

原版文学核心概念丛书

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相信本套丛书的引进将满足我国广大文学专业的师生及其他文学研究者、爱好者的需求，有力推动我国文学研究的发展与繁荣。

Key Concepts in Victorian Literature

Sean Purchase

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This book is also dedicated to my mother, Irene, and to the memory of my grandparents, Joyce Purchase, Albert Purchase, and Mabel Burdfield.

S.P.

General Editors' Preface

The purpose of Palgrave Key Concepts in Literature is to provide students with key critical and historical ideas about the texts they are studying as part of their literature courses. These ideas include information about the historical and cultural contexts of literature as well as the theoretical approaches current in the subject today. Behind the series lies a recognition of the need nowadays for students to be familiar with a range of concepts and contextual material to inform their reading and writing about literature.

This series is also based on a recognition of the changes that have transformed degree courses in Literature in recent years. Central to these changes has been the impact of critical theory together with a renewed interest in the way in which texts intersect with their immediate context and historical circumstances. The result has been an opening up of new ways of reading texts and a new understanding of what the study of literature involves together with the introduction of a wide set of new critical issues that demand our attention. An important aim of Palgrave Key Concepts in Literature is to provide brief, accessible introductions to these new ways of reading and new issues.

Each volume in Palgrave Key Concepts in Literature follows the same structure. An initial overview essay is followed by three sections – Contexts, Texts and Criticism – each containing a sequence of brief alphabetically arranged entries on a sequence of topics. 'Contexts' essays provide an impression of the historical, social and cultural environment in which literary texts were produced. 'Texts' essays, as might be expected, focus more directly on the works themselves. 'Criticism' essays then outline the manner in which changes and developments in criticism have affected the ways in which we discuss the texts featured in the volume. The informing intention throughout is to help the reader create something new in the process of combining context, text and criticism.

John Peck
Martin Coyle

Cardiff University

General Introduction

I

Queen Victoria reigned from 1837 to her death in 1901, and her name has become synonymous with the age. For students starting to study English literature, the term 'Victorian' suggests a quite specific historical juncture, tending to connote a peculiarly rigid set of ideas, circumstances, values and attitudes. These revolve around a number of concepts and themes, not to say clichés, which are frequently attributed to the Victorians, and they can be misleading. The Victorians are typically described as having lived rather drab lives that were little more than combinations of puritan ethics and repressions: severe moral probity, restraint, reserve, family values, a certain dourness or lack of humour, uncomfortable attitudes towards sex, stony faces in photographs, and black clothes. They are equally notorious for their intolerance towards social 'deviants' of all types. Criminals, lunatics, homosexuals and stray women were all treated severely or punished, and masturbation was discouraged by cold baths. In a society in which middle-class norms and attitudes rose to dominance, the working classes were also approached with caution and contempt, and foreignness in any shape or form was treated with suspicion and hostility.

As part of their complex middle-class ethos, the Victorians are just as famous for their liberalism and sense of industry. Concepts such as hard work, bustle, determination, energy, purpose and progress are all frequently attached to the Victorians, as are practical philosophies such as 'self-help' and 'philanthropy'. As these last two concepts suggest, however, the clichés surrounding the Victorian age, being clichés, turn out to be somewhat contradictory upon closer inspection: 'self-help' describes an ethos of self-sufficient individualism, while 'philanthropy' denotes an idea of charity or goodwill to others. As mutually defining oppositions, they are concepts which unsettle the clichés ascribed to the Victorians by operating as simultaneous attributes of the middle-class ethos. Similar contradictions appear when we consider the issue of sexual modesty. The general view is that the Victorians were prudish about the human body: everyone has an opinion, for example, about their reluctance to enjoy sex or reveal bits of their bodies. But this was an age when prostitution and pornography were rampant, homosexuals were jailed, transvestites roamed the nation's parks, population figures

swelled, particularly in the crowded cities, and sex was discussed everywhere.

