Chapter 26  English Literature

Queen Victoria’s Secret

“Trust yourself, then you will know how to live.”

Goethe

Queen Victoria --self-confident, deeply attached to her family, and relentlessly stubborn--reigned for a record-breaking sixty-four years, longer than that of any other British monarch. She ascended to the throne at the age of eighteen. A modern-day corporate king, Michael Eisner* (Chairman of the Board of the Walt Disney Company) observed in his book, Work in Progress, that many of his most successful decisions resulted from gut reaction or intuition. In conversation or reading, when Eisner heard a statement that was true, it set off so many bells and whistles in his mind that he experienced an almost physical reaction to it and he could almost feel the truth pushing back against him. So, call it stubbornness, call it decisiveness, but Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, Michael Eisner and Queen Victoria shared the belief of trusting the inspiration that lived within themselves. On tests, many times our first answer is the correct one. Great empires, corporations, and poems have been--and will continue to be--built on this “secret”—trusting and acting on the gift that keeps on giving – your own ideas.

Politics As Usual
During this Victorian Age, Britain ruled the seas and boldly established a presence in all parts of the world. The saying “The sun never sets on the British Empire” was quite true. The Liberal Party, formerly known as the Whigs, dominated Victorian politics and was opposed to colonial expansion. Conservatives, formerly known as the Tories, supported imperialism and electoral reform.

*Eisner's father required that for every one hour of television he read for two hours.

Are You Pondering What I’m Pondering Pinky?

The reasons Britain tried to gain and settle new colonies included raw materials, new markets, and homes for British settlers. If Britain didn’t settle new territory, they reasoned, rival European nations would. Victorians were also absorbed with the idea of the “white man’s burden”—the moral obligation to pass on the “superior” ideas of the West. Somewhat linked to this idea was “evangelicalism,” a movement that called for strict personal morality with a strong commitment to social reform.

Britain maintained two different policies for the status of their colonies. One was considered a “settled territory,” like New Zealand, where many of their own people lived and were given more authority to rule themselves. Then, there were colonies like Hong Kong that were considered more of an outright colony and strict rule was placed over them. The following is an excerpt from an actual 1839 British Government document regarding the colonization of New Zealand:
Her Majesty's Government has watched these proceedings with attention and solicitude. We have not been insensible to the importance of New Zealand to the interests of Great Britain in Australia, nor unaware of the great natural resources by which that country is distinguished, or that its geographical position must in seasons, either of peace or war, enable it, in the hands of Civilised men to exercise a paramount influence in that quarter of the globe. There is probably no part of the earth in which Colonization could be effected with a greater or surer prospect of national advantage.

The political situation in Ireland was somewhat different. In spite of Prime Minister William Gladstone’s support for Irish independence, the British people were still divided over whether Ireland should receive statehood.

When Economic Leadership Means Life or Death

“An expert is a man who has made all the mistakes which can be made, in a narrow field.”

Niels Bohr

Many times, mistakes mark the path to success for countries as well as individuals. Economic changes in Britain produced the growth of two classes, an industrial working class and a modern middle class. Although social concerns of the Victorian writers included brutal factory conditions and slums that bred poverty and disease, Victorian thinkers were optimistic, not pessimistic, about their world. After all, the Second Reform Bill of 1867 was passed which granted voting rights to tenant farmers and to better-paid male workers. When rightly conceived and applied, laws are simply guidelines to prevent sadness and failure.
The Irish tragedy underscores the importance for governments to react quickly to meet human needs. In order to provide money for the starving, Britain’s work relief program in Ireland included filling in valleys and flattening hills, purposeless work that fed the sense of desperation. The government wanted to justify its payments to the workers. Payday was at the end of the week—many times, men would die of starvation before the pay arrived. In 1846, Parliament repealed the Corn Laws. This action helped decrease food shortages, opened markets so that British industries prospered, and turned Britain from an agricultural to an industrial nation. The near-term effect on Ireland, however, was non-existent. See websites for more information.

Besides the Reform Bills, other improvements the Victorians strived to make in their society were to reduce the working day for women and children, establish a system of free schools, legalize trade unions, improve public sanitation, and regulate factories. Many Victorians favored the material benefits of the Industrial Revolution were good, but deplored the brutality of the factories and slums. It is hard to imagine, but conditions like this still exist in the world today.
Who Do You Believe?

