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UNDERSTANDING HISTORY AND CULTURE IN 19TH-CENTURY ENGLAND: CONTRIBUTIONS FROM DICKENS, THACKERAY, AND ELIOT

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Abstract. Students in programmes of English studies learn about history from historical textbooks, which provide a broad overview but lack detail. These texts prioritise a selection of significant events and collective narratives, neglecting the experiences of individuals. Consequently, the picture presented by textbooks remains overly general. Literature, conversely, offers a rich tapestry of individual stories that, when combined with historical textbooks, encourage students to link general facts with personal narratives. This helps students arrive at a deeper understanding of historical events and cultural circumstances and their impact on individual lives. The combined approach facilitates students' ability to imagine the daily realities of the past with a nuanced appreciation of both continuities and changes across time. William Makepeace Thackeray's *Vanity Fair*, Charles Dickens's *Great Expectations*, and George Eliot's *The Mill on the Floss* exemplify how instructors can leverage the complementary strengths of historical textbooks and Victorian novels to cultivate a more comprehensive understanding of the past, surpassing the limitations of either discipline in isolation.

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The Narrative Core of Literature and History

Chapters in history books about nineteenth-century England typically chronicle significant events, trends, and topics, such as industrialisation, the political and economic aspects of the Empire, the rise of the middle class, social reforms, trade, increased mobility, urbanisation, family life, the position of women, and living and working conditions. Acknowledging the importance of individual narratives, some history textbooks reference Victorian literature. For instance, one student textbook refers to Dickens's portrayal of national pride and the harsh realities of crime and misery, which shocked the wealthier classes and ultimately spurred reforms (McDowall, 2014, pp. 131–132), while another mentions his accounts of corrupt electors in *The Pickwick Papers* and even ends the chapter about Britain until 1851 with an excerpt from Joyce Cary's *Except the Lord* (Morgan, 2010, pp. 511, 516–517). Similarly, Victorian literature studies integrate historical context, adding factual details and broader circumstances into discussions of specific authors and significant themes (e.g., Brantlinger & Thesing, 2002; David, 2012; Adams, 2009). However, a truly comprehensive understanding of the era emerges from the synergy of these broader historical narratives and the details of individual lives and destinies explored in Victorian novels, providing richer context and a deeper connection with the past while enhancing students' comprehension of the historical period.

What connects literature and history is their shared narrative core. As noted by Seixas and Peck, “[s]torytellers, journalists, filmmakers, grandmothers, textbook writers and novelists—as well as historians—all create accounts of the past” (2004, p. 110). History can be viewed as a compilation of diverse texts, each offering its interpretation of the past, sometimes even presenting conflicting narratives. In this sense, history resembles a series of narratives open to interpretation like any literary work. The interpretations may change for various reasons, including new findings, politics, and the ever-changing standards and criteria for what is appropriate, adequate, and acceptable.

Seixas (2000) identifies three fundamental approaches to historical pedagogy and epistemology. The first, simply presenting a singular narrative of

events (“enhancing collective memory”), fails to engage students with the critical methodologies of historical inquiry. The second approach emphasises evaluating conflicting versions of the past, where students learn to understand the historical significance of an event and the criteria for a well-supported historical account. The third approach acknowledges the uncertainty inherent in selecting a single “best story”. Students compare different versions of history, examining supporting evidence and considering the political agendas that may shape such narratives in the present. Seixas (2000, pp. 20–21) emphasises that the goal is not to arrive at a single “best” interpretation but rather for students to understand how various groups construct historical narratives and how their rhetorical strategies serve contemporary purposes. Seixas’s approach highlights the inherent narrative character of history and its study, revealing parallels between the processes of writing, reading, and interpreting history and those involved in engaging with literature. In both cases, students encounter a story, then consider what shaped it, and then they (can) view it from different perspectives to understand what, how, and why something happened while also considering the outcomes of events and their effects. This applies to the interpretation of Victorian novels, which place individual stories into the broader context of historical circumstances and events, thus creating a more detailed picture of how individuals were affected.