The contradictions and complexities of the Victorian period also have to be seen in the context of technological, and consequently social, change. In the aftermath of the Industrial Revolution, nineteenth-century Britain changed rapidly from a largely rural to a predominantly urban society, and the Victorians were unparalleled as innovators in the sciences and technology. Important engineering feats came to symbolize this change, especially the development of the railways from the 1830s onwards, one of the most singular and striking achievements being Isambard Kingdom Brunel's Great Western Railway linking London and Bristol, which was opened in 1835. A London to Birmingham railway was also in operation by 1838, and by the early 1840s the popular holiday destination of Brighton was served by a London to Brighton railway which cost around eight shillings (40p) for a cheap day return. By 1850, in fact, there were around six thousand miles of railway lines across Britain. For many Victorians, a better and faster railway system marked a better and faster Britain. The trains gave rise to greater efficiency in transport and communications, and enabled the swifter movement of vital resources and materials between the nation's core industrial centres.

Along with the railways came the new timetables drawn up to meet the increasing network of lines criss-crossing the country. British time was consequently forced to become synchronized and standardized, and this regulation determined a new sense of hourly structure and routine in daily life throughout the country. From that point onwards, Victorians would have to keep time with both the new trains themselves and the relentless chug of the modern world they inaugurated. Victorian engineers also undertook the construction of a series of massive bridge, tunnel and viaduct projects, primarily to facilitate better routes for the trains, and developments in communications technology enabled them to lay down longer and longer telegraph lines. After 1855, large-scale changes were also afoot in areas of health and sanitation. Engineers such as Joseph Bazalgette, for example, designed and constructed a sewerage system in London which eventually helped eradicate lethal diseases such as cholera. His project was encouraged by the outcry following the 'Great Stink' of 1858, which was caused by the pumping of raw sewage into the Thames.

Radical intellectual achievements were also beginning to shape and change the age. As with the railways, many Victorian theories and ideas would have an immeasurable impact on the way that people came to understand and live their lives. To draw upon only a few of the more

obvious achievements, in chronological order, there was, for example, the publication of Karl Marx and Frederick Engels's work on the historical relationships between classes in *The Communist Manifesto*, which appeared in 1848 during a series of revolutionary upheavals throughout Europe. Eleven years later, in 1859, Charles Darwin published his theory of evolution in *The Origin of Species*. Although evolutionary ideas were not new to the Victorians (the work of Charles Lyell in 1830–3 and Robert Chambers in 1844 both held that organisms evolved from an original being created by God), Darwin's radical contribution was his theory of 'natural selection' and his stress upon the godless element of chance involved in evolutionary variation. His work posed the most lucid and persuasive challenge yet to religious orthodoxies, especially to the biblical idea of 'Creationism' and the notion of time, undermining centuries of Christian ideas about life on earth and the hierarchy of species. Towards the end of the century, Sigmund Freud's revolutionary ideas about psychosexual development, repression and the unconscious also began to receive recognition (and criticism). As with Marxism, psychoanalysis would have more impact in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, and it originated in Continental Europe, not Britain. But, like Marxism, it is important to remember that it is a discourse rooted in nineteenth-century attitudes and anxieties, and that Freud's ideas germinated and came together in key publications such as *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1900), when Victoria was still alive.

To underline the influence of one of these intellectual achievements here, and its implications for modern literary criticism and theory, we can focus on Marxism. The construction of huge factories and mass industries throughout Britain in the Victorian period helped cultivate an increasingly class-conscious nation, and it is out of this context that Marx and Engels's ideas about the fundamentally exploitative nature of industrial capitalism became important for understanding the modern world. Their theories also, inevitably, informed the critical discussion of what is happening in, and how we interpret, Victorian literature although this has proved to be a far from simple story. It is, however, a far from simple story. In the early 'hungry forties', Engels witnessed at first hand what he described as the poverty and oppression endured by the British working classes in Manchester, then the centre of Britain's massive textile industry. He subsequently condemned the industrial-capitalist system in his polemical *Condition of the Working Classes in England* (1844). This text helped shape his collaboration with Marx, and the manner in which class relationships – which Marx and Engels saw as the driving force behind the history of the Western world – would be thought about and interpreted in the future. But Marx also developed

theories about the way literature and culture participated in the spread and consolidation of 'ruling-class ideas'. One of the aims of this book, in this respect, is to demonstrate the various historical and theoretical ways in which Marx and modern Marxist literary critics have re-examined both 'ruling-class ideas' in Victorian literature and the tenets of basic Marxism.

