institutes were founded and lectures on science became a popular entertainment. And a particularly active area of research in this field was the relationship of science and literature in the nineteenth century because in this period, especially in the first half of the century, culture was much more unified and "science was very much integrated with the culture of its age" (John & Chappl, 1986).

And finally, one of these shifts in the way in which we perceive reality is the cultural movement to the Darwinian worldview which took place in the nineteenth century. It is the subject of Gillian Beer's *Darwin's Plots* which examines in its second part the influence of Darwinian (and other) evolutionary thought on literature and its assimilation in literary texts. According to Beer (1983) science influences literature because it influences the patterns of storytelling by giving a new pattern to our experience.

5. Conclusion

The coming on throne of a young girl, into one of the most powerful states in the world at a time when humanity was facing profound gender inequality, and the industrial revolution was knocking on the door, surely her personal life would be characterized by strange dynamics, from the marriage of a relative to the numerous attempts to liquidate her. For England and all the world, no doubt that Queen Victoria's reign marks the beginning of change, followed by a chain of changes in all realms of life of every European in general, and English in particular.

In conclusion, the Victorian era, based on facts, will be remembered as one of the most glorious periods in the history of England, and of world culture in general. But without forgetting some of the challenges and negative points of this period, including the suffering and abuse of the working class due to the rapid development of the industry, in particular the early times of this period with the physical abuse of children by employers. Problems with public hygiene and the emergence of epidemics in certain areas of the empire.

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