A Unique Immediacy: The Era of Realism

The Victorian period is particularly well-suited to the approach of supplementing historical facts with literature and cultural circumstances. The rise of the printing press, declining printing costs, and rising literacy rates created the opportunity for a wide range of social perspectives, including not only the voice of the aristocracy but also the voices of the middle class and the lower classes, often referred to as the “great unwashed”. The polymathy of Victorian authors proved invaluable for capturing the complexities and heterogeneity of Victorian society, as evident in Dickens’s, Thackeray’s, and Eliot’s works. William Makepeace Thackeray’s “many-sidedness” is demonstrable in his achievements as a novelist, travel writer, illustrator, essayist, short-story writer, playwright, and journalist (Harden, 1998, p. 1). Charles Dickens was another prolific figure who thrived as a journalist, reporter, novelist, critic, and editor. Similarly, George Eliot’s talents extended beyond novel writing and, in addition to those mentioned above, encompassed exceptional skill as a translator.

It was the novel that aroused readers’ interest by depicting the social realities of everyday life, including those inaccessible to them. This is why the novel became Britain’s dominant cultural form by the mid-nineteenth century. As the dominant form of the era, noted Adams (2009, p. 24), the novel was well-suited “to explore and even to define central aspects of Victorian experience and

belief”. Moreover, before the arrival of electronic forms of entertainment, “the novel gave literature a centrality in English culture unequalled before or since. More than any other genre, it has come to define what it meant to be ‘Victorian’” (Adams, 2009, p. 25).

Victorian novelists launched a new era of literary realism, offering an essential advantage over the previous periods in history, as can be exemplified by Thackeray’s *Vanity Fair* (1848), Eliot’s *The Mill on the Floss* (1860), and Dickens’s *Great Expectations* (1861). These novels paint a broader picture of life in England between 1814 and the 1850s: *Vanity Fair* is set in the period from 1814 to the early 1830s, *The Mill on the Floss* from the late 1820s to the late 1830s, and *Great Expectations* from the early to the mid-nineteenth century. Often incorporated into English studies programmes for non-native speaker students, these novels vividly portray a web of social, political, economic, and cultural values and circumstances, such as class issues, poverty, social mobility, the rising middle class, gender differences, public and private spheres, the importance of education, the British Empire, industrialisation, and migrations to towns. Additionally, they stress the relevance of the past to understanding the present of both individual lives and society.

Victorian novelists like Dickens, Thackeray, and Eliot had the advantage of direct experience unavailable to today’s students and scholars, who rely on primary and secondary sources to reconstruct the Victorian past. This first-hand perspective complements the relevant historical accounts with valuable details and insights into everyday experiences, from personal relationships to social, political, and economic circumstances. More importantly, Victorian novels also provide social commentary. Dickens’s, Thackeray’s, and Eliot’s novels help students understand the historical circumstances and their lasting relevance. In this sense, the credit should not be given only to the Victorian novel or these specific authors. Literature, in general, has a crucial role in English studies precisely because it offers a deeper understanding of the human experience.

Charles Dickens shaped the British sense of themselves more than any other author of the era. His novels were “richly sutured to public reading, which enabled them to reach even an illiterate audience” (Adams, 2009, p. 65). His background as a journalist and reporter from the streets, courtrooms, and the House of Commons demonstrated he had “an eye for detail and an ear for speech patterns” (Bradbury, 2006, p. 156). His use of language was unprecedented, and no one had ever written prose that way before (Garrett, 2006, p. 136). Dickens’s literary success popularised the novel form and fundamentally reshaped it. It brought about the rise of serialisation, a more affordable and immensely popular form of publication. Reading serialised instalments quickly became part of the domestic routine. Such reading practice extended beyond the domestic sphere and transformed the novel into a shared cultural experience. Public readings

promoted audience interaction and provided authors with immediate feedback on characters and plotlines, potentially influencing the narrative's direction.

Inspired by his 1836 visit to London's notorious prison, Dickens's "A Visit to Newgate" offered a glimpse into the potential of blending fact and fiction:

"We have only to premise, that we do not intend to fatigue the reader with any statistical accounts of the prison; they will be found at length in numerous reports of various committees and a variety of authorities of equal weight. We took no notes, made no memoranda, measured none of the yards, ascertained the exact number of inches in no particular room: are unable even to report of how many apartments the gaol is composed. We saw the prison, and saw the prisoners; and what we did see, and what we thought, we will tell at once in our own way." (Dickens, 2021, Chapter XXV)

This excerpt exemplifies how historical records and literature complement each other. While committee reports provide valuable data for historians, they lack the human element, which writers tell in their "own way". Literary depictions—such as the author's portrayal of the condemned, while confirming that Newgate was "a frowzy, ugly, disorderly, depressing" place, as described in *Great Expectations* (Dickens, 2017, Chapter XXXII)—also offered personal narratives and insights into the interaction of the prisoners with those who had access to the jail. Similarly, the novel informs the reader about numerous other aspects of life: about education and growing up in the country, medicines, food and table manners, the outside and inside of houses, the importance of the opinion of neighbours, sought even for funeral arrangements, and the overwhelming sense of national pride, where "to doubt our having and our being the best of everything" was considered treasonous (Dickens, 2017, Chapter XX).

