Victorian Britain II. - Literature

A Presentation by Claudia Schmidt and Judith Seibert
What we are talking about:

- The *moral code* in Victorian Britain
  - Its values and codex
  - Female characters ("To the Lighthouse")
- Authors and themes in the Victorian period
  - Oliver Twist and Great Expectations
How long lasted Victorianism?

- It started about 1832 although Queen Victoria inherited the throne in 1837
- Victorianism did not end abrupt when the Queen died (1901)
- It ended around 1910 when new scientific publications were published
  - Pierre and Marie Curie (1903-1911) and Albert Einstein (1921) won the Nobel prize
General characteristics of Victorianism

- Fast cultural change → transitional period
- National pride → Imperialism
- Strong belief in classes, religion and moral values
- Scientific Publications, e.g. Charles Darwin
Victorian society

People within society

Religion

Moral code

Values
Darwin and The Origin Of Species

- It was published in 1859
- Some species are superior to others
- Survival of the fittest, constant struggle for existence
The Victorian middle class

- Darwinistic class consciousness
- Possibilities for solid education
- Still inequality of genders
- Tried to build their own world, with own rules and values
- No individual development
“[…]conceive the state as a complicated machine; some fulfil more important duties; others serve only to obscure parts of the mechanism, concealed from the public eye. Yet if the meanest screw fails in its task, the proper working of the whole is imperilled.”
What meant the moral code?

- **For men**
  2. Being the centre of family life
  3. Having an honourable position
  4. No showing of emotional weakness
What meant the moral code?

- **For women**
  2. Getting married
  3. Emotional backup for the husband
  4. Ensure harmony and being sensitive
  5. Responsible for the children and the housework
The position of women

- They were mainly marginalized by men.
- Also their mothers education told them how to behave.
- They depended on authorities.
- Strong sexual repression.
- Were not expected to have interest in politics, literature and art.
Virginia Woolf's education was influenced by Victorianism.

"To the Lighthouse" was published in 1927.

One main character is portrayed as an ideal Victorian woman.
Mrs. Ramsay in „To the Lighthouse“

- A caring and sensitive woman
- Totally devoted to her husband
- A loving mother
- Is wrapped up in her role as mother, wife and housewife
- Perfect hostess at parties
Lily Briscoe in „To the Lighthouse“

- Has a total different life than Mrs. Ramsay
- Sees herself as an individual; is a painter
- Lily does not fulfil expectations; is unmarried
Victorian Literature

Romanticism and Realism
Victorian Literature

- 1832: First Reform Bill (often said to be the beginning of the Victorian age)
- Mainly Realism, but also influences of Romanticism
Victorian Literature

- Romanticism: ends ~1830
  - Idealistic
  - Individual
  - Nature
- Realism: 19th century
  - Realistic
  - Novel becomes more important
- adopts romantic ideas and enhances them
- “Romanticism of the 3rd and 4th generation”
Famous authors and their works

- Anne Brontë (Agnes Grey), Charlotte Brontë (Jane Eyre), Emily Brontë (Wuthering Heights)
- Arthur Conan Doyle (Sherlock Holmes)
- Rudyard Kipling (The Jungle Book)
Famous authors and their works

- Oscar Wilde (The Picture of Dorian Grey)
- Robert Louis Stevenson
- Charles Dickens

Oscar Wilde
Charles Dickens

* 7.2.1812 † 9.6.1870

Childhood:
- education
- later: father imprisoned for debt
- Had to work 10hrs/day at the age of 12

Law clerk

Journalist
- Editor of *Daily News*
Oliver Twist

- One of Dickens' best known works
- First section published in 1837 in the magazine *Bentley's Miscellany*
- Social novel
- Subject of numerous film and TV productions
- Musical "Oliver!"
Oliver Twist

Realistic features

- Failure of charity
  - Poor Law/workhouses
  - The poor choose between “being starved by a gradual process in the house, or by a quick one out of it.”

- Child labour

- Recruitment of children by criminals
Oliver Twist

Typical romantic features:

- Purity in a corrupt city
  - Does a terrible environment have the power to “blacken [the soul] and change its hue for ever”?
  - Sikes is haunted by Nancy’s eyes after having murdered her
  - Nancy makes the ultimate sacrifice for a child she hardly knows

- Countryside idealized
Great Expectations

- first serialized in *All the Year Round* from December 1860 to August 1861
- Various films:
  - 1997: starring Ethan Hawke and Gwyneth Paltrow
Great Expectations

Realistic features:

- Demonstration of social classes: ranging from the most wretched criminals (Magwitch) to the poor peasants of the marsh country (Joe and Biddy) to the middle class (Pumblechook) to the very rich (Mrs. Havisham)
Robert Louis Stevenson

- * 13.11.1850 in Edinburgh
  - Robert Lewis Balfour Stevenson
- † 3.12.1894
- Studied at Edinburgh University
- At the age of 18: Robert Louis Stevenson
- Lighthouse-engineer
- Switched to law, but never worked as a lawyer
Dr. Jekyll & Mr. Hyde

Features of social criticism:

- Duality of human nature
  - People were doubting the ideals of progress and civilisation
  - Link between savage and civilisation/good and evil