



# The Victorian Era

1830-1901



Society, Values, Culture











Technology/Progress





Gender/Sexuality

# The Victorian Era

- The dates of the Victorian Era (1836-1901) coincide with Queen Victoria's **ascension to the throne** and her death.



# The Victorian Era

- Placed high value on honor, duty, moral seriousness, and sexual propriety.
- Still have brutal factory conditions, low wages, and crowded cities, but the 1830s mark the beginning of political and social reform acts.
- Shift from agrarian society to industrial society creates a middle class (neither rich nor poor).
  - 1800=75% rural      versus      1900=75% urban



# Power and Empire

- **Richest nation** (first industrialized nation)
- Most powerful nation
  - unchallenged **military** supremacy
  - empire covers **¼** of earth's surface
    - 18 major territories added including India, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, most of East Africa and the Caribbean

A world map with a light gray background. Countries are outlined in thin gray lines. A set of countries is highlighted in solid red. These include Canada, the United Kingdom, Ireland, Iceland, Norway, Sweden, Finland, Denmark, Germany, Poland, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Austria, Hungary, Switzerland, Italy, France, Spain, Portugal, Greece, Turkey, Cyprus, Israel, Jordan, Iraq, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, Oman, Qatar, Bahrain, Brunei, Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia, Philippines, Thailand, Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia, Myanmar, Bangladesh, India, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, Russia, China, Mongolia, North Korea, South Korea, Japan, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Macau, and Australia.

**AT FIRST I WAS LIKE**

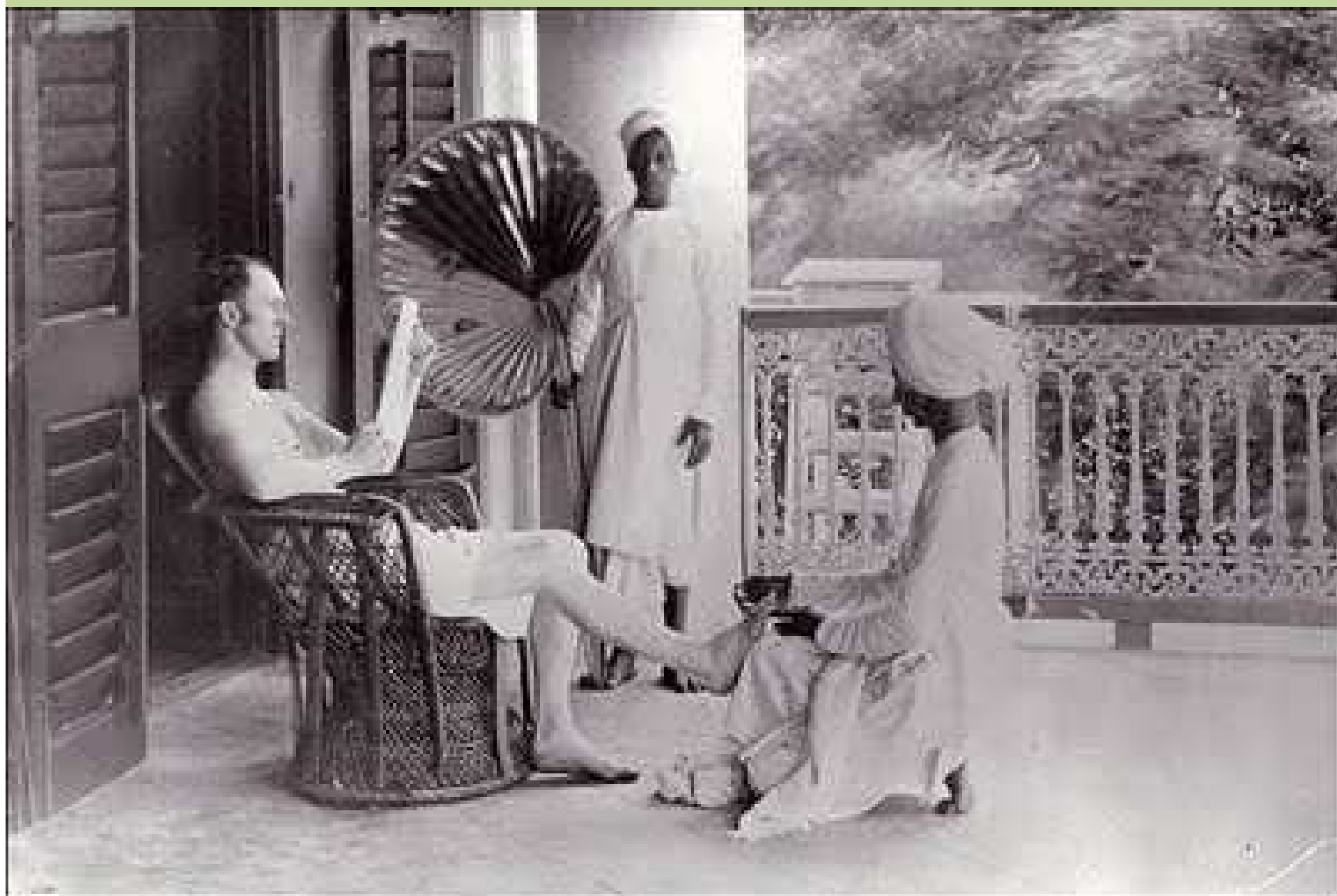
A world map with a light gray background, identical to the one above. However, only the United Kingdom is highlighted in solid red. All other countries are in the same light gray color as the map background.

