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Chapter 1 : Professor Deborah Wynne | English | University Of Chester

How key changes to the married women's property laws contributed to new ways of viewing women in society are revealed in Deborah Wynne's study of literary representations of women and portable property during the period to

Her reign lasted for 63 years and seven months, a longer period than any of her predecessors. Definitions that purport a distinct sensibility or politics to the era have also created scepticism about the worth of the label "Victorian", though there have also been defences of it. He saw the latter period as characterised by a distinctive mixture of prosperity, domestic prudery, and complacency [11] – what G. Trevelyan similarly called the "mid-Victorian decades of quiet politics and roaring prosperity". The Act abolished many borough seats and created others in their place, as well as expanding the franchise in England and Wales a Scottish Reform Act and Irish Reform Act were passed separately. Minor reforms followed in and Her government was led by the Whig prime minister Lord Melbourne, but within two years he had resigned, and the Tory politician Sir Robert Peel attempted to form a new ministry. It proved a very happy marriage, whose children were much sought after by royal families across Europe. However, a disastrous retreat from Kabul in the same year led to the annihilation of a British army column in Afghanistan. In 1847, the Great Famine began to cause mass starvation, disease and death in Ireland, sparking large-scale emigration; [14] To allow more cheap food into Ireland, the Peel government repealed the Corn Laws. Peel was replaced by the Whig ministry of Lord John Russell. The goal was to ensure that Russia could not benefit from the declining status of the Ottoman Empire, [16] a strategic consideration known as the Eastern Question. On its conclusion in with the Treaty of Paris, Russia was prohibited from hosting a military presence in the Crimea. During 1857–58, an uprising by sepoys against the East India Company was suppressed, an event that led to the end of Company rule in India and the transferral of administration to direct rule by the British government. The princely states were not affected and remained under British guidance. Society and culture Evangelicals, Utilitarians and reform The central feature of Victorian era politics is the search for reform and improvement, including both the individual personality and the society. First was the rapid rise of the middle class, in large part displacing the complete control long exercised by the aristocracy. Respectability was their code – a businessman had to be trusted, and must avoid reckless gambling and heavy drinking. Second the spiritual reform closely linked to evangelical Christianity, including both the Nonconformist sects, such as the Methodists, and especially the evangelical or Low Church element in the established Church of England, typified by Lord Shaftesbury – Starting with the anti-slavery movement of the 1830s, the evangelical moralizers developed highly effective techniques of enhancing the moral sensibilities of all family members, and reaching the public at large through intense, very well organized agitation and propaganda. They focused on exciting a personal revulsion against social evils and personal misbehavior. They were not moralistic but scientific. Their movement, often called "Philosophic Radicalism," fashioned a formula for promoting the goal of "progress" using scientific rationality, and businesslike efficiency, to identify, measure, and discover solutions to social problems. The formula was inquiry, legislation, execution, inspection, and report. Evangelicals and utilitarians shared a basic middle-class ethic of responsibility, and formed a political alliance. The result was an irresistible force for reform. Even more important were political reforms, especially the lifting of disabilities on nonconformists and Roman Catholics, and above all, the reform of Parliament and elections to introduce democracy and replace the old system whereby senior aristocrats controlled dozens of seats in parliament. This sketch is from an issue of Punch, printed in November that year. Religion was a battleground during this era, with the Nonconformists fighting bitterly against the established status of the Church of England, especially regarding education and access to universities and public office. Penalties on Roman Catholics were mostly removed. The Vatican restored the English Catholic bishoprics in 1850 and numbers grew through conversions and immigration from Ireland. Houghton argues, "Perhaps the most important development in 19th-century intellectual history was the extension of scientific assumptions and methods from the physical world to the

