up progressive social views and encouraged sympathetic relations between people of different sexes, religions, and lifestyles. "How Lisa Loved the King," for example, adapted from Giovanni Boccaccio's The Decameron, takes the form of a medieval tale of feminine piety while criticizing eighteenth-century marriage practices and the commodification of women. In condemning the practice of using women as vehicles for social and financial advancement, Eliot implied an equation between the patriarchal orientations of Victorian and medieval marriage (Williams 2013, 8–9). In "Brother and Sister," Eliot addressed gender inequality in an autobiographical, coming-of-age sonnet sequence. The speaker-describes how gendered codes of conduct limit sympathetic love between siblings. The speaker translates female obedience learned in childhood to poetic obedience as an adult. As an adult poet, she separates from her brother, escapes rigid societal boundaries, and writes the past with poetic authority within the confines of the sonnet form.

The speaker in "Erinna" identifies with the poetess tradition while also assuming the masculine privilege and agency of the epic tradition. By depicting the ancient poetess Erinna spinning silk "in insect labour," imagining great deeds of epic heroes, the narrator-poet weaves her own poetic tapestry that explores the themes of women's artistic ambition, domestic imprisonment, the silencing of female voices, and wasted female potential (Eliot 2005, 114). The dramatic poem Armangart takes up these same themes in its portrayal of a famous opera singer who loses her voice and career but finds redemption in female community and symbolic motherhood. Armangart, The Spanish Gypsy, and "Agatha" all consider the poetess themes of renunciation, duty, and motherhood. Much of Eliot's poetry recapitulates her own feelings about her profession as a female artist, her anxiety about death and the sustainability of her work, and her own role as spiritual mother to the nation.

As a poetess, Eliot relied on Christian morality to advance society, recycling religious terminology as feminine piety and preaching an unorthodox religion of sympathy. Biblical themes figure prominently in her poetry, and at times she elaborated on Judaic myths to convey humanist messages. For example, Eliot mythologized the death of a prophet in "The Death of Moses" to engender sympathy for Jewish people. In "The Legend of Jubal" she wrote the story of Jubal, father of the lyre, to relate the potential of art to enlarge the sympathies of humanity. In "O May I Join the Choir Invisible," a poetic hymn to sympathy, she employed biblical and sentimental language to express a longing for an earthly heaven in which people live in perfect sympathy with one another.

O may I join the choir invisible Of those immortal dead who live again In minds made better by their presence: live In pulses stirred to generosity. In deeds of daring rectitude

The speaker hopes to reach a "purer heaven," "enkindle generous ardor," "feed pure love," "beget the smiles that have no cruelty," and "be the sweet presence of a good diffused" (2005, 85, 86). Through poetry, Eliot used her influence to write with a moral imperative to improve society. Her poetic corpus offers critics and readers a fuller picture of the artist and contributes to a more complete understanding of her work and its relation to Victorian literature.

SEE ALSO: Eliot, George; fiction; Gender; Poetess; Religion; Sympathy

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Empire

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From the Latin imperium, the word "empire" denotes both power in general and, in the political domain, the authority of one state or constituency over a wider group of peoples, nations, or territories. It was in this latter usage especially that empire became a live topic in the Victorian era. During what is often called its "imperial century," England felt with increasing urgency the benefits and challenges of world rule, as this relatively small island nation seized political control of massive swathes of the earth's surface; transformed countless local cultures in its own image; and came effectively to dominate the world's rapidly globalizing economy in the decades leading up to World War I. The physical extent of these holdings was breathtaking. At the moment of the Empire's greatest span, a quarter of the earth's surface was ruled at least nominally from London, and a full 20 percent of the earth's...
population - some 450 million people - called Victoria their queen, whether they wanted to or not. Economically England's reach was yet more impressive, since the capital markets knitting the nineteenth-century world into ever tighter financial interdependence were effectively controlled from boardrooms in the City of London, epicenter of an "invisible empire of commerce" that recognized no boundaries at all (Cain and Hopkins 2001, 166). Every zone gathered into this global embrace found itself marked, to one degree or another, by the impress of British culture.