Thackeray praised Dickens's genius but criticised him for not representing nature "duly." Unlike Dickens, he said, he held "that the Art of Novels *is* to represent nature: to convey as strongly as possible the sentiment of reality" (Harden, 1994, p. 411, as cited in Fisher, 1997, p. 115). In "Charity and Humour," Thackeray wrote: "I can't help telling the truth as I view it, and describing what I see. To describe it otherwise than it seems to me would be falsehood" (Thackeray, 2007, p. 203). This is why Thackeray was "historically grounded, a constructionist and a realist" (Fisher, 1997, p. 9). That "truth must be told" is one of the principal reasons why *Vanity Fair* is considered a fine example of critical realism. It vividly portrays "little chapters in everybody's life, that seem to be nothing, and yet affect all the rest of the history," and how "poor little Emmy Sedley's happiness forms, somehow, part of" the conflicts in Europe when Napoleon "landed at Cannes, and Louis XVIII fled, and all Europe was in alarm, and the funds fell, and old John Sedley was ruined" (Thackeray, 2024, Chapters VI, XVIII).

George Eliot suggested that the quality of the novel to capture the complexities of the era realistically was not an artistic choice but an artistic necessity.

“Art is the nearest thing to life,” wrote Eliot (2019) in her *Essays*, “it is a mode of amplifying experience and extending our contact with our fellow-men beyond the bounds of our personal lot. All the more sacred is the task of the artist when he undertakes to paint the life of the People. Falsification here is far more pernicious than in the more artificial aspects of life”.

Victorian readers craved a comprehensive literary experience, demanding narratives that mirrored the realities of their era. Particularly captivating were depictions of life beyond their immediate reach, and the novel—with its capacity to connect intimate character stories with a broader cultural and historical landscape—was particularly suitable for such explorations, from the elevated spheres of the aristocracy to the depths of urban poverty.

Wealth, Values, and Success

Titles were the crucial distinction between the aristocracy and the affluent middle class. Facing financial difficulties, some aristocratic families arranged marriages between their children and those of wealthy merchants, essentially trading titles for money. Bitterly disappointed when her scheme to marry Jos Osborne failed, Becky said she should be “among GENTLEFOLKS, and not with vulgar city people” (Thackeray, 2024, Chapter VII). However, these “vulgar city people,” merchants, who profited from their lucrative investments in the colonies, could afford that their sons “shan’t want,” because merchant money was “as good as theirs,” and there were many gentlefolk who could not “spend a dollar to [a merchant son’s] guinea” (Thackeray, 2024, Chapter XIII). In addition to money, manual labour was probably the most crucial distinction between the affluent middle class and people experiencing poverty. Magwitch worked hard so that Pip “should be above work” (Dickens, 2017, Chapter XXXIX). The boundaries between the upper and the middle classes were becoming increasingly porous, and one could find ways to climb up. However, due to misfortunes, one could just as easily slip into poverty. Movement was possible both ways because “like the boundary between the middle and upper, that between the middle and lower was unstable with many members slipping downward” (Prewitt Brown, 2004, p. 83).

Whether from a venture in the colonies, as an annual income or through inheritance, money was inextricably linked with well-being in life and literature. After all, the publishing industry was a profitable business. Serialisation popularised the novel and brought substantial earnings to writers, who became the era’s celebrities. Dickens left an estate of £93,000 upon his death in 1870, and George Eliot’s success in writing enabled her to buy a sizeable property in the Regent’s Park area of north London. Following the loss of his inheritance due to the collapse of financial institutions in India and the speculations by his stepfather, William Makepeace Thackeray was “forced to face the unpleasant necessity of earning

a living” (Neill, 2004, p. 188). The author of *Vanity Fair*, the novel that inspired later narratives about financially ruined individuals and families, earned back, through writing, the amount equal to his inheritance lost in bad investments (Jędrzejewski, 2007, p. 22; Mays, 2002, p. 14; Neill, 2004, p. 188).