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whole life of man. The "Nonconformist conscience" of the Old group emphasised religious freedom and equality, the pursuit of justice, and opposition to discrimination, compulsion, and coercion. The New Dissenters and also the Anglican evangelicals stressed personal morality issues, including sexuality, temperance, family values, and Sabbath -keeping. Both factions were politically active, but until the mid 19th century, the Old group supported mostly Whigs and Liberals in politics, while the New "like most Anglicans" generally supported Conservatives. In the late 19th century, the New Dissenters mostly switched to the Liberal Party. The result was a merging of the two groups, strengthening their great weight as a political pressure group. They joined together on new issues especially regarding schools and temperance, with the latter of special interest to Methodists. They could not hold most public offices, they had to pay local taxes to the Anglican church, be married by Anglican ministers, and be denied attendance at Oxford or degrees at Cambridge. Dissenters demanded the removal of political and civil disabilities that applied to them especially those in the Test and Corporation Acts. The Anglican establishment strongly resisted until It was a major achievement for an outside group, but the Dissenters were not finished and the early Victorian period saw them even more active and successful in eliminating their grievances. Only buildings of the established church received the tax money. Civil disobedience was attempted but was met with the seizure of personal property and even imprisonment. The compulsory factor was finally abolished in by William Ewart Gladstone , and payment was made voluntary. Nonconformist ministers in their own chapels were allowed to marry couples if a registrar was present. Also in , civil registration of births, deaths, and marriages was taken from the hands of local parish officials and given to local government registrars. Burial of the dead was a more troubling problem, for urban chapels had no graveyards, and Nonconformists sought to use the traditional graveyards controlled by the established church. The Burial Laws Amendment Act finally allowed that. Cambridge required that for a diploma. The two ancient universities opposed giving a charter to the new University of London in the s because it had no such restriction. The university, nevertheless, was established in , and by the s Oxford dropped its restrictions. In Gladstone sponsored the Universities Tests Act that provided full access to degrees and fellowships. Nonconformists especially Unitarians and Presbyterians played major roles in founding new universities in the late 19th century at Manchester , as well as Birmingham , Liverpool and Leeds. Huxley coined the term. It was much discussed for several decades, and had its own journal edited by William Stewart Ross " the Agnostic Journal and Eclectic Review. Interest petered out by the s, and when Ross died the Journal soon closed. Ross championed agnosticism in opposition not so much to Christianity, but to atheism, as expounded by Charles Bradlaugh [42] The term "atheism" never became popular. Blasphemy laws meant that promoting atheism could be a crime and was vigorously prosecuted. The literary figures were caught in something of a trap " their business was writing and their theology said there was nothing for certain to write. They instead concentrated on the argument that it was not necessary to believe in God in order to behave in moral fashion. Separate spheres and Women in the Victorian era The centrality of the family was a dominant feature for all classes. Worriers repeatedly detected threats that had to be dealt with: The licentiousness so characteristic of the upper class of the late 18th and early 19th century dissipated. The home became a refuge from the harsh world,; middle-class wives sheltered their husbands from the tedium of domestic affairs. The number of children shrank, allowing much more attention to be paid to each child. Extended families were less common, as the nuclear family became both the ideal and the reality. Instead they should dominate in the realm of domestic life, focused on care of the family, the husband, the children, the household, religion, and moral behaviour. They taught in Sunday schools, visited the poor and sick, distributed tracts, engaged in fundraising, supported missionaries, led Methodist class meetings, prayed with other women, and a few were allowed to preach to mixed audiences. The poem was not pure invention, but reflected the emerging legal economic social, cultural, religious and moral values of the Victorian middle-class. Legally women had limited rights to their own bodies, the family property, or their children. The recognized identities were those of daughter, wife, mother, and widow. Meanwhile, the home sphere grew dramatically in size; women spent the money and decided on the furniture, clothing, food, schooling, and

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outward appearance the family would make. This made their work highly attractive to the middle-class women who bought the novels and the serialized versions that appeared in many magazines. However, a few early feminists called for aspirations beyond the home. By the end of the century, the "New Woman" was riding a bicycle, wearing bloomers, signing petitions, supporting worldwide mission activities, and talking about the vote. The public school became a model for gentlemen and for public service. Victorian literature In prose , the novel rose from a position of relative neglect during the s to become the leading literary genre by the end of the era. With the arrival of the railway network, seaside towns became popular destinations for Victorian holiday makers Popular forms of entertainment varied by social class. Michael Balfe was the most popular British grand opera composer of the period, while the most popular musical theatre was a series of fourteen comic operas by Gilbert and Sullivan , although there was also musical burlesque and the beginning of Edwardian musical comedy in the s. Drama ranged from low comedy to Shakespeare see Henry Irving. There were, however, other forms of entertainment. Gentlemen went to dining clubs, like the Beefsteak club or the Savage club. Gambling at cards in establishments popularly called casinos was wildly popular during the period: The band stand was a simple construction that not only created an ornamental focal point, but also served acoustic requirements whilst providing shelter from the changeable British weather. It was common to hear the sound of a brass band whilst strolling through parklands. At this time musical recording was still very much a novelty. The permanent structure sustained three fires but as an institution lasted a full century, with Andrew Ducrow and William Batty managing the theatre in the middle part of the century. Fanque also stands out as a black man who achieved great success and enjoyed great admiration among the British public only a few decades after Britain had abolished slavery. Such activities were more popular at this time than in other periods of recent Western history. Amateur collectors and natural history entrepreneurs played an important role in building the large natural history collections of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Large numbers travelling to quiet fishing villages such as Worthing , Morecambe and Scarborough began turning them into major tourist centres, and people like Thomas Cook saw tourism and even overseas travel as viable businesses. Britain was an active competitor in all the Olympic Games starting in Economy, industry and trade Further information: Much of the prosperity was due to the increasing industrialisation, especially in textiles and machinery, as well as to the worldwide network of trade and engineering that produced profits for British merchants, and exports from[clarification needed] across the globe. There was peace abroad apart from the short Crimean war, 1853-56 , and social peace at home. Opposition to the new order melted away, says Porter. The Chartist movement peaked as a democratic movement among the working class in 1848; its leaders moved to other pursuits, such as trade unions and cooperative societies. The working class ignored foreign agitators like Karl Marx in their midst, and joined in celebrating the new prosperity.

