



# A Two-Faced Reality (page 148)



## A Two-Faced Reality

# 1. The Victorian era (1837- 1901)



**1837** Queen Victoria comes to the throne

**1840** Marriage of Queen Victoria to Prince Albert



**1853-56**  
The Crimean War

**1877** Queen Victoria was crowned Empress of India

**1899- 1902** The British won the Boers

**1838** People's Charter calls for social reforms

**1837** Charles Dickens publishes *Oliver Twist*

**1851** The Great Exhibition opens at Crystal Palace

**1886** Expansion of the British Empire in Africa and Southeast Asia

The **Victorian Age** was an age of important social and political **reforms**, of technological and scientific **progress**, and Britain became the most powerful country in the world thanks to its **colonial expansion**.

- Queen Victoria was loved especially by the **middle classes** for her way of life and moral code.
- The Queen always reigned constitutionally, respecting Parliament and acting as a mediator above party politics (the two main political parties were the Liberals and the Conservatives, who alternated in government).
- This allowed: material progress, imperial expansion, social reforms.

### **Some important reforms:**

- *Ten Hours Act (1847)*: it limited working hours to ten a day.
- *Abolition of the Corn Laws (1846)*, (the Corn Laws kept the price of corn artificially high by taxing corn).

**Birth of the Chartist movement (1838):** working class people asked for a *charter* (= a list of rights) of social reforms, such as the extension of the right to vote to all male adults.

The Chartists were strongly opposed: the movement's leaders were arrested, some protesters were killed, so the Chartist Movement dissolved.

However, between 1860 and 1914 most of the Chartists' demands became law. In particular, in 1918 the right to vote was extended to all men, and in 1928 to all women.



## 2. The Great Exhibition gave prestige to Great Britain.



**Housed in the Crystal Palace, in Hyde Park, 1851**

It showed some of the most important British technological innovations and

increasing power  
of the middle  
classes

expansion of  
industry and  
trade

scientific and  
technological  
developments





# 3. Life in the Victorian town

As a consequence of the **Industrial Revolution**, many people lived in towns.

**Problems** linked to:

- overcrowded urban environment;
- high death rate;
- terrible working conditions in polluted atmospheres;
- cholera epidemics and tuberculosis.

Some **reforms** were made to clean up the towns.



Regent Street, London, around 1850



St. Thomas Hospital, London



## A Two-Faced Reality

Radical change in **medicine**:

- professional **organisations** were founded;
  - **modern hospitals** were built.
- 
- New **social services** were introduced: water, gas lighting, paved roads, places of entertainment, pubs, parks, stadiums and shops.
  - The **Metropolitan Police** was introduced in 1830 by the Prime Minister Robert Peel, who were called “Bobbies” from the name of its founder.



## A Two-Faced Reality

# Poverty

Poor people lived in overcrowded slums, in terrible, non-hygenic conditions, which led to epidemics of cholera and other diseases.

The **poor laws of 1834** only made the situation worse: children of poor families were separated from their families and sent to work in parish workhouses.

In the poem "London" **Blake** already criticized this exploitation of children by the Church (*how the Chimney-sweeper's cry every black'nin Church appalls*).

**Dickens** described the terrible conditions of workhouses in *Oliver Twist*

Poverty was seen as a crime.

Only at the end of the 19th century poverty was seen as a social problem.

So, the Victorian Age was an age of **great contrasts**: poverty and squalor on one hand, progress and reform on the other.

A contrast also visible in the grandeur of some public buildings compared to the numerous terraced houses and slums present in towns.





# 3. Victorian London

- Victorians often revived **previous styles**.
- Classical forms were preferred for **civic and public buildings**, like government offices, town halls; Gothic ones for **ecclesiastical and domestic works**.
- After 1855 the **Gothic revival** prevailed over the classical faction (see the Houses of Parliament).



The Victoria and Albert Museum



The British Museum



Buckingham Palace

(Read page 151: the birth of the high street)



## 4. The Victorian compromise (read page 154)

The Victorian Age was an age of **contrasts** and **social imbalance** (progress and reforms vs poverty and social injustice).

Victorian society was based on a set of **moral values** that could only be fulfilled by **the middle and upper classes**: hard work, respectability, good manners and education, patriarchal family, female chastity, repression of sexuality. Philanthropy (charitable activity) was carried out by a lot of respectable women.

These values derived from the Puritan tradition. All those who didn't conform to these values were considered evil and immoral .

So, the **Victorian compromise** is **a mixture of hypocrisy and morality**, the attempt to hide the unpleasant aspects of progress and the materialistic philosophy of life under a veil of respectability and optimism.



## 4. The Victorian family

The ideal Victorian family was **patriarchal**:

- a. Victorian private lives were dominated by an authoritarian father.
- b. Women were subject to male authority; they were expected to marry and make home a 'refuge' for their husbands.

