

## Victorian Beacons: Bourgeois Visions and Gender Realism in the Works of Dickens and Eliot

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**Abstract.** The image of the nineteenth century as a period of great opportunity for men of energy and skill is one that has been long established. Britain saw significant changes in politics, economy, and society throughout this era. The emergence of the middle class, sometimes known as the bourgeoisie, was one of the most important changes of this time. The goal of the bourgeoisie was to exert power and direct social change through their participation in social movements, charitable organizations, and municipal government. Historians have argued that an industrious middle-class made great fortunes in the early days of the industrial revolution and converted economic success into political power in the form of Reform Act 1832 that used to ensure policy reflected the middle-class interests. The fostered sophisticated tastes in music, literature, and the arts, which aided in the thriving Victorian cultural scene. As a reflection of civic duty and social obligation, philanthropy and charity initiatives were also essential to middle-class identity. Charles Dickens's *David Copperfield* and *Great Expectations*, as well as George Eliot's *Middlemarch* and *Daniel Deronda* offer important perspectives on the intricate social dynamics and transformations. By highlighting their internal struggles and external influences, Eliot provided complex portraits of the middle class. The profundity of the bourgeois experience, both intellectually and emotionally, is reflected in her works. Examining the perspectives in these specific works helps us understand more about the opportunities, challenges, and contradictions associated with the rise of the middle class and the enduring legacy of the Victorian era.

**Keywords :** Bourgeois; Industrial Revolution; working class; middle-class identity; social dynamics.

Literature calls itself the mirror of life or society. This expression describes the concept of using literary materials to portray society. It may also be seen as one definition of literature among many, which has never been easy to define. Strength and flaws in society are imaginatively and creatively reflected in literature. Storytellers craft narratives to mirror

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the experiences and circumstances of humanity. They do that by means of the story's characters or location. They use both words and deeds to convey a certain message to the reader, transforming their actual existence into a fictional one. Any person may wonder what it was like to live in the past. Let's dive into some interesting past and navigate social circumstances of that era.

One of the beacons of the Victorian era is Queen Victoria. The second longest reign in British history after Queen Elizabeth II. She became the longest reigning monarch on 9 September 2015 when she surpassed the reign of her great-great-grandmother Queen Victoria, who reigned from 6 February 1952 until her death on 8 September 2022. Queen Elizabeth II reigned for 70 years whereas Queen Victoria for 64 years, but during Queen Victoria time, notable advances in science, industry, politics, and the economy took place. Before Victoria took the throne, most of Britain was rural and agrarian; by the time of her death, however, the nation had become heavily industrialized and much more urbanized. The Victorian civilization of the Industrial Revolution was characterized by a hierarchical structure that included the top class, middle class, and working class destitute people. The disparities between these many social classes could be identified by factors including wealth, power, politics, education, culture, and living and working situations. Working-class people were seen as unreasonable, immature, superstitious, violent, overly sexual, and dirty. The members of the lower/working classes were subjected to animal-like abuse and exploitation because they lacked power.

But the middle classes reached a position in the eighteenth century where it was easier for them to influence national policy and color the national worldview. They nonetheless had an impact on society's top echelons, who in turn developed middle-class habits and morals. The English middle classes gained the ability to control the nation's taste, morals, and manners thanks to the Industrial Revolution and the progressive extension of Parliamentary Democracy. Once in this position, they never looked back. Actually, the violin class's triumph in many spheres of society began this century and peaked in the middle of the nineteenth century with Victoria's coronation as English queen. The majority of the nineteenth century, particularly the years 1830-1870, can be remembered as a time of Parliamentary and Constitutional reforms, as well as a period of rapid industrialization of society that resulted in the gradual loss of the feudal lords' dominance and political power, the

transformation of English society from one based on agriculture and rural areas to one based on cities and industries, and the greatest success ever experienced by the new commercial Bourgeoisie. The development of steamships and railroads advanced significantly between 1830 and 1850, and as a result, the heavy industries, mining, and textiles all saw growth during this time in English history. It took almost forty years longer to build the remaining fifteen, 620 miles of railway lines after the Duke of Wellington inaugurated the new Manchester and Liverpool railway in 1830, marking the first significant success of the steam railway. Many important changes in the business and civic life of the English nation were brought about by the rapid growth of railways in England almost entirely throughout the nineteenth century. It opened up new vistas as a new method of passenger traffic as well as for the carriage of all classes of goods.