Thackeray, who studied at various schools and even considered a career in law, abandoned that idea due to an inheritance. In *Vanity Fair*, he portrays how education is an important gateway to success—if only to mock its practicality, other than the chance to meet influential members of society and learn how to get close to them. Here, education is not a tool for success based on knowledge one gains by learning; success comes through the superficial acquisition of skills required to move upwards in society. When girls finish school, their parents receive a letter confirming their worth “to occupy a fitting position in their polished and refined circle,” stating they possess “virtues which characterise the young English gentlewoman,” including obedience, “delightful sweetness of temper,” skills in “music, dancing, in orthography, in every variety of embroidery and needlework.” However, “schoolmistresses’ letters are to be trusted no more nor less than churchyard epitaphs,” the truth of which Becky defiantly confirms on her leave by flinging “Johnson’s Dictionary” through the window of the carriage (Thackeray, 2024, Chapter I). Becky’s less formal education and exceptional manipulating skills allow her to climb the social ladder. In contrast, despite her education and virtues, Amelia falls victim to her naivety in this hypocritical society focused on proper etiquette and financial success, or at least the credit and support of a high-positioned individual.

Dickens was forced to work in a shoe polish factory while his father was in debtors’ prison. The family’s financial problems halted his education, and when the misfortune repeated, the family was evicted. Later, as the son of a bankrupt, he was looked at with disdain by his love interest (Davis, 2007, pp. 3–4). The importance of education and finances would later reverberate in *Great Expectations*. Pip had limited opportunities for education in “an evening school in the village,” in which a little general shop was kept in the same room and in which the “pupils ate apples and put straws down one another’s backs” until “Mr. Wopsle’s great-aunt collected her energies and made an indiscriminate totter at them with a birch-rod” (Dickens, 2017, Chapter X). Pip’s story tells how one’s money and position in society were far from static—an unexpected benefactor could lift one to great heights. However, one could also quickly go “from bad to worse” in society in which it was so natural to change companions depending on one’s fortunes and prospects that one should never “invest portable property in a friend” (Dickens, 2017, Chapter XXXVI). Pip’s education to become a gentleman was not enough when his prospects were ruined because he was “bred to no calling” and, eventually, found himself “fit for noting” (Dickens, 2017, Chapter XLI). In addition to learning how to call the playing cards correctly, he also learned the importance of one’s trade.

Eliot exemplified how extensive literary education could help a woman achieve success. She had a modest formal education, but her lifelong commitment to reading as a prerequisite for self-education made her “one of her epoch’s most erudite thinkers” (Jędrzejewski, 2007, pp. 1–5). However, she was more an exception than a typical example. Her quasi-autobiographical novel *The Mill on the Floss* describes how the happiness and stability of ordinary family lives can be disrupted. Mr Tulliver wants to educate his son Tom to “put him to a business, as he may make a nest for himself” (Eliot, 2004, Chapter III), but his bankruptcy directly affects the lives of his children. His son Tom is forced to quit education and seek other ways to earn and repay his father’s debts, while his daughter Maggie must give up her friendship with the son of the man who brought financial ruin upon her family. The intertwinement of education and financial success in *The Mill on the Floss* has complex moral implications. Education fuels Maggie’s intellectual curiosity; however, the limits of female education not only bring her frustration but also eventually result in her isolation from her family, particularly from her brother, whose potentials for social mobility are constrained by both financial situation and educational prospects and performance, which limit his independence and force him to take practical jobs.

Thackeray, Dickens, and Eliot showed that education, although valued as a tool for social mobility, was not a guarantee for either morality or wealth, both highly prized in Victorian society. Becky seemed free to do whatever she wanted as a ruthless social climber, but her well-being, climb upward, and social credit depended on others. Estella served only as a means for Miss Havisham to exact her revenge on men. Pip wanted to become a gentleman and believed he was one, but his education and money were merely someone else’s property and investment. Maggie felt the consequences of bankruptcy, and as long as she did not have enough money, she would not have enough freedom to achieve what she wanted. Education could grant access to opportunity but not necessarily success. It could be a gateway to a better life but also bring disillusionment and emptiness through misplaced gratitude and false perceptions when wealth distorted one’s judgement. In the increasingly industrialised society that profited from the colonial empire, concrete skills to make money, like those of lawyers, accountants, or merchants, were needed for financial success beyond inheritance.