With the development of more social classes in England and the factory workers pleading for the government to do something about the horrific conditions, the question arose as to how much influence the government should have in running society. Three schools of thought emerged. Reformist Liberalism argued that rapid changes in society brought problems that government intervention and regulation were needed to control. Socialism supported the government moving toward eventual public ownership of major industries instead of private ownership. Sitting opposite socialism on the political seesaw was the laissez-faire theory. It supported a “hands off” policy—requiring government to avoid meddling in the affairs of business. Like eating at a Chinese restaurant, the ultimate solution was ‘a little from Column A, a little from Column B,’ with ingredients drawn from each economic model.

Well I’ll be a Monkey’s Uncle

Making Economic Sense of Darwin’s Theory
Around this time the thoughts of Charles Darwin were gaining currency. Herbert Spencer applied Darwin’s “survival of the fittest” theory (natural selection) to human social life by contending that only the “fittest” humans achieve social and economic success, while the unfit fail’ no government or organization should interfere in this process. Needless to say, this theory was found to be “for the birds” as it did not take into account human pain and suffering.

**Realism and Naturalism**

*The Victorian Age Is the Age of Novels*

The arts thrived during the Victorian Age in various forms. While Romantics were known chiefly for their poetry, the Victorians were better known for their novels. Victorian writers did not entirely abandon the ideas of the Romantic Age however. Slightly modified from Romanticism was the new literary movement called realism, influenced by the social aspect of society. Realism seeks to portray the realities of human life without any “sugar coating.” Life is presented how it is, not how it might be. Naturalism, an offshoot of realism was influenced by the scientific advancements of the day. The writings of an author who believed in naturalism would occasionally be full of harsh details with the ideal of promoting social change. It would view nature as indifferent to the human suffering it caused.

**Cavalcade of Stars**

*A Lifetime of Great Reading Awaits*

And Its Free on the Web
With the unveiling of the Victorian Age, poems or novels thrilled the reader with the author’s real-world experience. Like the next stage of a rocket thrusting toward space, Naturalism emerged from realism with force and scientific authority. The strongest voice of Naturalism was writer Thomas Hardy. A. E. Houseman was a poet whose lyrics spoke of personal loss and rural change. Emily Bronte described characters and setting from her own childhood. Elizabeth Barrett, who eloped with Robert Browning against her father’s will, was well known for the poems that she wrote to her husband. The first Victorian poet to focus on the negative effects of the Industrial Revolution was Matthew Arnold. An inspiration to poets after his day was Gerard Manley Hopkins, a Catholic priest. Did you ever hear of Mary Ann Evans--how about George Eliot, the author of Adam Bede? Well, they are the same person! George Eliot is the pen name of Mary Ann Evans. Author of “Gunga Din” is Rudyard Kipling, and the greatest of the Victorian historians is Thomas Carlyle. Like arriving near Sutter’s Mill at the beginning of the gold rush, great riches await those with the patience to open each book with its treasure chest of thought.

“Vulgarity is simply the conduct of other people”
Oscar Wilde

Two literary movements the Victorian era produced were the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood and the Aesthetic Movement. The Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood was headed by Dante Gabriel Rossetti and sought to ignore the ugliness of industrial life by portraying nature with the style popular in the Renaissance. The Aesthetic Movement would have attracted men like John Keats. It turned away from the everyday world and sought to create “art for art’s sake.” Oscar
Wilde belonged to the Aesthetic Movement. For a guaranteed laugh, [click here](#) for more Oscar Wilde quotations.

**Warning:** If you click, you may become a Wilde fan for life.

"The Lady of Shalott"

By Alfred, Lord Tennyson

Lying, robed in snowy white
That loosely flew to left and right--
The leaves upon her falling light—
Thro' the noises of the night
She floated down to Camelot:
And as the boat-head wound along
The willowy hills and fields among,
They heard her singing her last song,
The Lady of Shalott

Heard a carol, mournful, holy,
Chanted loudly, chanted lowly,
Till her blood was frozen slowly,
And her eyes were darken'd wholly,
Turn'd to tower'd Camelot.
For ere she reach'd upon the tide
The first house by the water-side,
Singing in her song she died,
The Lady of Shalott.