Yet for all this power the Empire was also precarious, contested, always under construction. Despite the pronouncements of its most confident supporters, the Empire was the expression of neither a unified design nor an overarching imperial will; still less was it the outcome of inevitable historical laws. Its particular shape and strategies on the ground derived rather from an ensemble of ad hoc responses to local conditions. Key decisions were made not just by grand strategists, but by politicians responding to domestic necessities, bureaucrats buried in paperwork, and governors in the field seeking to advance their own careers. The Empire was not, as Sir John Seeley put it in 1883, acquired in a "fit of absence of mind," but it was nevertheless generated from an array of competing motivations, and at no point was its achievement guaranteed.

Still, conceived properly as a globalized system of political, military, cultural, and economic power, the British imperial network of the nineteenth century was both massive and massively consequential, so pervasive that few nations escaped its effects and hardly a human being on earth remained beyond its influence. The cliché that "the sun never sets on the British Empire" was true, then, insofar as the socioeconomic and cultural effects of empire were for hundreds of millions of people decisive, even when those at home remained barely conscious of the global network sustaining them. In this sense, empire was arguably the most important social fact of the Victorian era, with "social fact" referring to an aspect of daily life whose origins are collective and institutional, but that exerts shaping power over the experiences of individual people.

PROBLEMS OF DEFINITION

Victorians themselves most often understood the term "empire" in its narrowly political sense, as the territories annexed to the Crown by treaty or conquest. These formal holdings fell into three main categories: the white settler colonies of Australia, Canada, New Zealand, and Southern Africa; the shifting roster of usually nonwhite Crown Colonies that included Jamaica, Malta, Natal, and dozens of others, all administered by English governors or councils appointed by imperial authority; and the crucially important special case of India, which generated vast wealth and garrisoned much of Britain's globally deployed army, but remained politically problematic for British rulers until its 1947 partition into modern-day India and Pakistan - a division at the heart of modern-day antagonisms between those nations. Finally, this formal empire included, and still includes, the United Kingdom itself, which was yoked together in the Acts of Union (1707, 1800) and whose members have arrayed themselves only uneasily under English suzerainty since that time. Ireland remained in need of "pacification" throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, while Scotland introduced a referendum for independence as late as 2014. The term "Britain" itself names an act of imperial consolidation.

Vast as it was, this de jure empire was, de facto, far larger than even the checkerboard of settlement colonies, protectorates, and Crown Colonies colored pink on the famous colonial maps of the period. In addition to formally annexed territories, the British imperial system also included an immense and shifting network of economic dependencies and trade outposts over which England held "informal" sway. As John Gallagher and Ronald Robinson argued in an influential article, "The Imperialism of Free Trade" (1953), studying the British Empire by attending to its formal holdings is like sizing an iceberg by its tip. In the nineteenth century, the part below the imperial waterline - England's informal empire - included treaty ports and "concessions" like Shanghai and Canton; so-called spheres of interference such as Iran, Afghanistan, and various territories in the Persian Gulf; and a host of other zones of British preeminence linked to the metropolitan economy in relationships that were often (but not always) violent but that in all cases positioned British interests first.

The sheer diversity of the social and political relationships convened under England's auspices has caused difficulty for later analysis, since just what constitutes "empire" is far from obvious. One might construe the term in its oldest, Latinate sense to mean supreme command; its nineteenth-century sense as formally organized colonial rule; or its twentieth-century sense as an integrative, acquisitive stage of capitalist development. Yet more generally it might, as in some twenty-first century academic discourse, be construed to refer to almost any system of oppression based on racial hierarchies. Each choice yields different analytical consequences and marks out different but related objects of study. (The story is the same for the related but not synonymous terms "imperialism" and "colonialism"). Recent work has settled on "imperial system" to name the dynamic ensemble of formal and informal relations that changed shape, shifted character, and (mostly) expanded across the period of Britain's world leadership.

However it is named, the process of coerced integration by which England came to dominate the planet began as early as the sixteenth century and its effects remain palpable today. Yet it was in the Victorian era that British economic, military, and political power catalyzed a global order whose scale has gone unraveled until the present moment. "We are [now] living at a period of wonderful transition," said Prince Albert in 1851, "which tends rapidly to accomplish that great end to which, indeed, all history points - the realization of the unity of mankind" (1866, 96, emphasis original). The Empire was to be the system under which this unity might be achieved.