Middle-class individuals started promoting a new work ethic, including professionals, merchants, and owners of factories. Work was the fundamental human good, according to this ethic. The one who put in the work was deserving of success, while the person who did not was the one who suffered. It was formally frowned upon to be idle or frivolous. Children's and adults' middle-class stories were replete with inspirational accounts of underprivileged individuals who improved themselves through diligent labor. Urban popular leisure habits have not entirely been altered by middle-class forces. Workers had little leisure time and money, yet many chose to skip work when they could, sometimes choosing leisure time over more pay, much to the chagrin of their supervisors. Despite this, leisure was nonetheless limited by the intensity of labor. City governments also attempted to restrict other traditional popular entertainment, such as gambling, popular festivals, and animal competitions like cockfighting and bear-baiting. Such leisure was considered wasteful, vulgar, and detrimental to political order inasmuch as it gathered large numbers of people in cities. Established in 1820s in locations such as London to offer more professional control over public behavior and crime, urban police forces devoted most of its midcentury existence to suppressing popular leisure drives. Drinking, though disapproved of by middle-class critics, was an important recreational outlet, bringing men together in a semblance of community structure. Bars sprouted throughout working-class sections of town.

On the whole, however, the early decades of the Industrial Revolution saw a massive decline of popular leisure traditions, even in the countryside, festivals were diluted by importing paid entertainers from the cities. Leisure did not disappear, but it was increasingly reshaped toward respectable family pastimes or spectatorship at inexpensive concerts or circuses, where large numbers of people paid professional entertainers to take their minds away from the everyday routine. Family life was significantly impacted by the expansion of cities and industry. As work shifted away from homes, the family's productivity decreased. This held true for both middle-class and working-class individuals. In the age-old tradition where all family members were expected to chip in, many businessmen in the 1820s who were opening a new store or factory first anticipated that their wives would help them. But after the first generation, this tendency subsided, partly because elegant residences required separate maintenance and were situated somewhat outside from business districts. As a result of the division of work and home, most metropolitan groups generally redefined gender roles, making married men the primary breadwinners in their families.

The socio-economic realities that Dickens and Marx viewed were very much alike. Rather than being a direct descendant of Marx, Dickens embodied the spirit of an intellectual vanguard. At least to certain viewers, his work has an authenticity in its worldview that Marx was unable to capture. In any event, Dickens and Marx's writings enhance one another. They examined many of the same societal issues in meaningful ways while writing in an identical setting and at a similar period. Charles Dickens' novels provide the kind of perspective on people's subjective and inter-subjective realities that social scientists strive to capture but nearly never manage to. Dickens's novels and other works of fiction can be viewed as data from a methodological perspective because they express a viewpoint. In *A Tale of Two Cities* Dickens says that he went to great lengths to ensure that the novel was based on factual events. Nevertheless, Dickens is also searching for more profound truths. Naturally, the potential exists to fabricate a substantial falsehood while providing several, potentially corroborated facts. In contrast, the novel aims to use a sequence of made-up experiences to convey a greater truth. Dickens was a virtuoso at crafting a masterpiece out of detail after detail of people, many of whom belonged to an underclass that was mostly disregarded, against

the brutal backdrop of a society whose feudal framework was gradually collapsing and inexorably giving way to industrial capitalism.

As European capitalism reached unprecedented heights, writers Charles Dickens (1812–1870) and Karl Marx (1818–1883) tackled the challenges faced by a new underclass on several occasions. Dickens depicted the suffering of the proletariat in his novels *Oliver Twist*, *Great Expectations*, and four more, drawing on his personal experience as a child laborer. Marx's early fascination with the development of economic production, together with ideas from Hegel's philosophy, produced *Das Kapital* and *The Communist Manifesto*. Dickens openly addresses social issues in his writings. Marx described Dickens and the other novelists of that time presented splendid brotherhood of fiction-writers in England, who's graphic and eloquent pages have issued to the world more political and social truths than have been uttered by all the professional politicians, publicists and moralists all together :

The bourgeoisie has stripped of its halo every occupation hitherto honored and looked up to with reverent awe. It has converted the physician, the lawyer, the priest, the poet, the man of science, into its paid wage- laborers (Marx, 37).