**BUT THEN I WAS LIKE**

# Power and Empire

- Colonial domination rationalized by pseudo-science purporting to demonstrate **inferiority of dark-skinned people** by a felt sense of **racial and cultural superiority** of the white race.
- *“The relation of a civilized to an uncivilized race, over which it rules, is exactly that of a parent to child, or generally adults to infants.”*  
--Alfred Russel Wallace, evolutionary theorist







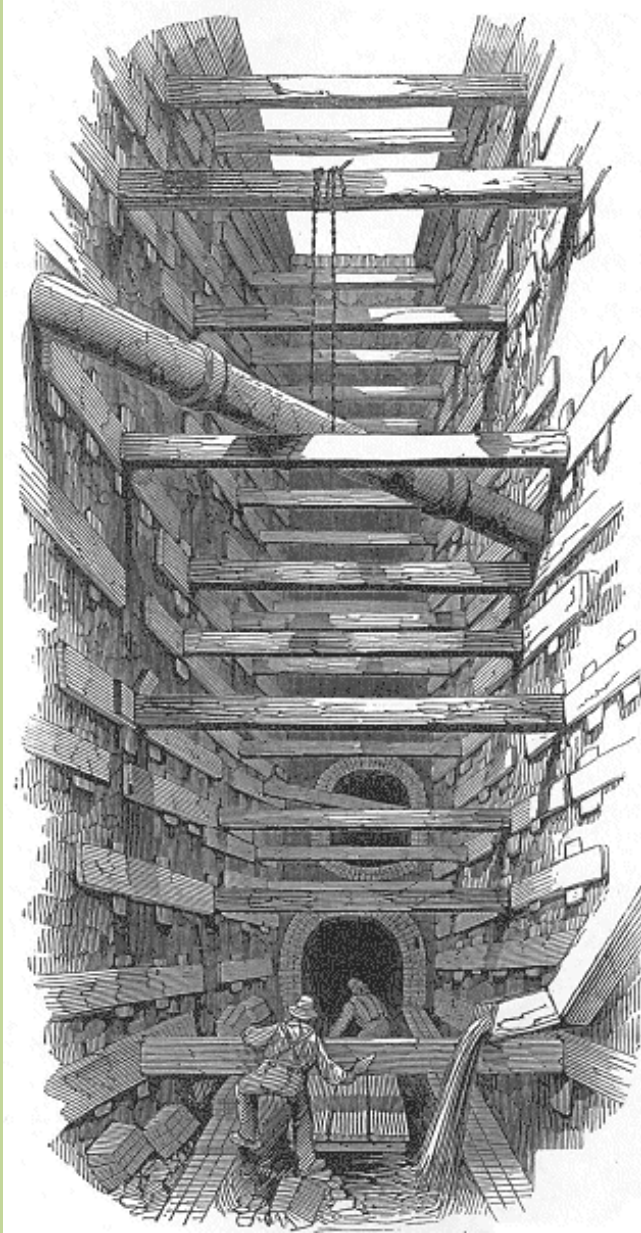
# Power and Empire

- Despite wealth created by industrialization and colonization, millions still suffer from poverty.
  - Inadequate housing/overcrowding leads to illness and disease
  - Unregulated factories subject workers to dangerous conditions





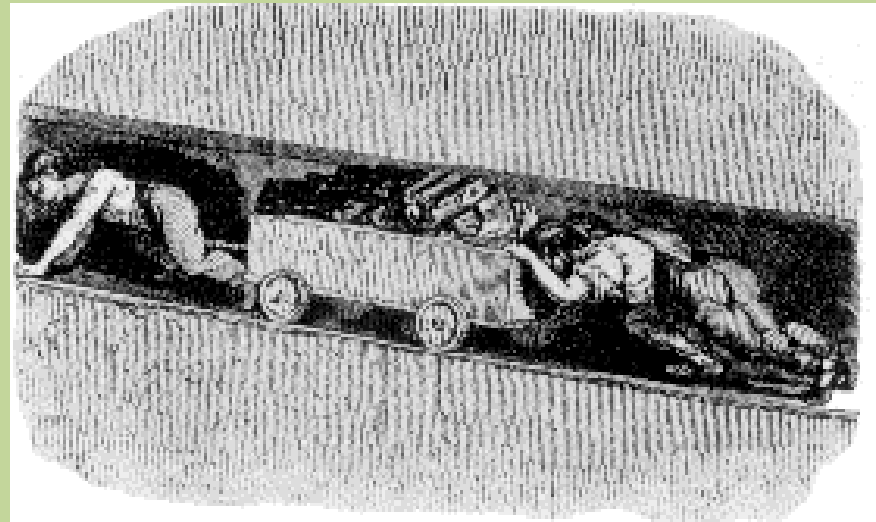
Oct. 4, 1845.]



“Construction of the sewer beneath Fleet Street, London, early 1860s. By 1858 the stench of the sewage from the Thames had become so overwhelming that the House of Parliament at Westminster found it impossible to meet; construction of a city-wide underground system of sewers...began the following year.”

Broadview Anthology of British Literature. “The Victorian Era.” Joseph Black (ed.), et. al. Broadview Press: Toronto, 2007. Print.







# “Two Nations”

- Coined by Prime Minister Benjamin Disraeli to describe the disparity between rich and poor
- Legislators, workers, and writers document the lives of the **poor and working people** to provoke social reform
- **Chartism**: a political campaign movement to press for political reforms including **annual elections**, universal male suffrage, abolition of **property qualifications** for members of Parliament, and the **secret ballot**



