

## **victorian critics of victorian society**

HIS 4150 Tuesday & Thursday, 2:00 pm - 3:15 pm  
Palmer 3170, University of Toledo

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### **description:**

By 'Victorian society' I mean that society ruled by Queen Victoria, sovereign of both the United Kingdom and a world-wide empire. Its history spans her reign, 1837-1901. By 'Victorian society' I also mean a modern society of a type whose spirit is characterized by materialism, whose economy is characterized by capitalist expansion, whose body is exploited in production and repressed in reproduction, whose dominant ideology is based on private property, freedom of contract, individualism, and competition. A consequence of having these two meanings is that we may refer not just to events between 1837 and 1901 but to the same themes when they arise in other places and in other times.

The course is one of social history, that is, it partakes both of history and sociology. But that's not all. We shall also find that the critics of this society found expression in novels and economics, and so, academically speaking, it may seem that we wander from the specializations, or disciplines of knowledge, but this is inevitable if we aspire to find the unity of human experience.

With respect to the critics of Victorian society I restrict our readings to Victorians themselves. Criticism may be of the word or the deed. If by the deed, then it is very often effective by means of collective action of numerous people. If the criticism is by the word, then its power stems (usually) from single individuals. There is the arm of criticism wielded by moral force and there is the criticism of arms wielded by physical force.

Queen Victoria came to the throne at the end of a great upheaval of those resisting the hell of the factory, an upheaval led by a mythic figure, Captain Ludd. Queen Victoria began her reign at about the same time that another massive revolt took place, this one by the followers of the People's Charter. Luddism and Chartism are the names of the huge insurgencies of the working class. The more familiar 'isms' of the 19<sup>th</sup> century - liberalism, socialism, communism, anarchism - are associated with single individuals.

### **readings:**

I have asked the university bookstore to stock the following books for you to purchase. Most of them have arrived, but not all.

Charlotte Brontë, *Shirley* first published in 1849

Henry Mayhew, *London Labour and the London Poor* (New York: Dover, 1968), first published, 1861

John Ruskin, *On Art and Life* (London: Penguin, 2004), first published 1853, 1859

Karl Marx, *Capital*, volume one, first published 1867

John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty* (London: Penguin, 1985), first published 1859

William Morris, *News from Nowhere* (), first published 1890)

### **requirements:**

Class requirements are as follows: a) attendance, b) satisfactory and timely completion of the reading assignments, c) a written essay about another book by a Victorian critic concerning Victorian society, or some other book that you have chosen after obtaining my approval, d) quizzes now and then, and e) a final exam. The final grade will be determined by combining my evaluation of your classroom participation, your quiz grades, the grade on your final exam, and the grade on the essay you write. I shall also take into account the tendency of your work: those whose evaluations continually improve do better than those whose work declines.

### **assignments:**

"... whilst your petitioners have learned that her Majesty receives daily for her private use the sum of £164 17s 10d., they have also ascertained that many thousands of the families of the labourers are only in receipt of 3 3/4d. per head per day."

Chartist petition (1842), quoted in Dorothy Thompson, *Queen Victoria* (1990)

Tuesday, 10 January                      introduction

Thursday, 12 January      Chartism

"They suffered the experience of the Industrial Revolution as articulate, free-born Englishmen. Those who were sent to gaol might know the Bible better than those on the Bench, and those who were transported to Van Diemen's Land might ask their relatives to send Cobbett's *Register* after them."

E.P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, revised edition (1968) p. 914

Tuesday, 17 January                      An Outline of the Industrial Revolution

Thursday, 19 January      J.S. Mill, *On Liberty*

"... the idea of culture, and the word itself in its general modern uses, came into English thinking in the period which we commonly describe as that of the Industrial Revolution."

Raymond Williams, *Culture and Society* (1958), p. ix.

Tuesday, 24 January J.S. Mill, *On Liberty*

Thursday, 26 January J.S. Mill, *On Liberty*

"No one has more respect for the real rights of property than I have; but I do not class among them the robber's right by which the lands of this country are now held in fee for the British crown. I acknowledge no right of property in a small class which goes to abrogate the rights of a numerous people."

James Fintan Lalor, *The Irish Felon* (1848)

Tuesday, 31 January John Ruskin, "The Nature of Gothic"

Thursday, 2 February John Ruskin, "The Work of Iron"

"... as an old woman accused of stealing a cow remarked in court to her prosecutor Daniel O'Connell, 'you know about the roguery of it, but you don't know at all about the truth of it.'"

Terry Eagleton, *Heathcliff and the Great Hunger* (London, 1995), p. 172

Tuesday, 7 February Henry Mayhew, "The Destroyers of Vermin"

Thursday, 9 February Henry Mayhew, "Garret Masters,"  
"Coal-Heavers"

"that in the opinion of your petitioners the continued denial of the franchise to women is unjust and inexpedient. That in the home, their position is lowered by such an exclusion from the responsibilities of national life. In the factory, their unrepresented condition places the regulation of their work in the hands of men who are often their rivals as well as their fellow workers."

*Humble Petition of women workers in the cotton factories of Lancashire*  
(1900)

Tuesday, 14 February Henry Mayhew, "Lumpers," "Ballast Men,"  
"Dock Labourers"

Thursday, 16 February Henry Mayhew, "Watermen," "Carmen &  
Porters," "Vagrants"

"Up! Off your knees, young men! Let us have more effort directed to the removal of evil! Don't go continually begging of God to do that which you ought to do! The world is wrong, and wants righting, and you and I are responsible for doing our share towards righting it. What horrible villainy have you been guilty of, that half your time needs to be taken up in praying for forgiveness?"