The premise of basic or 'vulgar' Marxism is that the history of human relationships is governed entirely by the economic infrastructure of society. For some modern critics, especially postmodern critics, such an argument is reductive because it offers a far too sweeping 'grand narrative' of life and everything. Such reductionism, they maintain, fails to take account of the complex and ambiguous *other* movements of history, those which are made up, for example, of the numerous sexual, gender, or racial dimensions which cannot be simplified into a rigid, economic opposition between 'us' (the oppressed class) and 'them' (the dominating class). As with other critical and theoretical fields such as feminism, deconstruction, new historicism and psychoanalysis, and indeed the major Victorian ideas and attitudes themselves, *Key Concepts* provides crucial information on these complexities and some ideas about the various ways of approaching them. In doing so, the book demonstrates how and why a more complex approach to these ideas is important in any attempt to understand, and do justice to, the complexities of Victorian literature and culture.

II

Around the same time that Marx and Engels were establishing their social critique, Victorian writers also took up the cause of ordinary working people. In the 'Condition of England' or 'Social Problem' novels of the 1830s–50s, especially, the miseries and deprivations suffered by the British working classes came under increasingly heavy criticism. Two of the most famous and popular novels of this sub-genre were Elizabeth Gaskell's *Mary Barton* (1848) and Charles Dickens's *Hard Times* (1854). Gaskell's work is subtitled *A Tale of Manchester Life*, and Dickens's novel, although set in the fictional 'Coketown', is also a rendering of Manchester. Both novels deal with hardship, hunger, injustice and despair, and it is indicative of the changing role of fiction in the period, and the peculiarly Victorian confidence shared by Gaskell and Dickens, that they intended their works to be agents of social and economic reform.

In *Hard Times*, the weaver Stephen Blackpool is mistreated by the aptly named industrialist Josiah Bounderby, and just about everyone else

in the novel (including his unpredictable wife). He is wrongly accused of theft, exiled by his union, made redundant, falls down an old mine shaft, and dies. And yet, as brutal and as unjust as conditions were, and however accurate Gaskell and Dickens were in reflecting these problems, in reality the new industrial systems proved to be hugely successful in terms of their overall contribution to the Victorian economy and the way that they sealed Britain's reputation around the world. Victoria's factories mass-produced a vast range of goods made from diverse natural and metallurgical resources – textiles (particularly clothes), steel, coal, hardware, household goods, pharmaceuticals, luxury goods – for a growing world market, and they ensured that the Queen would preside over the most powerful nation in history. With the Victorian industrialist and middle classes profiting from such growth, at the expense of workers such as Stephen Blackpool, Britain quickly became renowned as the 'workshop of the world'.

Given the importance of industry and trade, important shifts in the economic infrastructure of Victorian society are something that every student of the period needs to be aware of. In 1846, in the middle of the 'hungry forties', a new economic confidence slowly emerged in a climate of free trade heralded by the repeal of the Corn Laws (1846). Since 1815, the Corn Laws had imposed restrictive tariffs on imports of corn, and these led to inflated prices for domestic grain and home-baked bread. It was the Victorian poor who paid the price, in terms of deprivation, but also the poor who agitated against a law so weighted against their basic needs. The repeal of the Corn Laws signalled the slow retreat of some of the worst excesses and deprivations of the period, although not those associated with the concurrent Irish Famine (c.1845–52), which led to the starvation and emigration of millions from Ireland. However prematurely, a new decade, the 1850s, also indicated an era of prosperity after the 'hungry forties'. With a new spirit of confidence in place, in 1851 the Victorians undertook a grandiose project which seems largely to have been designed to show off their new-found prosperity to the world, and the 'workshop' of British superiority which made it possible.

The Great Exhibition (1851), heavily promoted by Prince Albert, took place fairly early on in Victoria's reign. It was a building which at once paraded Britain's economic success and imperial pre-eminence, and summed up the country's sense of a united purpose and identity. Housed in a Crystal Palace made almost exclusively of glass and iron, the exhibition dominated Hyde Park with all the robust British clarity, common sense and strength that the materials of its construction suggest. It was, to all intents and purposes, a kind of museum of modernity – British

industrial-capitalist modernity – containing some 100,000 exhibits from around the world, and indeed it was British showpieces that dominated the floor space. On display were many of the instruments, apparatuses, designs, machines and tools (such as telegraphs and newfangled gadgets such as early cameras), which Victorians thought were making Britain 'great'. These included cotton-spinning and printing machines, industrial hammers, engines, locomotives, and the many other engineering and technological 'miracles' which were used in the nation's factories and mills. Records of the exhibition's floor plan indicate that although the nation's working classes were permitted entry, the exhibits were laid out in such a way that the role of the many Stephen Blackpools who operated them in reality was effectively downplayed. The Great Exhibition all but ignored, in other words, the human cost of Victorian industrialism.