# Utilitarianism

- A philosophy developed in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century which stated “it is the greatest happiness of the greatest number that is the measure of right and wrong.”
  - the central guiding principal of social morality should be the pursuit of what is good for all members of society, with no one person or group’s interests given special weight

# Society, Values, and Culture

- Rise of **secularism** and **religious skepticism**;
  - the divinity of Jesus Christ
  - the literal truth of the Bible
  - man's creation
  - the existence of God
- Caused by evidence of the **fossil record** and the theories of **evolution** and **natural selection** in Charles Darwin's *On the Origin of Species* (1859) and *The Descent of Man* (1871)
- Scientist Thomas Henry Huxley coined the term "**agnostic**" in 1869: a person who neither **believes** nor **disbelieves** in the existence of God, holding instead that it is simply impossible for humans to possess the knowledge of such matters



# Society, Values, and Culture

- **Domesticity:** the home and family is the center of British religious, cultural, and emotional life
  - Industrialization transforms the household from a “work space” into its opposite—reinforces prescribed gender roles
  - Man becomes the breadwinner who deals in the public sphere of the workplace
  - Woman becomes the care-taker and spiritual guide for family in the private sphere of the home
  - Middle class lifestyle becomes the ideal to which all aspired (working-class women still worked, however)



Queen Victoria, Prince Albert, and their nine children. Queen Victoria was Britain's most revered icon of domestic femininity and motherhood.