According to Marx every profession that was previously regarded with respect has been taken away by the bourgeoisie. Medical professionals, attorneys, clergy, poets, and scientists have all been reduced to its wage workers. Historical materialism holds that different modes of economic production characterize every stage of history. In the early stages of communism, stories and songs told of the daily struggle to obtain food, clothing, and shelter. With the development of an increasingly complex society, these stories became divorced from the survival process and the storyteller split from the worker. A writer's world is shown via the window of literature. Though the novel's specialization is the interaction between the person and society, all of its genres deal with human experiences. Because it is regarded as one of the Victorian literary excursions, the book won the 19th-century Leader form of literature designation :

The doctrine that all truth and beauty are to be attained by a humble and faithful study of nature, and not by substituting vague forms, bred by imagination on the

mess of feelings, in place of finite substantial reality, wrote Victorian author George Eliot (Louis, 30).

This notion may stand in for the belief that inspired Victorian novelists who transformed literature from a creative expression of the imagination to a work of fiction grounded in fact. Reading works by the great Victorian novelist, such as George Eliot will assist the audience detect some common traits of the time, as the novels of that era becomes more relatable to everyday life by reflecting societal issues. Moral themes including justice, truth, love, and brotherhood are central to these literary masterpieces. Novels spread widely for people of all ages. The latter traits were the outcome of the Industrial Revolution and scientific advancements made during the reign of Queen Victoria.

#### **Bourgeoisie Vs Working class**

Marx claims that those who own and control the means of production which involves ownership of such things as land, factories, financial institutions and the like is the Capitalist class or Bourgeoisie, and those who own nothing but their ability to sell their labor power that is, their ability to work in return for wages is the working class or Proletariat. In the mid-nineteenth century, Marx defined class as follow:

Persons share important characteristics in the system of economic production. This condition depended on individual status with the economic process, whether owned and controlled the means of production or worked for someone else (Kimball, 1965).

According to above statements, there are two classes in any society: the proletariat, who work, and the capitalists, who possess the means of production. Eventually, there were two more classes. Professionals, managers, administrators, scientists, engineers, and leaders in their respective fields make up the first group, and educators and nurses make up the second. What sets the middle class apart from the working class are their earnings and influence over other workers. These two subclasses make up the middle class.

#### **Industrial Revolution : Social Injustice and Economic Exploitation**

In the annals of human history, the story of industrialization is not yet written; it is a narrative still unfolding, shaped by the choices we make and the actions we take. It is a tale of triumph and tragedy, of progress and peril, of humanity's boundless potential and its inherent fallibility. Once a society realizes it needs to industrialize in order to construct larger, more productive factories replace its relationship with Mother Nature with machines. Industrialization, at its core, is a testament to humanity's ingenuity and ambition. It is the engine that powers economic growth, propelling nations towards modernity and prosperity. From the spinning Jennies of the Industrial Revolution to the automated assembly lines of the present day, machines have become the architects of our material progress. They churn out goods with a precision and efficiency unmatched by human hands, reshaping the fabric of society and the contours of the global economy in the process. Many global developments as well as changes in people's lives and occupations occurred in the early years of the 18th century. The phrase industrial revolution describes these developments as well as the era in which they occurred. These changes are the outcome of industrialization. Although there are many different interpretations of this phrase, one possible description is the fast industrial expansion that started in England in the middle of the eighteenth century and quickly expanded to many other nations, including the United States, during the course of the next 50 years. While historians differ on the true significance of the Industrial Revolution, most of them concur that it was a great turning point in the history of the world. It has a significant impact on the transformation of the Western world's economic and social structure from one that is mostly rural and agrarian to one that is urban and industrial. There was more than one factor that led to the Industrial Revolution. Several disparate elements come together. The industrial revolution was marked by a multitude of breakthroughs.

Only two hundred years ago, the average Englishman did not earn enough to keep himself alive and healthy. In addition, he was fed mainly by grains that were in poor condition, and suffered from a variety of diseases. However, only one hundred years later, the average Englishman ate four times as much good and varied food, worked half as many hours, and fell asleep content and happy. In short, his material well-being had remarkably improved. The miracle that had happened in England was called industrialization. Industrialization is a historical period that corresponds with the mass production of goods and the beginnings

of modern banking and money, and assists in the creation of more wealth. Modern historians often call it the *Industrial Revolution* due to the global changes that it produced.