From “The Lady of Shalott”
By Alfred, Lord Tennyson

After Wordsworth, Alfred, Lord Tennyson became poet laureate. Unlike his contemporaries, he was more of a Romantic than a Realist.
One of Tennyson’s most famous works, *Idylls of the King*, “The Lady of Shalott” was based on Arthurian legend. In this story, the Lady spends all of her time weaving a magic web so she may avoid invoking a curse that has been placed on her. She is able to glimpse “shadows of the world” in a mirror. After seeing Sir Lancelot in the mirror, she boards a boat bound for Camelot and then she dies shortly thereafter. Although the Lady “knows not what the curse may be,” the text hints that the Lady is forbidden from glimpsing into the real world. Tennyson’s primary purpose in “The Lady of Shalott” is to portray the social isolation of artists.

“Ulysses”

*By Alfred, Lord Tennyson*

Stephen Hawking, the famous English astrophysicist, declared: “My goal is simple. It is complete understanding of the universe, why it is as it is and why it exists at all.” Science has looked to outer space for answers to life’s fundamental questions, and poets have looked inside the mind and soul for keys to meaning and purpose. In “Ulysses,” an emotional poetic view is seen as in the passage—“...vile it were / For some three suns to store and hoard myself...” This reveals that the speaker feels frustrated and useless about his state of mind.

*Time*

*Now You See It - Now You Don’t*

Bill Gates, leader of Microsoft Corporation and richest individual in the world during the late twentieth century, set what were called “blood dates.” These were days on which any given software project must be finished. If it was not finished, you would get a personal visit from Bill—and you did not want a visit from him under these circumstances. Day
Timers, Palm Pilots, alarm clocks, schedules, and computers—all struggle to capture this elusive essence. Time is the blood of life—the quiet, unyielding master of our short journey. In “Ulysses,” the sacred apparition of time appears in a line from a dramatic monologue. This is a critical time in his life and “…Little remains; but every hour is saved…” We realize that dissatisfaction with idleness motivates the statement “how dull it is to pause, to make an end.” In the final analysis, the hour—the ghost of time—always wins.

The Ride Is Over
Before We Realize It Started

On the verge of dying at an early age of leukemia, Keats offered these parting thoughts on time—friend of the wise, enemy of the thoughtless:

“When I have fears that I may cease to be”
By John Keats

When I have fears that I may cease to be
Before my pen has glean'd my teeming brain,
Before high piled books, in charact'ry,
Hold like rich garners the full-ripen'd grain;
When I behold, upon the night's starr'd face,
Huge cloudy symbols of a high romance,
And think that I may never live to trace
Their shadows, with the magic hand of chance;
And when I feel, fair creature of an hour!
That I shall never look upon thee more,
Never have relish in the faery power
Of unreflecting love! - then on the shore
Of the wide world I stand alone, and think
Till Love and Fame to nothingness do sink.
“Come, my friends.
'T is not too late to seek a newer world.”

From “Ulysses”
By Alfred, Lord Tennyson

The resigned yet buoyant “Though much is taken, much abides...” best summarizes Ulysses’ feelings about growing old. Ulysses wants his last days to be full before death; in his own words, “…my purpose holds / To sail beyond the sunset... / until I die....” One reason for this may be because the speaker’s past experiences have fed his desire for additional adventure. To best summarize the message of “Ulysses” we can safely say that it is never too late to strike out anew. In Tennyson’s “Crossing the Bar” the speaker pictures God as “my Pilot” because God guides the speaker through life and death. The principal message that is conveyed in this poem is faith in God. For a quick look at the “bearded wonder” (Tennyson), click here.

“My Last Duchess”
By Robert Browning

In Robert Browning’s “My Last Duchess,” we learn a lot about the Duke and his character traits and the pettiness of humankind. He can be jealous, manifested by his reaction to his wife and her “bad habit.” Like Veruca Salt from Willie Wonka and the Chocolate Factory, he is determined to have things his way as evidenced by his high expectations of his wife and compulsion for strict control. His art collection and his treatment of the Duchess as a possession reflects his preoccupation with possessions. His reference to the gardener as an “officious fool” suggests that he’s a stern boss. Without feeling
“judgmental,” you might label the Duke as overly proud especially when he feels that it would be “stooping” to point out the Duchess’s annoying habits. He might not be the kind person you would like to have in your alliance on Survivor.

“What’s Learned in Pleasure Is Learned in Full Measure”
Benjamin Franklin

Sit back and enjoy “The Charge of the Light Brigade” and “Ulysses.” as they earn their way to becoming honored guests in the home of your mind long after this lesson ends.

“The Charge of the Light Brigade”
By Alfred, Lord Tennyson

1. Half a league, half a league,
   Half a league onward,
   All in the valley of Death
   Rode the six hundred.
   "Forward, the Light Brigade!
   Charge for the guns!" he said:
   Into the valley of Death
   Rode the six hundred.