'**Victorian**', synonymous with **prude**, stood for extreme repression; nudity was denounced in art and even furniture legs had to be concealed under heavy cloth not to be 'suggestive'.



## 5. The role of the woman (read pages 168-169)

In Victorian society women were mainly considered as “**the angel in the house**”.

Husband and wife had different roles. The wife’s duties were to educate the children, to manage the house and make it a comfortable place for her husband. The husband was considered the head of the family and his main responsibility was to work.

**The royal family was a powerful model** for this. In fact Queen Victoria showed both her authority as a queen and her female humility in the presence of her husband.

**However**, many women took on **new challenges**:

- Women were encouraged to play **sport** (the only difficulty were bulky skirts).
- Some women were great **travellers**, like Anne Blunt who travelled in the Arabian desert with her husband, or all the women who emigrated to America and Australia.
- Florence Nightingale can be considered the founder of **modern nursing**: she led a team of nurses in the war of Crimea, and then founded the first training school for nurses in London.
- Marianne North travelled in many distant countries and she **Painted** a lot of unknown species of animals and plants.



## 6. The British Empire (pages 173-174)

During the reign of Queen Victoria, Great Britain ruled over a **wide** and **powerful empire**, that brought the British in contact with different cultures.



**An area of 4 million people  
more than  
400 million squares miles.**

British Empire throughout the World,  
19th century, Private Collection





## 6. The British Empire

- Britain's imperial activity started with Queen Elizabeth 1<sup>st</sup> , in the second half of the 16<sup>th</sup> century.
- **After the 1857 Indian Mutiny** (a rebellion in India against the rule of the British East India Company) India came under direct rule by Britain and Queen Victoria was crowned **Empress of India** in **1877**.
- The British occupied new territories, such as Australia, New Zealand, Hong Kong, and expanded their possession in Africa and South East Asia.



## A new representation of the queen



Queen Victoria was the first queen to use **photography** as a form of propaganda, but at the same time she became a familiar figure to her people.

This photograph shows a **realistic representation** of the queen: she's wearing a simple dress, her face is real, it shows the passing of time.

There is also a realistic background.

Her servant Abdul Karim is standing near her, in a very natural way, as if it was normal to have an Indian attendant: the idea of **the Empire** becomes popular.



In a more traditional form of representation, Queen Elizabeth I was represented in a painted portrait (“*The Spanish Armada*”), a mark of the wealth and social status of the queen. Her posture is very formal : she’s sitting on a throne. She expresses a sense of stillness and command.

It’s a **symbolic representation**: she symbolizes absolute power, she’s far from everyday life. She’s wearing a very elaborate dress, her face is ageless. There’s a fantastic background. Her hand rests on the globe, this represents the dream, **the aspiration to a global empire**.



## 6. The British Empire

### The Victorians believed that

- the 'races' of the world were divided by physical and intellectual differences;
- some were destined to be led by others;
- it was an obligation imposed by God on the British to impose their superior way of life, their institutions, law and politics on native peoples. (This was called “the white man’s burden”, after a poem by Rudyard Kipling).





# 7. The Victorian novel (page 155)

- In the Victorian Age the writers and their readers shared the same interests and values.
- Novels became very popular, they were widely read by **the middle classes** and especially by **women**. People borrowed books from circulating libraries; books were read aloud in the family.
- A lot of novels were published in **instalments** in the pages of periodicals.
- Novelists described society as they saw it, reflecting the social changes that were happening. They made people aware of social injustices but their criticism wasn't radical.
- There were a lot of **women writers** (from Jane Austen to George Eliot, they explored the daily lives and values of women)



## Early Victorian writers

- They felt they had a moral and social responsibility. They described the social changes, they were aware of the evils of society and denounced them, although it was never radical criticism (they didn't question the foundations of society).
- They were mainly social and **humanitarian novels** (Charles Dickens) or **psychological novels** (Emily and Charlotte Bronte).

## Late Victorian writers

- In the second half of the century writers no more identified with the values of society and openly criticised them. Their **new realism** was influenced by *Darwin's theory of evolution* (individual characters influenced by the environment, by the historical moment and by hereditary traits), and by *Positivism* (scientific precision in describing social and psychological aspects). They were nearer to European **Naturalism**. (Thomas Hardy, Robert Louis Stevenson and Oscar Wilde).



## 7. The Victorian novel: main features (page 155)



Charles Dickens

- The voice of **the omniscient narrator provided a comment** on the plot and erected a rigid barrier between 'right' and 'wrong'.
- **The setting** chosen by most Victorian novelists was the **city**, which was the main symbol of the industrial civilisation as well as the expression of anonymous lives and lost identities.
- Victorian writers concentrated on the creation of characters and achieved **deeper analysis of the characters' inner life**.
- **Retribution and punishment** were to be found **in the final chapter**, where the whole texture of events, adventures, incidents had to be explained and justified.