Tom Mann, *Preachers and Churches* (1894)

Tuesday, 21 February Charlotte Brontë, *Shirley*. I recommend chapter fourteen of E.P. Thompson's *The Making of the English Working Class* (1968) as a 20<sup>th</sup> century guide to the Luddites

Thursday, 23 February Charlotte Brontë, *Shirley*

"The ultimate idea of English civilization being that 'the sole nexus between man and man is cash payment,' - and the 'Union' having finally determined the course and current of that payment, out of Ireland into England, - it had come to pass that the chiefs were exchanged for landlords, and the clansman had sunk into able-bodied paupers."  
John Mitchel, *The Last Conquest of Ireland* (Perhaps), (New York, 1861)

Tuesday, 28 February Charlotte Brontë, *Shirley*

Thursday, 2 March Charlotte Brontë, *Shirley*

"... the end I have in view is social equality for each and all, to obtain this we must first have political equality for each and all. To obtain political equality, we must have a more extensive and effective organization of the working-classes, and of that portion of the middle class which is immediately dependent on their custom, than has hitherto been even thought of, much less accomplished."  
Bronterre O'Brien, *The National Reformer* (1837)

Tuesday, 14 March Charlotte Brontë, *Shirley*

Thursday, 16 March Charlotte Brontë, *Shirley*

"If by this it is meant that examples are to be made without taking the necessary means to discriminate between guilt and innocence, and that, in order to inspire terror, men are to be sacrificed whose guilt remains uncertain, I can only say I trust no court of justice will ever entertain so fearful and odious a doctrine."  
Alexander Cockburn, *Charge of the Lord Chief Justice of England to the Grand Jury at the Old Bailey* (April 1867), p. 108

Tuesday, 21 March Karl Marx, ch. 7, "The Labor Process"

Thursday, 23 March Karl Marx, ch. 10, "The Working Day"

"In 1872 the Parks Regulation Act was passed. It limited the right of the policed within the park to the maintenance of civil order, but to play no role in granting permission for meetings to be held or determining what may be spoken about within meetings. Certain regulations which have evolved since then are still in effect: speakers' platforms must be a sufficient distance from one another so as not to allow one orator to shout down the voice of another... and it is forbidden to impart racing tips from the platform."

Stephen Coleman, *Stilled Tongues: From Soapbox to Soundbite* (1997), p. 37

Tuesday, 28 March Karl Marx, ch. 13, "Cooperation"

Thursday, 30 March Karl Marx, ch. 14, "Division of Labor and Manufacture"

"They found ample scope for character training and the inculcation of moral excellence in the two games, football and cricket, and one of them, cricket, they made the basis of what can only be called a national culture. 'A straight bat' and 'It isn't cricket' became the watchwords of manners and virtue and the guardians of freedom and power... [The working class] had won for themselves one great victory, freedom on Saturday afternoons."

C.L.R. James, *Beyond a Boundary* (1963), p. 165, 166

Tuesday, 4 April Karl Marx, ch. 15, "Machinery and Modern Industry"

• The essay you are required to write is due today, Tuesday, 4 April. The essay should be on a book that you have read in addition to the assigned readings. It should contain quotations from several of the required readings. The purpose of the essay is to provide an opportunity to reflect upon what you have read already and to apply it to a new subject. It should be between five and ten pages, no more no less. The essay should be written legibly if it is not printed.

Thursday, 6 April Karl Marx, ch. 25, "The General Laws of Capitalist Accumulation"

"When she insists that two and two make five I say that I cannot help thinking that they make four. She replies that there may be some truth in what I say but she knows they make five. Thereupon I drop the discussion."

Sir Henry Posonby, Queen Victoria's private secretary

Tuesday, 11 April Karl Marx, part VIII, "So-Called Primitive Accumulation"

Thursday, 13 April Karl Marx, part VIII, "So-Called Primitive Accumulation"

"In the great majority of cases today at least in the possessing classes, the husband is obliged to earn a living and support his family, and that in itself gives him a position of supremacy, without any need for special legal titles and privileges. Within the family he is the bourgeois and the wife represents the proletariat."

Frederick Engels, *The Origin of the Family* (1884)

Tuesday, 18 April William Morris, *News from Nowhere*, chaps. 1-4

Thursday, 20 April  
chaps. 5-9

William Morris, *News from Nowhere*,

"They have never imagined the great arch of bourgeois culture... But what our authors have done, *inter alia*, is ... 1) to ignore the importance of the Protestant and bourgeois-democratic inheritance; 2) to overlook the importance of capitalist political-economy as 'authentic, articulated ideology'; 3) to forget the contribution, over more than three centuries, of British natural scientists; 4) to confuse an empirical idiom with an ideology."

E.P. Thompson, "The Peculiarities of the English," *Socialist Register*  
(1965)

Tuesday, 25 April  
chaps. 10-14

William Morris, *News from Nowhere*,

Thursday, 27 April  
chaps. 15-18

William Morris, *News from Nowhere*,

"I shall stick to the hardest of hard facts, and the coldest of cold reason; and I shall appeal to that robust commonsense and English love of fair-play for which, I understand, you are more famous than for your ability to see beyond the end of your free and independent nose at election times."

Tuesday, 3 May

Robert Blatchford, *Merrie England* (1892)  
exam week

Thursday, 5 May