

# Course Themes

---

Victorian Literature

# Empire

---

- Definitions of/Differences between imperialism and colonialism (See Course Notes-- Postcolonialism). These exist as a reciprocal relationship
- Considering empire not only as historical fact but also in terms of moral responsibility and culpability
- Defining and reinforcing Englishness by setting against Otherness: physical features, cultural customs, behavior and attitudes
- Various ideas about and responses to empire, e.g., White Man's Burden and "violence begets violence"/use of force to enact moral responsibility and humanitarianism
- Empire as a blank space in which to create stories (fiction and real): adventure, reinforce cultural values, the opportunity to create wealth, opportunity, identity
- What is the best, right way to manage an empire vs the very notion of empire itself

# Education

---

- What type of education best serves children?: Facts, practical, utilitarian (NA 72-73; 12)/Imagination, feeling, self-expression. Combine these? What type of education do children need? Inclusion of morality and ethics?
- The ways in which social class and gender affect education and shape curriculums
- How should teachers be trained/how should they teach? The challenges teachers face in urban and rural schools
- What should the purpose of a university be?: Useful (career preparation) vs Liberal (formation of the mind/character) knowledge
- The link between education and democracy/individualism/freedom

# Individualism, Society, and Democracy

---

- How does one live as an individual and belong to a community or society?
- Notion of identity/selfhood: Stable self, divided self, multiple selves
- Individualism—personal desire, choice—freedom and free will—determine one’s own identity. If excessive, can lead to disorder, lack of common standards, and even anarchy
- Society—Order and stability—accepted rules of behavior, standard values and attitudes. If excessive, can be restrictive and confining, loss of individuality
- Do the demands of belonging to a society (e.g., giving up some freedoms or personal desires) actually allow individuals to be free and secure? Do we need to be “watched” in order to act morally and ethically? Does individuality make a society better, more productive and more innovative/progressive, even if there are occasional risks that individuals will violate the rights of others?

# Play and Games

---

- Play---Games---Sports: Continuum of play moves (left to right) toward greater structure and less freedom. Play: freedom, spontaneity, loose structure, imagination, joy, locomotion, end in itself. Games: purpose, structure (rules), merit-based, fairness, equal opportunity, means to an end—winning. Games emphasize structure and limit (not eliminate) play. Play and games can foster social interactions, friendships, community, good will, joy. Play and games can rejuvenate the human spirit. Games can instill order and measurable outcomes—meaning. They depend on following rules.
- Play and games signal a key Victorian tension between freedom and structure. Individuals frame an understanding of themselves and others as well as relate to society through play and games: Material play and games are rooted in daily life and social practices—how individuals can shape and fulfill their desires
- Work and play exist on the same continuum: In the nineteenth century, play was about a change of work (new and changing work patterns; how to balance leisure or play with work) and from work (re-create oneself for greater productivity). Work can incorporate play and games; play can be serious, but this speaks to the absorption of the player in play.

# Victorian Medievalism

---

- The medieval past was used to validate nineteenth-century progress: Look how far we've developed as a nation and empire. It was also used nostalgically to look back to a time of community, stability, order, faith. This view functioned as a check on progress and empire. How, then, could medieval past serve two contradictory purposes?
- Medievalism is a cultural discourse that can support or critique power structures/cultural values (e.g., political conservatism or liberalism, views of art, masculinity). Its values: chivalry, order, religious faith, gallantry, nobility, honor, duty, fidelity, masculinity, moral influence of women
- Medievalism was used to comment on the Victorian present: offer solutions to the present or critique the present. Tennyson's passion of (not for) the past (See NA, Tennyson bio).