Albert's dream of a harmonious British universalism was never to be realized, but there can be no doubt that his adopted nation altered the shape of world history forever. British class relations, institutions, political schemes, and gender relations all arrived along with imperial rule, but stayed long past nominal independence. One of the Empire's most effective techniques, "indirect rule," was particularly well-suited to this cultural reorganization, since it effectively turned the native population against itself, installing local elites who managed local affairs on London's behalf. One result of such social engineering is that what now appear as timeless social categories in areas of Africa, the Middle East, the Indian subcontinent, and the Caribbean archipelago - the Indian caste system is just one example - often emerged from interactions between indigenous social forms and an imperial power seeking to shape them to its advantage. The shocks of decolonization in the twentieth century, then, like the spiraling civil wars and ethnic conflicts following in its wake, are only one sign of how the legacy of British imperialism remains alive in our own period. So too is today's interlinked global economy merely the after-image of the nineteenth century's dense
Educated observers may score this "balance sheet" differently; yet any accounting of the white man's burden must inevitably confront the burden of nonwhites. Over the course of Victoria's reign, many thousands of mostly nonwhite individuals died either by immediate imperial action - war, counterinsurgency, execution, and so on - or by less direct forms of killing following on the heels of British intervention. At the extreme end of these tabulations, the radical historian Mike Davis (2002) argues that 30-60 million people perished by famine, civil conflict, and poverty resulting from the Empire's laissez-faire economic policies and antireligious relocation programs. Such attributions are controversial even among critics of empire. It is true, however, that despite its claims for world unification and improvement (claims that continue to inspire later defenders of its legacy), England prosecuted more than two hundred separate wars during the Victorian era. These ranged from large-scale international conflicts like the Crimean (1853-56) and Boer Wars (1880-81, 1899-1902) to the almost innumerable counterinsurgencies, suppressions, and now-forgotten campaigns waged in Britain's effort to modernize the world. The sheer number of these military actions - more than one per year in every year of Victoria's reign - measures subject peoples' reluctance to take on willingly the yoke of British leadership. Yet opposing this superpower was not easy. As one naturalized British subject put it late in the century, referring to the technological innovation the British tested on indigenous peoples the world over: "Whatever happens, we have got / the Maxim Gun, and they have not" (quoted in Hobsbawm 1987, 20). While other historical empires have employed more ruthless means - in fact, the British imagined theirs as an empire of tolerance, and the nineteenth century a Pax Britannica - none has so fully inhabited the contradiction whereby improvement and death were aimed at the same goal; one way or another, as Anthony Trollope put it, "the Australian black man ... has to go" (2013, 76).

Citing such evidence, critics of imperialism from the Victorian era forward have punched holes in the rhetoric of self-congratulation still clinging to the imperial project. In their trenchant critique of modern social form, for example, The Communist Manifesto (1848), Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels explain that any self-consciously modern society like England's "compels all nations, on pain of extinction... to introduce what it calls civilization into their midst, i.e., to become bourgeois themselves. In one word, it creates a world after its own image" (1977, 225, emphasis added). Marx and Engels see the spread of English values like duty, autonomy, and hard work as capitalism's leading edge, cutting through divergent forms of life in a drive toward a total and violent homogenization. Arguing the opposite side of this question, radicals like John Bright and Richard Cobden critiqued formal imperialism as economically wasteful, arguing instead for free trade and open markets - even if they viewed those mechanisms as leading toward just the global homogeneity Marx and Engels critiqued. Still other Victorian-era writers, such as the journalist William Howard Russell, pointed out the hypocrisy of pro-imperial rhetoric with examples of brutality they had observed first-hand. Russell's dispatches from the counterinsurgency campaign in India, 1857-59, make for disturbing reading; and Marx himself contributed scathing reports on that conflict as a correspondent for the New York Tribune. By 1899, Joseph Conrad could have his character Marlow explain, in the brilliantly equivocal assessment of British imperialism, Heart of Darkness, that "The conquest of the earth, which mostly means the taking it away from those who have a different complexion or slightly flatter noses than ourselves,
is not a pretty thing when you look into it too much" (1988, 10). Scholars may now disagree on the ethics of England's globally scaled project of expropriation and cultural repudiation; what is clear is that, fueled equally by the evangelical fervor to convert souls and the capitalist drive to open markets and exploit resources, the Empire's ambiguous process of conversion looked, from the point of view of Victorian society, like progress.

