

# Important Features of 19<sup>th</sup> Century British Literature: A Study with Special Reference to Victorian Era

Dr. Jayanta Mukherjee

Associate Professor & Head, Department of English, Belda College Belda-721424

West Bengal, India

Mob: 9874206121

[jayantamukherjee1975@gmail.com](mailto:jayantamukherjee1975@gmail.com)

---

**Abstract:** The 19th-century British literature encompasses all the works that were written and published between 1800 and 1900. Most of the works of this period fall within the Victorian era which is between the years 1832 and 1900. The paper addresses the most outstanding features of British literature of this age. Some of the developments that exist were originated in this period and have since existed in the world today. The writing in this period had standard features of the development of familiar themes such as love and relationships. The literature employed similar stylistic devices such as satire and led to other branches such as the children literature, short stories, and gothic literature. 19<sup>th</sup> Century British Literature is one of the most exciting fields for study currently, and this goes alongside British culture. Several scholars are pursuing and attempting to teach the intersections attributed to the British culture and literature that are believed to define the current and contemporary scholarships and civilization. The 19th Century opened with great hope as well as optimism for a human king in the aspect of culture, language, and communication (Flynn, 2017). It is during this period, and the British Literature took a sharp turn that shows it widely embraced by many scholars. British Literature is argued to have captured and qualified the optimism mood and expressions to a common link that would see enhancement of science and technology through linguistic transformation.

**Keywords:** British, Genre, Literature, Novels, Science, Victorian.

---

The major focus of British Literature was indeed science studies. Science studies topic involved literature and history of science, psychology as well as medicine. It is through this topic that evolutionary concepts were disseminated. Some of the ideas included Darwinism, theories of culture, and the body as components of evolutionary theories. Nevertheless, other elements of evolution that were a significant focus of British Literature in the 19th C were romantic and Victorian anthropology, the methods of race, monstrosity, and monsters, which were substantial components of Romantic writing in the culture of British Literature. Most importantly, it is through this topic that utopianism and science fiction dwelled via the British Literature. The second topic that British Literature in 19<sup>th</sup> focused on was visual culture and visual arts. This topic, in a way, encouraged the development of British Literature since British Literature was, in this time, connected to histories and aesthetic value of culture. Some of the artistic, cultural value during this time that was developed through British Literature included Victorian avant-gardes, Gothic revival, Pre-Raphaelite painters, and photography as well as Decadence cultures.

Furthermore, gender and sexuality also were essential topics during the 19<sup>th</sup> Century that helped in the growth and development of British Literature. Through this topic, many British scholars focused on Victorian feminisms which were

composed of the woman question, gender, and religion, muscular Christianity, the rise of queer culture as well as the invention of sexology (Tracy, 2017). Another topic was a significant linguistic development during this period of class, history, and politics. For instance, the British scholars used British Literature to analyze Marxism, the culture of the working class, the labor politics alongside the industrial revolution. Additionally, they discussed crystal palaces, parliamentary reforms, and conditions in England, transatlantic exchanges between the Americans and Britain, Catholic liberation, liberty anarchy, modernism, and free trade.

The style facilitated the growth of British Literature through realism, narrative, and novel theory, the invention of other languages such as English and literary canons. The main components of the genre that formed part of British Literature were Romantic and Victorian poetry, Romantic dreams, poetics of Catholicism as well as atheism, Victorian melodramas, and critical theory. Moreover, during this period, literature and empire formed part of romantic slave narratives. British Literature, in its development through the scholars, was concerned by a significant focus on subjectivities of the empire, British colonial interventions, which were a representation of Ireland, Africa, the Eastern Question, postcolonial theory, and travel writing. Finally, mass culture was another key topic that shaped the transformation of British Literature. British Literature, in its development, focused on medievalism, the illustration of magazines, sensation, conduct guides, gothic, vampires and detective fiction, and savages.