Interrelations Between the Private and Public Realms

The Victorian novel eagerly explored the interrelations between the private and public realms, the degree of liberty one had in both of them and how disrupted and disruptive those interrelations could be when fuelled by the anxieties of the era, grounded in financial prospects. People were rather careful and selective in deciding which of their private affairs they wanted to make public because poor

choices could have catastrophic consequences, including financial ones. Magwitch did not “intend to advertise [his return] in the newspapers” (Dickens, 2017, Chapter XL). Becky and Rawdon’s marriage was not “declared to the world, or published in the *Morning Post*” (Thackeray, 2024, Chapter XVII). Maggie’s decision to embark on a boat ride alone with her cousin’s fiancé, Stephen Guest, exposed Victorian society’s precarious nature of privacy. Magwitch’s lack of caution that led to his exposure, Becky’s decision to share the news in the wrong way to the wrong person, and Maggie’s compromised reputation due to time spent alone with a man show how easily private matters could become public with severe consequences: Magwitch faced arrest, Becky was denied acceptance by her husband’s relatives, and Maggie endured social disgrace upon her return, unmarried.

Wemmick teaches Pip that “the office is one thing, and private life is another” (Dickens, 2017, Chapter XXV). This distinction also reflects the gender roles of the era. While men were expected to find fulfilment and success in the public realm, women were expected to achieve them in the domestic sphere. They did not enjoy the freedom of independence as it would mean they entered the public realm of men’s territory of influence. As noted by Adams, in Victorian literature male characters typically find fulfilment in public achievements, with marriage as a supporting or hindering factor. For heroines, however, “the most consequential choice is invariably who, or whether, to marry” (Adams, 2009, p. 124). Marriage was not solely a private affair but rather a financial and social contract that served the family’s needs, not rarely at the expense of the individual’s emotions.

Vanity Fair perfectly illustrates how marriage affects one’s prospects of success. Becky Sharp is a compelling example of how important marriage was for women, whether they were members of the aristocratic class or aspiring to join it. Thackeray ridicules the aristocratic custom of marrying for prosperity, subject to the most critical values that women are expected to have—beauty and possession. Becky says she would be a perfect wife for money. “It isn’t difficult to be a country gentleman’s wife ... I think I could be a good woman if I had five thousand a year” (Thackeray, 2024, Chapter XLI). Becky, who with each instance of compromising her reputation, goes one step up on the social ladder, enjoys success in the public realm despite her private life as long as she publicly enjoys the favour of influential members of the aristocracy. By comparison, her friend and angelic counterpart Amelia, the living embodiment of devotion, emotion, and maternal love, suffers for all her virtues. Amelia’s conviction to a life of unhappiness demonstrates how easily society could put its values below money. They both show all the hypocrisy of the society in which a woman falls and is seen as having fallen quite selectively.

Dickens’s life—including his family history, emotional relationships, financial difficulties, pre-novelist jobs, and his later public life—reflects the longstanding social and class divisions and tensions in English society that had

existed for generations and that reached a boiling point during the Victorian era, driven by the broader reform movements of the time (Davis, 1999, pp. 99–100; Smith, 2006, pp. 2, 8–10). His marriage, divorce, and life with his wife's sister also show how the private sphere was related to the public one—his career. As noted by Waters, although Dickens was lauded for his sentimental portrayals of domestic life, he devoted significant creative energy to depicting dysfunctional or unconventional families. Distorted familial relationships were a powerful tool for Dickens to explore the social, political, and economic anxieties of the Victorian era. Moreover, the houses and mansions in his novels “fail to maintain the division between private and public spheres, allowing the worlds of business, politics, or ‘Fashion’ to intrude upon the sanctity of the home” (Waters, 2006, p. 119).

While *The Mill on the Floss* centres on the domestic sphere of the Tulliver family, it also highlights the intricate interrelationship between the private and social realms. Namely, all private events in the family's life, from Mr Tulliver's bankruptcy to Maggie's boat ride with Stephen Guest, also unfold in the public sphere as determining forces that affect subsequent personal choices (Jędrzejewski, 2007, p. 48). Tom Tulliver embraces his mother's family principles of hard work, perseverance, and respectability, which become ever more important as he grows up. Maggie, however, shows increasing disdain for conventions and expectations of her era. Both in life and in *The Mill on the Floss*, Eliot challenged the societal stereotypes of her time, particularly those concerning the prescribed roles that women as obedient wives and “angels of the house” were expected to fulfil.