Given how hollow the Empire's most jingoistic rhetoric can now sound, it bears repeating that despite the voices of individual critics like Marx, Engels, Russell, and a handful of others, the belief in England's special capacity to better the world was shared widely across social classes and ideological groups for most of the Victorian era. What came up for disagreement was how best the desired improvement could be effected. Hawkish liberals like Lord Palmerston viewed the military as the favored instrument of modernization, while Protestant missionaries put faith in spiritual education to bend indigenous societies toward the light. Meanwhile, free-traders like Cobden and Bright believed England could perform its sacred mission with trade. "Not a bale of merchandise leaves our shores," Cobden explained in the 1840s, "but it bears the seeds of intelligence and fruitful thought to some less enlightened community" (1868, 45–46). Still others, including the scientist and founder of social Darwinism Herbert Spencer, advocated patience, since the pull of history's upward progressive motion would, he thought, inevitably bring even the most backward nations forward—or they would perish in the trying.

All of these ideas, we should note, rely on elaborate metaphors—of improvement, civilization, and development—to imagine history as a single-track process that is always moving "forward" (another metaphor) toward a single goal. This goal was unsurprisingly isomorphic with British social values. As modern-day critics of such progressive ideologies have noted, Victorian anthropology, political theory, and even novelistic discourse imagined nonwhite races as somehow out of time, locked in what Dipesh Chakrabarty has called the "waiting room of history." This tendency of Victorian rhetoric to translate social form into temporal terms finds what may be its grandest expression in John Stuart Mill's argument for human autonomy, On Liberty (1959). There Mill explains that certain non-European cultures are not modern enough to participate in their own governance trapped in their "nonage," such "backward states of society" (1989, 13) cannot yet think or act independently, as full political selves. Furthermore, explains Mill in a still-surprising formulation, "Despotism is a legitimate mode of government in dealing with [such] barbarians, provided the end be their improvement, and the means justified by actually effecting that end" (13–14).

Mill's account is secure, in the sense that it imagines human reason as both the engine and goal of history's upward sequence. Yet its flow is evangelical, insofar as it imagines "improvement" as a process of conversion in which the English have not just the power but the responsibility to bring lagging societies forward. (A signal irony of imperial history is that this rhetoric of modernization inspired some of the very nationalistic movements that would emerge to challenge British rule.) The logic of conversion at the core of a largely secular Victorian liberalism also structured expansionist strategies that were directly religious. Christian charities for "native improvement" and societies for the education of heathen tribes proliferated in the era. They became commonplace enough that in Bleak House (1853), Charles Dickens could have Mrs. Jellyby describe her African charity as aimed at the "cultivation" of both coffee berries and human beings. Dickens plays his scene for laughs, but such ostensibly charitable efforts were unlikely to seem funny to those convinced of their necessity—or yet to those uncultivated souls on their receiving end. The story of anticolonial struggle in the nineteenth century and afterwards is the story of resistance to such forcible salvation.

Wilkie Collins includes a similarly blinkered evangelical character, Miss Clack, in his great critique of British imperialism in India, The Moonstone (1868), which charts with steady irony Clack's efforts to salvage other souls by force. Literary allusions like these help raise the important question of how cultural expressions like fiction and poetry helped shape—and were themselves shaped by—the material practices of imperial rule in the Victorian period. How did literature and empire interrelate? The answer is complicated, since the dynamic between cultural forms and sociopolitical ones is never stable. And the breadth and complexity of "empire" as a topic means that cultural engagements with it proliferate. In broadest terms, however, there can be no doubt that literature played a central role in expressing, popularizing, and shaping attitudes about the Empire throughout the nineteenth century. The imperial experience, in turn, helped give new form to literary output, providing British literature with exotic settings, novel themes, and even entirely new genres across the so-called Pax Britannica. Whole segments of Victorian literary production would have been impossible without the Empire: we could name war ballads, travel narratives, historical novels, nationalistic poetry, and the wildly popular adventures for boys written in the 1880s and 1890s. Still other forms dealt with imperial themes less directly: from neomedieval romances like Tennyson's idylls of the King (1859–85) to dramatic monologues like Robert Browning's "Caliban upon Setebos" (1864), stage melodramas, and what is arguably the most important form of the era, the novel.