# Gender and Sexuality

- Based on middle class lifestyle, woman's role is to be an icon for femininity, an “Angel in the House”: good manners, restraint, moral uprightness, purity, devotion, selflessness
- Women's Rights:
  - Not eligible for most employment
  - Not eligible for higher education
  - Could not vote
  - Few legal rights

# The Law of Coverture

- Marriage Law—husband and wife considered “one person”: the husband
- Husband’s Rights:
  - Full control of his wife’s personal **property/income**
  - Absolute authority over **home and children**
  - Could use **force** to discipline family
  - If deserted by wife, she could not sue for divorce and had no rights to custody of children



# Gender and Sexuality

- Victorian gentleman: **tender**, merciful, **prudent**, patient, and disciplined
- The Fallen Woman: any form of female sexual experience deemed improper or immoral; prostitutes, **rape victims**, unmarried mothers, **adulteresses**, homeless women, the insane, **rebellious women**.
  - Ostracized from society; suffer poverty and death



# Gender and Sexuality

- The New Woman of the 1880s and 1890s
  - Smoking, swearing, riding a bike, debating in public, wearing men's clothing, refusing marriage
  - A figure of greater sexual, social, and economic independence
- 1890s: women experience greater access to education, employment, political and legal rights, and civic visibility.



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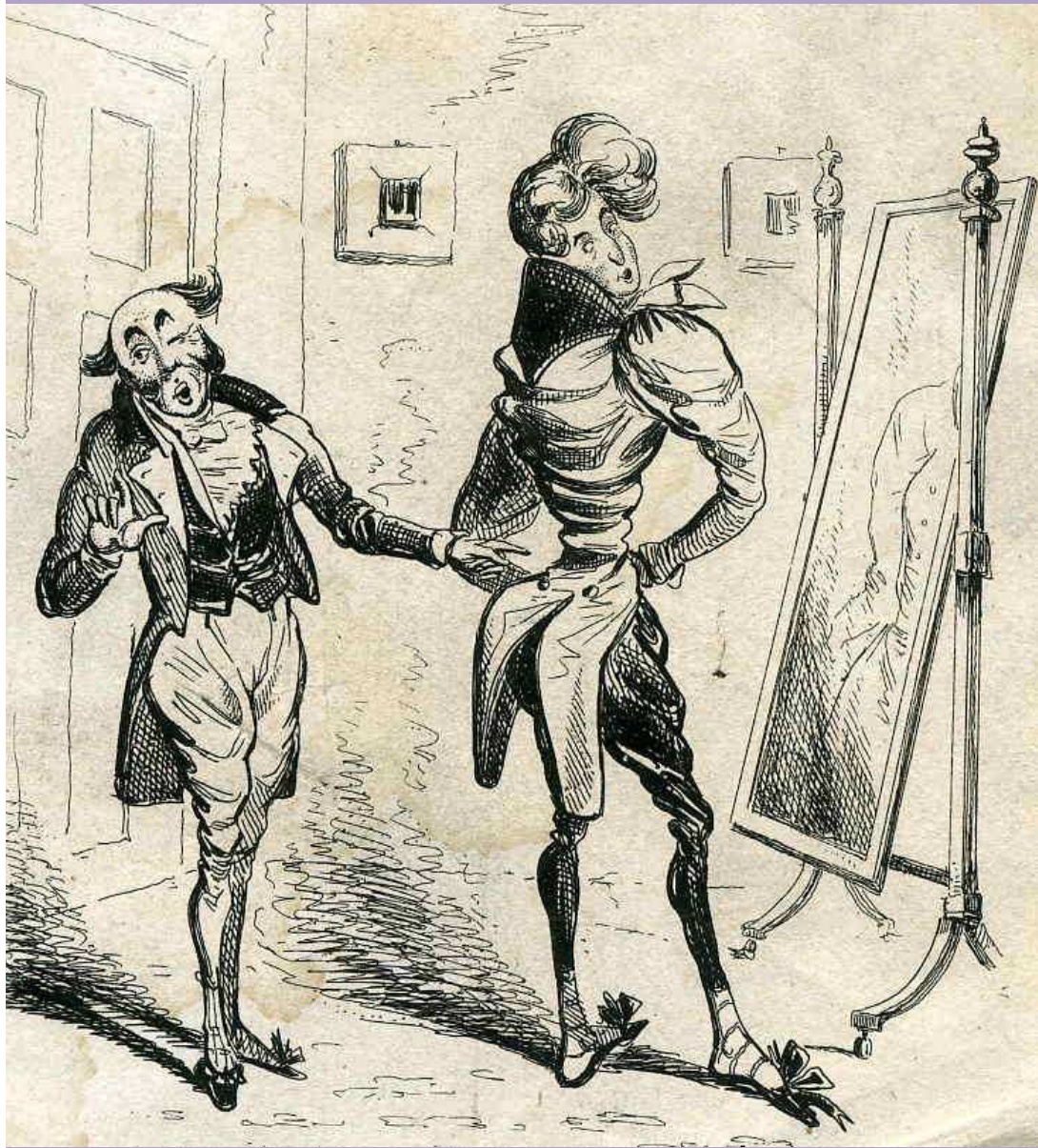