The British Literature of the 19th Century also focused on social life and majorly expounding on the shortcomings and challenges of the people related during that period. Many authors developed and wrote stories that were centered on relationships admiration and how most of the people in relationships ended up disappointed (Flegel, 2016). The literature formed the center of fascinating debates regarding the worthiness of bonds and love. The 19th century British Literature created an image about relationships that many would desire and probably dread at the same time. Social life has always existed, but the literature spiced up the links to appear as one of the fascinating aspects of human life.

Nevertheless, the British Literature of that era focused on the other sides of relationships that were very challenging to people, especially the young. Although love was a beautiful relationship required so much hard work to maintain and sustain. Social life also incorporated much of class differences where people from different classes could rarely coexist with one another.

Relationships and love were affected by the financial status where the rich could freely mingle with the people of their choice. In contrast, the people who are considered to be on the lower side of financial capability had few options (Dau & Preston, 2015). According to most works of literature of the 19th-century genuine love rarely existed but was based on material belongings.

The genre focused on the authoring of mostly fictional stories. Although these stories incorporated aspects of life that could be visualized in real-life situations and be relatable, some elements of the stories in this genre were not realistic. The authors employed some unique creativity in the literature to develop their themes vigorously in their accounts. The fiction in this literature helped to create an image of the character's actual lifestyle and practices that are not existent in the world of the reader (Olsen, 2018). The British Literature, therefore, was an important aspect that would widen the readers' perspective about several life aspects; this is through the presentation of the unique existence and the occurrence in the story. Fiction in this genre shaped the perspective of those who were exposed and, consequently, their view of the world and the events that took place daily. Furthermore, the use and application of fiction in many parts of the stories during the 19<sup>th</sup> Century helped to shape the world innovations and the developments that exist in the world today. The changes may not be as exact as in the stories, but they are inspirations that are birthed from the fiction.

The genre aimed at the preservation of the traditions and perspectives in life. The stories were centered on the daily practices and the norms of the British people. Most of the stories had this common phenomenon where the settings and the methods that many characters in the story had the traditional background of the British people. Although it is hardly expected that the writings be borrowed from other places and cultures, this literature was tailored to be that of preservation. The most profound driving factor for the protection and the maintenance of this old norms, sentiments, and perceptions was the fact that most of the authors did not see hope in the future (Schulting, 2016). Many changes in the society did not seem promising and were considered not in accordance to the culture; this prompted many authors to try and preserve their old perceptions through the use of literature. Most of the norms had been neglected, and the writers used poetry and stories to revive because there was great fear in what civilization would bring to society. The 19th

Century formed the pioneer of the revival of the traditional perceptions and sentiments, and the 20th century British Literature came to specialize in the revival process.

Most of the literature in the Victorian period touched on the aspects of inequality in society. Several dividing lines existed based on social classes and the financial capabilities of the people living during that era (Dau & Preston, 2015). There were discriminations on the commercial lines where the rich people saw the rest as inferior. The divisions even cut across the social lives of people and affected the way people related to romantic relationships. The poor were a vulnerable group who were seen to be subjected to the superior; they were mostly employed as laborers and occupied most of the color jobs (Schulting, 2016). The authors, therefore, were not happy, and most people rose to condemn inequality and discrimination through the writing of stories and poetry. The situations were not openly criticized but were done stylistically through the creations of conditions that reflected the societal occurrences. The stories and the poets took turns that displayed inequality and discrimination as very evil practices in society.

The Victorians, through their literature, had a very profound urge to encourage and built the society to be better citizens (Olsen, 2018). There was an aspect that rose in many authors that aimed at the tailoring of the citizens to fulfill higher and even noble roles in the world. Some powerful inspiration rose through the authors through the poetry and the stories in the Victorian era. Sharp criticism arose regarding the settlement of the people for mere standards when they could hold more powerful positions and empower others in the society. The stories also focused and encouraged the citizens through the exploration of the characters who did not settle and gain comfort in their position and life situations but concentrate on improvement and empowerment until they arrived at the desired place in life. The literature pushed people to explore and surpass their capabilities through constant development, learning, and belief in oneself. The research worked to serve the purpose of inspiring and creating a generation of self-belief. The results are evident in the next era that was marked by plenty of change in society. So much was introduced that ranged from innovations in science, technology, and new ways of doing things, including how people viewed and handled romantic relationships. Although the Victorian era was so much opposed the change, some of its literature built the foundation for change.