As the Victorian era's most popular and arguably important format, the novel has a particularly complicated relation to empire. In broad strokes, it can be characterized as transpiring in two phases. As critics like Edward Said (1994) have argued, British fiction of the mid-century tended to engage empire only elliptically, with the colonies appearing most often as a kind of offstage "elsewhere" that nevertheless affects decisively the domestic plot. Thus does Australian wealth transform Pip's life in Dickens's Great Expectations (1861); Indian cash make Jos Sedley a target for manipulation in Thackeray's Vanity Fair (1848); and Caribbean slave money generate the backstory for Wilkie Collins's Armadale (1866). In such cases the Empire features as the origin of money, source for exotic detail, and enabler of plot; but critics have also argued for the mid-Victorian novels' more direct role in furthering the work of empire. In a famous reading of Jane Eyre (1847), for example, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (1999) explains that Victorian novels direct readers to identify with the values of imperial society. In Bronte's novel, Spivak argues, Jane's chastening of her own desires over the course of the novel finds her progressively internalizing the categories and values of bourgeois society. The course of her bildung, or education, then, is the process of replacing an old set of desires with a newer and allegedly better one. The "epistemic violence" of this cognitive reinscription also operates on the reader herself, Spivak explains, as he or she identifies with Jane and thus becomes "educated" as the novel unfolds. Transferred to a colonial context, such education or, in Spivak's phrase, "soul making," could never be innocent, and scholars have since shown in detail how elaborate systems of colonial education—including, not incidentally, the first curricula dedicated to "English Literature"—ensured native subjects' reeducation in British values now deemed universally good.

If novels of the early and mid-century tended to treat the imperial periphery as just
that (recall that Jane's dangerously erotic rival, Bertha Mason, has a mysterious Jamaican backstory), the Empire assumed a more prominent role in the fiction of the latter decades of the century. In the years after 1870, literature disseminated, crystallized, and also challenged the values of that era's more self-consciously imperialist culture. Thus do novels by Conrad and Olive Schreiner expose the perverse disorientations of imperial adventure, while short novels like Robert Louis Stevenson's "The Ebb-Tide" (1894) describe in pitiless detail the failure, disease, and barbarism lurking within the rhetoric of civilization. Such examples suggest how the leafy elsewherees of the mid-century novel emerged in the last decades of the century as central players, while critical voices arose to compete with the din of cheers now promoting the imperial enterprise more loudly than ever. Kipling's poetry for Victoria's Diamond Jubilee (1897) breathes a jingoistic melancholy, while Rider Haggard's King Solomon's Mines (1885) and She (1887) follow brave white men into extravagantly sexualized African zones. Meanwhile some of Sherlock Holmes's most famous cases—the *Sign of the Four* (1889), for example—would hardly be mysteries without the allegedly magic irrationality of 'the Orient.'

Yet the case of literature is just one index of how decisively the Empire shaped Victorian domestic experience. In political, economic, cultural, and, importantly, social ways, English life would have been literally unlivable without global networks of exploitation and trade there to sustain it. Characteristically English rituals like afternoon tea were impossible without commodities obtained abroad; the day-to-day maintenance of life in the city relied on global supply chains and trade relationships that linked England to the world; and the entire edifice of modern economic life, from the agricultural countryside to the industrial metropolises of London, Manchester, and Liverpool, depended on the financial network of banks, credit, and investment that was based in England but reached across the world. It has been argued that many Victorians were simply ignorant of their nation's overseas commitments. But even when the fundamentals of their daily life remained opaque, and even when the exotic locales to which their own daily lives were in fact linked seemed fuzzy or remained entirely unknown—and the period's robust print culture made such ignorance difficult to come by—British life depended on empire. As historians F. J. Cain and A. G. Hopkins explain, imperialism was not "an adjunct to British history . . . but an integral part of the configuration of British society, which it both reinforced and expressed" (2001, 56).