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At the beginning of the century, women enjoyed few of the legal, social, or political rights that are now taken for granted in western countries: Women were expected to remain subservient to their fathers and husbands. Their occupational choices were also extremely limited. Middle- and upper-class women generally remained home, caring for their children and running the household. Lower-class women often did work outside the home, but usually as poorly-paid domestic servants or laborers in factories and mills. The onset of industrialization, urbanization, as well as the growth of the market economy, the middle class, and life expectancies transformed European and American societies and family life. For most of the eighteenth century through the first few decades of the nineteenth century, families worked together, dividing farming duties or work in small-scale family-owned businesses to support themselves. With the rapid mercantile growth, big business, and migration to larger cities after , however, the family home as the center of economic production was gradually replaced with workers who earned their living outside the home. In most instances, men were the primary "breadwinners" and women were expected to stay at home to raise children, to clean, to cook, and to provide a haven for returning husbands. Most scholars agree that the Victorian Age was a time of escalating gender polarization as women were expected to adhere to a rigidly defined sphere of domestic and moral duties, restrictions that women increasingly resisted in the last two-thirds of the century. Scholarly analysis of nineteenth-century women has included examination of gender roles and resistance on either side of the Atlantic, most often focusing on differences and similarities between the lives of women in the United States, England, and France. While the majority of these studies have concentrated on how white, middle-class women reacted to their assigned domestic or private sphere in the nineteenth century, there has also been interest in the dynamics of gender roles and societal expectations in minority and lower-class communities. Although these studies can be complementary, they also highlight the difficulty of making generalizations about the lives of women from different cultural, racial, economic, and religious backgrounds in a century of steady change. Where generalizations can be made, however, "the woman question," as it was called in debates of the time, has been seen as a tendency to define the role of women in terms of private domesticity. Most often, depictions of the lives of nineteenth-century women, whether European or American, rich or poor, are portrayed in negative terms, concentrating on their limited sphere of influence compared to that of men from similar backgrounds. In some cases, however, the private sphere of nineteenth-century women had arguably more positive images, defining woman as the more morally refined of the two sexes and therefore the guardian of morality and social cohesion. Women were able to use this more positive image as a means for demanding access to public arenas long denied them, by publicly emphasizing and asserting the need for and benefits of a more "civilized" and "genteel" influence in politics, art, and education. Through their novels, letters, essays, articles, pamphlets, and speeches these and other nineteenth-century women portrayed the often conflicting expectations imposed on them by society. These women, along with others, expressed sentiments of countless women who were unable to speak, and brought attention and support to their concerns. Modern critical analyses often focus on the methods used by women to advance their cause while still maintaining their delicate balance of propriety and feminine appeal by not "threatening" men, or the family unit.

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Focusing particularly on representations of women and material culture in Charles Dickens, George Eliot, and Henry

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Victorian novels, too, she points out, portray women as imbuing their property with intimate meanings rather than capitulating to the meanings assigned to objects by market value or mass production.

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Abstract. The book was originally published by Ashgate. It is now republished by calendrierdelascience.com key changes to the married women's property laws contributed to new ways of viewing women in society are revealed in Deborah Wynne's study of literary representations of women and portable property during the period to

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