The effects of industrialization that are latent in *Hard Times* by Charles Dickens. Unlike some critics argues that Dickens did recognize the hard work of the industrialists and in fact supported them. The encouragement of industrialization is seen from a Utilitarian perspective; that is, industry was the best thing that happened to England. Combined with good deeds and good intentions, industrial growth will definitely lead to the greatest total welfare to the maximum number of people. Without industry, England would have remained a relic in the dark ages of history, and would not have been acknowledged as the most modern and powerful nation in the 19th century. Understanding the history of industrialization in England is crucial to finding the latent understanding of Dickens's *Hard Times*.

The Industrial Revolution manifests a significant period in the ongoing process of modern industrial transformation and economic social change; it is one in which both the rhetorical and actual uses of industry come to an economically dominant and/or culturally significant proportion. To say this transformation has endured into the present is to comment on the extraordinary tenacity with which economic history seems to be superseded in this field. The term 'Industrial Revolution' was invented in the 1830s. The key change brought about by the revolution was the broader and rational organization of this new type of production: the advent of industrial specialization, the transition from handwork to machinery, and the concentration of workers in a common place of production, the factory.

On the one hand, the Industrial Revolution brought forth a lot of positive changes. Many people were better fed, clothed, and housed thanks to the new industries, and as skilled laborers are needed to read instructions, take measurements, and interpret drawings and blueprints, this helped the working class become more educated. However, a lot of people fall prey to oppression; women are employed in factories, and children as young as six or eight are forced to labor in mines and mills :

An age that began with a confidence and optimism leading to economic boom and prosperity eventually gave way to

uncertainty and doubt regarding Britain's place in the world. Today we associate the nineteenth century with the Protestant work ethic, family values, religious observation and institutional faith (Taibi, 11).

Despite having created the majority of the riches, the middle and working classes received little personal gain and had no political influence. In contrast, the nation's leaders and holders of political authority were members of the upper class. The Victorian era was marked by swift advancements in a variety of fields, including medical science and technology, population density, and geographic shifts. These modifications had a wide-ranging impact on the nation. *Hard Times* by Charles Dickens vividly portrays the world of commerce and industry, driving a ruthless society forward. Written amidst personal and professional turmoil in early 1854, Dickens critiques England's path under a complacent middle class. The novel explores the clash between darkness and light in 1850s England, echoing Dickens's disdain for Utilitarian philosophy through the plight of neglected children, sparing them a tragic fate in defiance of prevailing social norms.

#### **Juxtaposing Eliot's *Middlemarch* and *Daniel Deronda* with Dickens's *David Copperfield* and *Great Expectations***

The nineteenth century novel expanded considerably the range and seriousness of expression of English literature. It was also, for the main part, a time of social and political change, of material and intellectual quest, and of philosophic uncertainty. The dominant passion of the age was the search for self-culture and self-amelioration. As a vehicle of ideology for moral and social improvements, it was tried the first full year of the chartist movement in 1838, and the condition of the poor became at length fashionable. This was also an age of faith in the evolutionary moral progress of the species, and of hope that Darwin might be wrong.

The writings of these authors provide valuable insights into human nature, encompassing both its positive and negative aspects such as cruelty, greed, and the desire for power. The characters' backgrounds play a significant role in shaping their behavior and decisions, highlighting the complex relationship between socio-cultural influences and intellectual

dilemmas. These structural elements have wide-ranging implications, attracting the attention of scholars from various disciplines. The quality and the values which mark an individual are situated as a universal phenomenon. Dickens and Eliot deal with complex characters and the values and emotions associated with them, and in turn, the readers recognize familiar traits, virtues, and moral values in the characters but are also subject to shock when these features are seemingly reversed if compared with the qualities of the character.

Charles Dickens in *David Copperfield* (1849) depicted his own story and in *Great Expectations* another boy's apprenticeship in life generally, and both novels attack common aims. Mary Anne Evans or George Eliot presenting herself the story of *Middlemarch* (1874) portrayed how life affects and molds her various characters and set up for the education of the sympathizes, with the finest moral discernment that had been put into practice. In *Daniel Deronda* (1876) Eliot worked on moral Jewry like *David Copperfield* on the moral machinery, but in placing, time and novel and whether *Daniel Deronda* came out of the experience assured things cannot have been quite the same.