2. "Forward, the Light Brigade!"
   Was there a man dismay'd?
   Not tho' the soldier knew
   Someone had blunder'd:
   Theirs not to make reply,
   Theirs not to reason why,
Theirs but to do and die:
Into the valley of Death
Rode the six hundred.

“The Charge of the Light Brigade” (cont.)

3.
Cannon to right of them,
Cannon to left of them,
Cannon in front of them
Volley'd and thunder'd;
Storm'd at with shot and shell,
Boldly they rode and well,
Into the jaws of Death,
Into the mouth of Hell
Rode the six hundred.

4.
Flash'd all their sabres bare,
Flash'd as they turn'd in air,
Sabring the gunners there,
Charging an army, while
All the world wonder'd:
Plunged in the battery-smoke
Right thro' the line they broke;
Cossack and Russian
Reel'd from the sabre stroke
Shatter'd and sunder'd.
Then they rode back, but not
Not the six hundred.

“The Charge of the Light Brigade” (cont.)

5.
Cannon to right of them,
Cannon to left of them,
Cannon behind them
Volley'd and thunder'd;
Storm'd at with shot and shell,
While horse and hero fell,
They that had fought so well
Came thro' the jaws of Death
Back from the mouth of Hell,
All that was left of them,
Left of six hundred.
6.
When can their glory fade?
O the wild charge they made!
All the world wondered.
Honor the charge they made,
Honor the Light Brigade,
Noble six hundred.

“ULYSSES”

By Alfred, Lord Tennyson

It little profits that an idle king,
By this still hearth, among these barren crags,
Match'd with an aged wife, I mete and dole
Unequal laws unto a savage race,
That hoard, and sleep, and feed, and know not me.
I cannot rest from travel; I will drink
Life to the lees. All times I have enjoy'd
Greatly, have suffer'd greatly, both with those
That loved me, and alone; on shore, and when
Thro' scudding drifts the rainy Hyades
Vext the dim sea. I am become a name;
For always roaming with a hungry heart
Much have I seen and known,-- cities of men
And manners, climates, councils, governments,
Myself not least, but honor'd of them all,--
And drunk delight of battle with my peers,
Far on the ringing plains of windy Troy.
I am a part of all that I have met;  
Yet all experience is an arch wherethro'  
Gleams that untravell'd world whose margin fades  
For ever and for ever when I move.  
How dull it is to pause, to make an end,  
To rust unburnish'd, not to shine in use!  
As tho' to breathe were life! Life piled on life  
Were all too little, and of one to me  
Little remains; but every hour is saved  
From that eternal silence, something more,  
A bringer of new things; and vile it were  
For some three suns to store and hoard myself,  
And this gray spirit yearning in desire  
To follow knowledge like a sinking star,  
Beyond the utmost bound of human thought.

Ulysses (cont.)

This is my son, mine own Telemachus,  
to whom I leave the sceptre and the isle,—  
Well-loved of me, discerning to fulfill  
This labor, by slow prudence to make mild  
A rugged people, and thro' soft degrees  
Subdue them to the useful and the good.  
Most blameless is he, centred in the sphere  
Of common duties, decent not to fail  
In offices of tenderness, and pay  
Meet adoration to my household gods,  
When I am gone. He works his work, I mine.

There lies the port; the vessel puffs her sail;  
There gloom the dark, broad seas. My mariners,  
Souls that have toil'd, and wrought, and thought with me,—  
That ever with a frolic welcome took  
The thunder and the sunshine, and opposed  
Free hearts, free foreheads,—you and I are old;  
Old age hath yet his honor and his toil.  
Death closes all; but something ere the end,
Some work of noble note, may yet be done,
Not unbecoming men that strove with Gods.
The lights begin to twinkle from the rocks; The long day wanes; the slow moon climbs; the deep Moans round with many voices. Come, my friends.
'T is not too late to seek a newer world.
Push off, and sitting well in order smite The sounding furrows; for my purpose holds To sail beyond the sunset, and the baths Of all the western stars, until I die.
It may be that the gulf's will wash us down; It may be we shall touch the Happy Isles, And see the great Achilles, whom we knew.
Tho' much is taken, much abides; and tho'
We are not now that strength which in old days Moved earth and heaven, that which we are, we are,-- One equal temper of heroic hearts, Made weak by time and fate, but strong in will To strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield.

http://charon.sfsu.edu/TENNYSON/tennyson.html