ANALYTICAL CHALLENGES

The vastness of imperialism as a topic in the Victorian era means that approaches to studying it vary, and methodologies abound. In broadest terms, postcolonial, Marxist, and anticolonial approaches tend to see the British Empire as a project of expropriation and domination, while more reparative studies seek to document how British rule in fact improved what is now called the Global South. In less partisan ways, recent studies have traced the dynamic interconnections between "core" and "periphery," home and abroad, emphasizing the complexity, versatility, and (what is more surprising) precarity of the Victorian imperial system.

Underlying any approach to empire is an implicit position on whether this phenomenon is best understood in cultural or political-economic terms. Where cultural theories of empire focus on imperialism as an ensemble of social forms, racial ideologies, and cultural attitudes, political-economic analyses presume instead the priority of economic factors in driving imperial expansion. (This is Vladimir Lenin's thesis, for example, in his influential essay, "Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism.") Where a culturalist approach might focus on how racial stereotypes inform Haggard's romances, say, or depictions of Irishmen in the British Press, an economic perspective would see such racism and cultural jingoism—however virulent—as secondary effects of the material interests driving England's expansion abroad. Overlaid onto this dispute between cultural and political-economic models are disagreements as to what other causal factors spurred England's overseas adventures: possibilities include cultural and racial bias, religious zeal, humanitarian impulses, economic urgency, and sheer happenstance. All were factors, and none are mutually exclusive. This problem of overdetermination, or the complex interlacing of causal factors, makes isolating any single "driver" of imperialism problematic from both conceptual and historical points of view.

Another analytical difficulty in assessing empire concerns agency. Did England "rule" its "subjects" in unquestioned exertions of power, or did these allegedly passive recipients of British dominance in fact respond actively to their situation? It is a limitation of both political models, which focus on the formal annexation of territory, and world-systems approaches, which attend primarily to economic divisions of labor at a global scale, that they understand power to work unidirectionally, radiating outward from an imperial "core" to its "periphery," from England to its subjects. No doubt total control was the ambition of many imperialists, who imagined, with mining magnate and politician Cecil Rhodes, that they would annex the entire solar system if they had the chance. And the capitalist classes in London did indeed exert no small measure of control over the nineteenth century's newly globalizing financial network. By definition, any imperial relation presumes a power differential between a dominant state or population and the subaltern one.

Yet England's ability to manufacture consent and enforce its will was uneven across the Empire, and its success varied significantly from case to case. Where a white dominion like Canada might remain loyal to the Crown even beyond its nominal independence (in 1931), observing a "Commonwealth Day" to celebrate this relationship even today, a territory like India would prove difficult to manage and expensive to maintain throughout its tenure as a colony. In southern Africa, meanwhile, the British would be handed spectacular defeats in the Zulu War (1879) and the Boer Wars, episodes that knocked down any assumption that technological "modernity" guaranteed geopolitical preeminence. In fact the anticolonial cause generated an array of nascent nationalist movements, counterimperial organizations, and insurrections both armed and peaceful throughout England's imperial century: Fenians sought revolutionary change in Ireland, the ex-soldier Ahmad 'Urabi led revolt in Egypt, and Gandhi sought swaraj, or self-rule, in his campaign of nonviolent resistance in India. In those zones as elsewhere in the British system, the power arrangement that could from one perspective seem like "British Rule" was, in practice, marked by any number of insubordinations and lapses in control. These ranged from everyday acts of non-cooperation to the anticolonial wars and mutinies cited above. In the Jamaica Rebellion (1865), for example, a band of ex-slaves armed themselves, torched the island, and triggered a massive response from the colonial government during which hundreds of black peasants were killed. But this was just one among hundreds of uprisings during the period, rebellions that were themselves only the most radical outbursts of anticolonial activity undertaken by the tens of millions of
the Empire's nonvoting British subjects. Despite the comforting simplicity of those pink-colored maps, then, Britain's imperial project was marked at every turn by resistance, negotiation, and what seemed, from the point of view of imperialists, like failure. The British Empire, from this point of view, was never so much an empire as the dream of one (see Darwin 2011).