Elsewhere in the exhibition, there were a range of international artefacts and curiosities on display, including the paraphernalia of empire such as Bengal ivories and stuffed elephants. All of the exhibits glamorized Britain's domestic and colonial achievements around the globe, and the stuffed elephants were, in this respect, more emblematic of British dominance in India than any celebration of Indian culture. Nonetheless, millions paid to come and see the exhibition over the six months it was open to the public. At the same time, the fact that Britain's economic gains and successes throughout the period, on the back of the Industrial Revolution, were also attributable to its prowess in world trade, is a significant factor in any understanding of the Victorians and their literature. The Great Exhibition celebrated an increasingly global market, but it also underlined the ambition, on the part of the Victorians, to establish the greatest empire the world had ever seen. By the time of Victoria's death in 1901, a full generation after she had been crowned Empress of India in 1876, the Victorians had succeeded in realizing this ambition. Following the last phase of the 'Scramble for Africa' campaigns, during which Britain carved out the lion's share of that continent, the British Empire had begun to govern around a quarter of the population of the globe. Back at home, meanwhile, as if pointing towards the hollowness of everything the Victorians achieved, both in Britain and abroad, the Crystal Palace was dismantled and relocated to South London. There it languished as a popular destination for day trips, before finally being destroyed by fire in 1936. After its months of glory in 1851, Joseph Paxton's tribute to Victorian might had become an empty and vulnerable shell.

If 1851 provides one key point of reference, we also need to be aware of the longer picture. Most commentators describe the Victorian era as

part of a broader historical period known as the 'long nineteenth century'. This period, approximately 1815–1914, includes all of the events and affairs which distinguish British history throughout these years, from the end of one great European conflict, the Napoleonic Wars, to the outbreak of another, the First World War. In this respect, although this book deals specifically with key concepts in Victorian literature, the important point to make at this juncture is that this more extensive historical scope needs to be remembered when approaching the period. Quite obviously, many of the significant political and cultural events which shaped the age cannot easily be contained by the specific years defined by Victoria's reign. Neither did Victorian writers begin being 'Victorian' in 1837 and start being 'modernist' in 1901. Put another way, the Victorian age, its culture, ideas, problems and anxieties, the key concepts of its literature and their implications, are simply not as neat as the years 1837–1901 would suggest. When, otherwise, does the immediately preceding age of Romanticism (c. 1789–1830) end, exactly, and to what extent do the ideas and concepts that characterize Romanticism still inform the Victorian age? Are there really discernible cut-off dates or points, and if there are, how do we account for the intervening years between 1830 and 1837, during William IV's short reign? For some critics, it is indeed the decline of the long 'Georgian' period (1714–1830), evidenced as early as the late eighteenth century in the so-called 'Romantic' decades, and not simply Victoria's accession to the throne, which marks the beginnings of 'Victorianism' as a definable concept. These were the tumultuous years of the French revolution (1789) and Britain's wars against Napoleonic France (1800–15). They were also the years leading up to the first great Reform Act (1832) and the New Poor Law (1834), when the notion of fundamental changes to the British constitution first seemed a real possibility and the nation's electorate was slightly expanded. At the other end of the nineteenth century, some commentators argue that the period considered by many to have succeeded Victorianism in literature and culture, modernism (c. 1890–1939), probably has origins as far back as the 1870s, more or less in the middle of Victoria's reign.

Evidently, the problems attendant on periodization underline why the many clichés and shibboleths ascribed to the Victorians need to be approached with caution. The entries in this book and the period covered by the chronology (1800–1914) have been selected with these problems specifically in mind. To that end, the book does not simply dispense with the clichés and the shibboleths. Rather, it re-examines them, in order to provide a more thorough research tool for twenty-first-century students of the period. Victorian Britain in the 1830s undoubt-

edly did undergo what Edward Bulwer Lytton, in *England and the English* (1833), described as an 'age of transition – an age of disquietude and doubt'. But this is not to suggest that other periods were not equally unsettled or transitory. More to the point, the reasons for these transitions and their implications are as many and complex as they are difficult to affix reliable dates to.