# Gender and Sexuality

- 1880s the term “**homosexual**” enters the English language
  - Until this time, no real conception of homosexuality as an identity
  - Homosexual acts between men were **illegal** and punishable by **death** until 1861; Labouchere Amendment of 1885 mandates imprisonment for any man found guilty of a sexual act with another man

# Gender and Sexuality

- The term “**lesbian**” emerges in the 1890s, but do not suffer the same persecution as gay men
  - Rationale: women **unmotivated by sexual desire**, intense, passionate “friendships” seen as innocent
- End result: feminized male characters (the dandy, the aesthete, the fop) and masculinized female characters (the New Woman) in literature
  - Celebrated by few, denounced by many



# Technology and Progress

- Steam engine: adapted for use in the production of coal, textiles, heavy metals, and printing presses
- Steam locomotives: railway mania creates tourism and railway literacy
- Leisure time: public amusements such as exhibitions, circuses, sports, gardens, theatres, music halls, museums, and shopping
- Visual culture: photography, cinema, innovations in print technology (books and art)



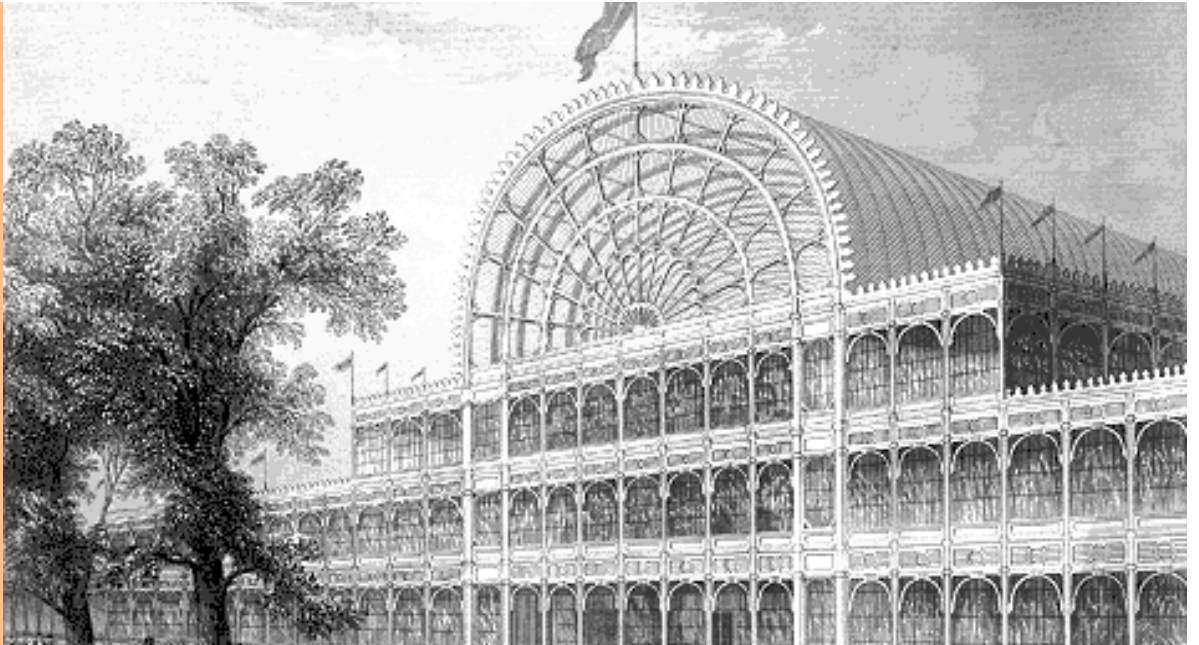