### **The Rise of the Middle Class**

The term 'Victorian middle-class' refers to the group of individuals who were above the working class but under the nobility in the middle of the eighteenth century. The Victorian era's middle classes were successful because they were able to universalize a set of values centered on development and individualism. The promotion of political economics and the middle class are equally responsible for this acknowledgment. A major component of middle-class culture was improvement. Numerous reform initiatives were spurred by the persistence of poverty and the working class's reluctance to adopt middle-class behaviors. In their endeavors to help the impoverished see their own interests, the Victorian middle-class articulated their own ideals. Reform plans and policy recommendations upheld middle-class principles and contributed to the consolidation of the carving out of middle-class values that attempts to define a society based on merit rather than aristocratic privilege represents a transformative chapter in human history. It underscores the enduring power of ideals such as hard work, education, and social responsibility in shaping the fabric of our communities and the aspirations of generations to come. As we navigate the complexities of the modern world, the legacy

of middle-class values serves as a guiding light, reminding us of the enduring quest for a more just and inclusive society.

There had existed in Britain a tiny class of traders, small farmers, and merchants during the second part of the eighteenth century. With the growth of industrialists and factory owners, this tiny class-known as the middle class-had expanded. Afterwards, it expanded swiftly in the nineteenth century. These guys were successful industrialists who rose from humble backgrounds through hard work and determination. Factory owners, bankers, merchants, attorneys, businesspeople, traders, engineers, and other professions comprise the middle class. Stated differently, this group encompassed all those who fall between the lower and higher classes. Middle class men were expected to work in business, while their wives were expected to stay at home and take care of the family. These social roles were established for both genders. The need of having a secure financial situation prevented middle class males from getting married until they were 27 or 30 years old. Approximately 15% of the population belonged to this class. Status is determined by a man's education, social standing, and values.

Victorian literature is literature that originated during Queen Victoria's reign and that reflected the Victorian era. It serves as a bridge in the annals of literary history between the extremely different writing of the twentieth century and the literature of the romantic age. It produced some of the greatest poets and had exceptional writing. There are commonalities among all the major writers of the era's works. The primary attribute of Victorian literature is its tendency to resemble everyday life, reflecting the issues and passions that exist in the actual world. It develops into a potent tool for social and economic advancement of humanity. Victorian literature seems to establish its moral purpose and stray from the conventional role of literature, that of art for art's sake. Victorian literature is known for its idealism; this period is seen as one of uncertainty and gloom. Despite the realistic and materialistic nature of the times, the majority of writers glorify an idealized existence. In in another context, it is an idealistic era that addresses noble concepts like justice, truth, love, and brotherhood; these concepts served as the primary inspiration for the era's poets, essayists, and novelists.

The Victorian novelists had given emotional coloring to everything they

wrote about their complicated plots had often included melodramatic suspense or farcical absurdity; many of them were committed to overt social purpose (Bloom, 48).

According to Bloom, all Victorian authors were experts at crafting a compelling narrative. They elevated the novel beyond all other literary genres with their masterful storytelling and writing techniques. The novel accounted for the majority of the changes. The novel has been called the most influential form of writing in the 19th century. The practicality books Authors of the Victorian era drew inspiration for their works from actual, everyday locations. They insisted on describing the environment and way of life of middle-class and lower-class residents.

The opulent lifestyle of the aristocracy and the vast wealth amassed by the middle class gave the impression that Victorian society was stable; however, as a result of rural-urban migration, the rise of the Bourgeoisie also brought about a sharp rise in poverty and urban overcrowding. In addition, women faced oppression as they were excluded from the public arena of politics and business and restricted to the home. Children were also exploited since they were forced to labor in hazardous situations and as slaves. Despite having strong moral convictions, the middle class in Victorian society did nothing to improve the lives of the underprivileged or ease their suffering.

### **Conclusion**

Terms like Industrial Revolution, reform, and change spring to mind when defining Great Britain during the Victorian era. The Industrial Revolution caused several developments to emerge in a wide range of sectors. One notable aspect of Victorian life was the class divide and the distance between social strata. It causes the majority of authors of the time, especially novelists, to view it as one of their central subjects. Thus, a primary feature of the Victorian fiction like Charles Dickens' *Hard Times* was the actual setting and real-life incidents. As we stand at the crossroads of history, let us remember that the power to shape our destiny lies not in the hands of machines, but in the hearts and minds of humanity. Let us choose wisely, for the fate of our planet hangs in the balance.

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