III

A few points about the structure and method of this volume are also required here. Over three sections, *Key Concepts* provides a series of small essays on a range of problems and issues associated with Victorian literature and its criticism. The first part, 'Contexts', deals with the numerous historical, political and cultural concepts which shaped the literature, and its scope is as broad as these categories suggest. Following the entry 'Age of Victoria', readers will find in the section alphabetical entries on a number of quite specific issues ranging from 'Architecture' to 'War'. Each of these will equip the reader with a three-step approach to the concept in question: the important historical and cultural facts required in order to contextualize a concept such as war in the nineteenth-century; the significant ideas surrounding the impact of war on Victorian consciousness; and lastly, by means of a series of close, theoretically informed readings, the ways with which to apply these facts and ideas to Victorian literature.

The same approach applies to the second and third parts of the book. Part 2, 'Texts', comprises discussions of the various literary genres and forms which make up Victorian texts. In this section, however, the emphasis is very much on genres, sub-genres and forms, rather than individual texts or authors. Hence there are a number of entries on subdivisions of the novel form but only one entry each on Poetry and Drama. The huge and diverse forms which make up Victorian poetry and drama cannot possibly be contained within a few paragraphs, and I have not tried to take on such a task in this section. It was, nonetheless, with some reluctance that due to restrictions on space and a need to prioritize what students are most likely to be interested in reading about, I allocated these concepts only two separate entries. Readers will, on the other hand, find discussions of Victorian poetry and drama integrated into various entries elsewhere in the book. The 'Contexts' section, for example, contains a separate entry on the poetry of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, one of the major poetic and artistic movements of the day, and the entry on 'Decadence and Aestheticism' incorporates a discussion of Oscar Wilde's dramatic works. Otherwise, as the entry on Poetry

in 'Texts' attempts to show, many Victorian poets were great innovators in poetic form, and the 'dramatic monologues' form experimented with by major figures such as Alfred Lord Tennyson and Robert Browning were especially significant. Similarly, as I demonstrate in the entry on Drama, the theatre was immensely popular with the Victorian public. Although nineteenth-century plays were very much dominated by the genre of melodrama, social problem theatre also proved to be popular, and more controversial, towards the end of Victoria's reign.

Unavoidably, however, the preponderance of fiction in this section of the book also reflects the rise of the novel as the major form in Victorian literature. By mid-nineteenth century, after its emergence in the early eighteenth century, the novel had become truly pre-eminent, and for the first time its popularity eclipsed the previously dominant form in English literature, poetry. For the Victorians, fiction seems to have become the most suitable medium with which to reflect the 'age of transition' to the modern industrial world that they were building, and it is part of the task of Part 2 of this book to examine the historical and cultural reasons behind this development. The 'Victorian novel', at least as we have come to know it, has some of its roots in the early works of one of its great innovators, Charles Dickens. Intriguingly enough, *The Pickwick Papers* (1836–7) and *Oliver Twist* (1837) were even published during the first year of Victoria's reign. The novel's rise was then consolidated in what critics often describe as the peak years between 1847 and 1852, a period which the entry in this section on the Mid-Victorian Novel attempts to cover. At a glance, these years were certainly prolific for Victorian novelists. Publications included Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847) and *Shirley* (1849), Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* (1847), Elizabeth Gaskell's *Mary Barton* (1848) and William Thackeray's *Vanity Fair* (1847), as well as Dickens's *Dombey and Son* (1848) and *David Copperfield* (1850). *Key Concepts* sets out to explore the historical and cultural upheaval in which such a proliferation of novels were produced, and the many sociopolitical tensions and problems that resonate within them.

These days, Victorian studies are inseparable from modern developments in literary and critical theory, and this is why Part 3 of this book turns to 'Criticism'. Approaches to the period now come armed with an array of critical practices and 'isms', some of which can be bewildering for readers encountering them for the first time, and any list of them sounds exhausting: cultural materialism, new historicism, feminism, Marxism, postcolonialism, postmodernism, poststructuralism, structuralism, not to mention deconstruction, psychoanalysis, and queer theory. It is my intention in this section to clarify and explain these