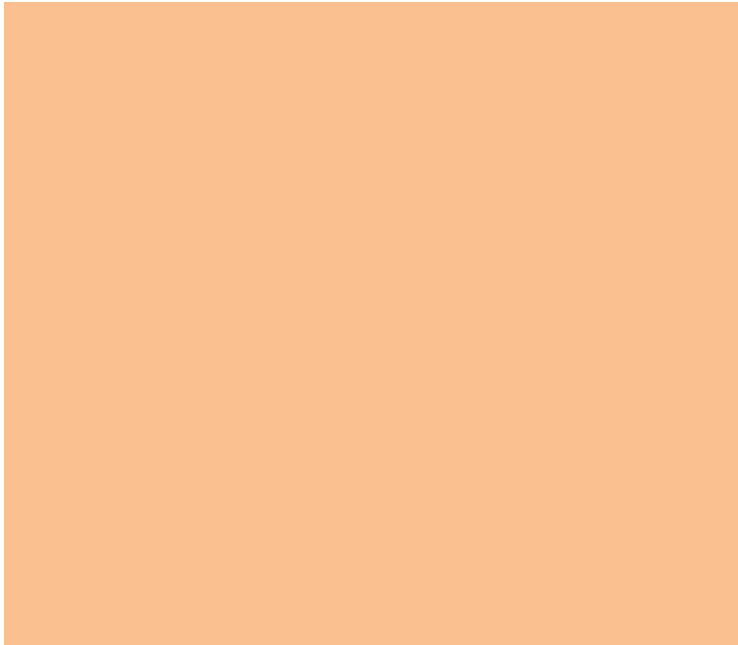






MODERN ADVERTISING: A RAILWAY STATION IN 1874.





# Literature

- **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 19<sup>th</sup> century, readers sought literature that **represented their lives** and offered them **moral and ethical guidance**
- *“We want to be taught to feel, not for the heroic artisan or the sentimental peasant, but for the peasant in all his coarse apathy, and the artisan in his suspicious selfishness.”*  
—George Eliot

# Literature

- **Aestheticism:** a critique of **moral purpose** of realistic fiction; stressed experimentation in form and composition, independence of imagination and expression, and freedom of content (no matter how perverse)
- Purpose: **Art for art's sake.**

# Literature

- **Novels:** dominant literary form; “social problem” novel, “domestic” novel
- **Poetry:** influenced by Romantic period;
  - dramatic monologue: a lyric poem in the voice of a speaker who is not the poet
- **Drama:** frivolous, romantic, witty; mocked contemporary values (satirical)
- **Non-fiction:** essays, criticism, history, biography, newspapers, and magazines
  - “The Age of Periodicals”
  - “The Age of Reading”