It is during the Victorian era that the British literature saw the rise of short stories combinations rise to fame. Some authors focused on short stories that employed so much of the gothic aspects. The genre was primarily developed by authors such as Richard Cumberland; these stories had new sides of love and romance by the characters in the story. Most of these stories had terrible endings that were mostly death or just scary occurrences (Dau & Preston, 2015). The genre brought to attention the dangers and the consequences of some love affairs, especially those that were termed as illicit.

Moreover, it is this through this short story compilation that the Victorian era literature got exposure and fame because of its straightforward nature to follow up. The stories did not take up much of the readers' time because an individual would read a story in a period before embarking on another. With time most people had gained interest and even widened their reading culture to begin on other stories, magazines, and Publications that inspired those that came across. British literature reached many individuals, and the content mostly inspired the readers and gave birth to the many changes that became visible towards the end of the era and the beginning of the next. It is during this period that so much upheaval was witnessed, some literature-inspired this and other authors were able to capture the happenings into their writings.

The period was also marked by reality publications that were far from fiction and personal creation of the authors. Some writings and books focused on real-life situations through direct address and references to the main thing under consideration. The political scenes were explored, and the happenings and updates wrote down for the public and the world to read and gain the information (Olsen, 2018). Also, some authors in this era rose to explore subjects in society, bringing more knowledge to the readers. Aside from the political issues and topics, some authors studied science and inventions that were starting to crop up during the period. Sir Henry Rigid Haggard's pioneer contribution to the subject writings through Archaeological writings cannot go unnoticed in the British literature in the 19th Century.

The Victorian era witnessed the rise and the development of the children's stories that were tailored for the entertainment and the education of the young individuals born and raised in that period (Day & Fritz, 2018). The first writings were short stories that featured mostly animals as the characters in the story. With time the advancement rose to the publications of children's stories with pictures as aids to the understanding of the stories that were written down. The images, in some cases, were more in most books than the word count; the picture quality in this era slowly developed to incorporate colors. Children's stories that were written during this era grew to gain global recognition, the books were read, and the authors recognized in many parts of the world.

The 19th Century British Literature is a fascinating area in the world literature that inspired most literary works that exist today. The era was marked by several developments and the rise of so many events that inspired so many changes that shaped the citizens and the world. The literature of this era focused on prevalent issues and the same themes that revolved around the same things in the same period. The most common topics that the story features include factors to do with social life and social class's difference, which mostly breeds inequality in society. A common feature is a focus on love and the challenges that surround relationships. The most outstanding feature of British Literature in the 19th Century is the evidence of resistance to change and the constant effort to revive the old perceptions and the practices that had been lost through civilization. Despite the changes that followed the era, some of the literature styles, themes, and concerns overflowed to the next Century and even beyond as some of the methods are visible in today's current literature.

#### Works Cited

- [1] Dau, D., & Preston, S. (Eds.). (2015). *Queer Victorian Families: Curious Relations in Literature*. Routledge.
- [2] Day, S. K., & Fritz, S. S. (Eds.). (2018). *The Victorian Era in Twenty-First Century Children's and Adolescent Literature and Culture*. Routledge.
- [3] Flegel, M. (2016). *Conceptualizing cruelty to children in nineteenth-century England: literature, representation, and the NSPCC*. Routledge.
- [4] Flynn, C. (2017). *Americans in British Literature, 1770-1832: A Breed Apart*. Routledge.
- [5] History of English Literature, (N.D.). Retrieved from <http://www.historyworld.net/wridhis/PlainTextHistories.asp?ParagraphID~knv>
- [6] Olsen, T. B. (2018). *Wordsworth and Evolution in Victorian Literature: Entangled Influence*. Routledge.
- [7] Schulting, S. (2016). *Dirt in Victorian literature and culture: writing materiality*. Routledge.
- [8] Tracy, T. (2017). *Irishness and womanhood in nineteenth-century British -writing*. Routledge.