For many years studies of empire treated the topic as a matter of grand drama, where territories were conquered, treaties effected, and allegedly great figures – Palmerstons, Churchills, and Stanleys – "shaped Empire" in heroic acts of individual will. Recent research has instead emphasized the multilateral interactions among colonizer and colonized, and has sought to highlight how, as the title of a famous anthology has it (1989), "The Empire Writes Back." This emphasis on the agency, creativity, and adaptive power of supposedly subject peoples corrects for a long history of treatments that imagined the imperial encounter as a strictly one-sided affair. Whether the focus is London or Nairobi, Whitechapel, or Borneo, however, it is at the least heroic scale of daily life and everyday experience – in the micro-battles of adaptation, endurance, and cultural remixing that living in a global society demands – that the work of Victorian Empire is arguably best appreciated. So while studies of "Empire," and even encyclopedia entries on it, lend it the character of a separate domain of analysis, closed off from other facets of Victorian life, England's globalized network of economic, political, military, and cultural links was crucial to the development of culture the world over, and lay at the very heart of British society in the nineteenth century. Every artifact of Victorian culture is, in this sense, an artifact of empire.

SEE ALSO: Afghanistan; Africa; Australia; Canada; Caribbean in literature; China; Colonial and postcolonial literature; Cosmopolitanism; Ethics; Global studies; India; Ireland; Latin America; Liberalism; Money and business; New Zealand; Novel, adventure; Novel, Indian; Orientalism; Pacific islands; Political economy; Scotland; Slavery; Travel literature; War

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FURTHER READING

Epic
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Although between 1830 and 1900 British poets published epics by the score, by the literary-historical lights of the twentieth century the genre remained nearly invisible. Whether it had gone out with Milton or just lay dormant till modernism, expansionists and revivalists agreed that the same conditions within democratizing, secularizing, industrializing society that had nurtured the rise of the novel had put paid to the epic. The slackening of traditional authority in church and state, the manifest dominance of bourgeois habits and values within a newly negotiable class structure, the global commerce in goods and ideas, the very pace of change that hastened each of these developments along – all were hostile to the generic determinants of epic, understood as the narrative of a heroically led, collectively resonant action whose consequences underwrote the culture that its audience inhabited and whose ethos retained normative force. Epic was written off as an early casualty of that "strange disease of modern life" lamented in "The Scholar-Gipsy" (line 203) by Matthew Arnold, who nevertheless remained among its theorists (Preface to Poems, 1833; On Translating Homer, 1861) and dabbler ("Sohrab and Rustum," 1853; Balder Dead, 1855).

The story of Victorian epic becomes narratable once we recognize that the age's epoists were not incapacitated by the malady of the modern but inspired by it. The generic conventions canvassed below differ from the tradition Milton crowns, in ways that mark the poems employing them as artifacts of their time and place. But that is the tradition to which they belong, albeit with an ambivalence symptomatic of the modern poets' pervasive doubt whether they deserved to join so venerable a company – and, at the same time, whether the uncertain prestige of membership was worth the heavy dues.

HERO
The Princess Victoria was a babe in arms when Byron launched Don Juan (1819) with the boastful confession "I want a hero" (1.1). She had scarcely ascended to the throne when the nation's foremost man of letters delivered the lectures that became On Heroes, Hero-Worship, and the Heroic in History. Carlyle's 1841 title does not mention "Heroism," but in retrospect that is what his catch-all title was nervously gesturing at: an –ism, an ideology, the idea of the hero being the very thing Britain wanted when heroic realities were in question. Within the decade Thackeray's Vanity Fair (1847) would be subtitled A Novel Without a Hero, demarcating a generic division of labor whereby novels would accord ordinary mortals and downsize human grandeur to everyday gauge, relinquishing heroism to the epic if either of the two could any longer be found.