Imperialism and Economic Prosperity

The vast network of colonies was crucial for the economic prosperity of nineteenth-century Britain. It supplied raw materials that fuelled its industrial production and provided lucrative trade and business opportunities, with and within the colonies.

Middle-class families' exposure to the Empire extended beyond newspaper articles about victories, travelogues, and missionary stories. They encountered its importance first-hand through business opportunities and family connections, with sons serving in the colonies and daughters married to officials or missionaries living in places like Africa, India, and the West Indies. Inevitably, this was reflected in the novels people were reading. As a result, Victorian novels started to reflect this growing awareness of imperialism (David, 2002, p. 86).

Great Expectations and *Vanity Fair* explicitly reference the Empire's significance and the intricate relationship between wealth accumulation and social values. Trade with the colonies “to the East Indies, for silks, shawls, spices, dyes, drugs, and precious woods”, and “to the West Indies, for sugar, tobacco and rum.

And to Ceylon, specially for elephants' tusks" was an essential source of profit, which was "tremendous" (Dickens, 2017, Chapter XXII). Novels of the era often depict colonial presence, such as in India, through the characters of retired British military officers and Anglo-Indian officials. "They say all Indian nabobs were enormously rich", comments Thackeray, and the most prominent example is Jos Sedley, who had "an honourable and lucrative post" (Thackeray, 2024, Chapter III). By mentioning various imported goods, especially clothing, the novelists highlighted the growing trade with South Asia and the wealth it brought. This trend is particularly noticeable in the works of William Makepeace Thackeray, who was born in Bombay to an Anglo-Indian family (Adams, 2009, p. 166).

While *The Mill on the Floss* lacks explicit references to the material benefits of the Empire, it is indirectly connected to the broader theme of imperialism and so contributes significantly to a better understanding of the period. Together with other novels of the era, it can be read as an exploration of the economic and social changes brought about by imperialism, particularly its impact on wealth distribution, class mobility, and societal values.

Thackeray's *Vanity Fair*, Dickens's *Great Expectations*, and Eliot's *The Mill on the Floss* offer rich portrayals of the importance of financial stability, social values, and the perceived benefits of the Empire during the first half of the nineteenth century. By doing so, these novels also hold important implications for understanding the circumstances prevailing in the second half of the nineteenth century and Britain's later waning power and social anxieties that emerged towards the end of the era.

Conclusion

To gain a deeper understanding of British society in the present, students of English need to develop a deeper understanding of its past and the historical circumstances that shaped it. Reading Victorian novels alongside historical accounts equips students with a thorough understanding of nineteenth-century England, particularly regarding the complex web of its values. In this sense, Thackeray's *Vanity Fair*, Dickens's *Great Expectations*, and Eliot's *The Mill on the Floss* serve as windows into the past, offering students glimpses into the Victorians' concerns, aspirations, and challenges they faced in their daily lives. When combined with historical facts, this literary perspective unfolds a more comprehensive cultural landscape of England in the first half of the nineteenth century. This broader picture encompasses the era's harsh realities and tremendous opportunities, including the societal roles, norms, and expectations inextricably linked to wealth and class. The enduring relevance of these novels continues to prompt scholars and students to revisit Victorian narratives and reinterpret their insights into contemporary experiences.

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Допринос романа Чарлса Дикенса, Вилијама Мејкписа Текерија
и Џорџ Елиот бољем разумевању енглеске историје
и културе XIX века

Резиме

Студенти англистике о историји Енглеске уче из историјских уџбеника, који пружају ширу слику о значајним догађајима, али у великој мери изостављају искуства појединаца. Резултат такве перцепције историје јесу колективне приче, односно уопштена слика друштва и његове историје и културе. За разлику од текстова из историјских књига, књижевност причама о појединачним судбинама, прожетим детаљима, гради широку панораму, која, у комбинацији са историјским подацима, подстиче студенте да повежу опште чињенице са личним наративима. Резултат тога је боље поимање историјских догађаја у културолошком контексту, њиховог утицаја на животе појединаца, као и повезаности догађаја и

промена у одређеном временском периоду. Романи *Вашар џашићине* Вилијама Мејкписа Текерија, *Велика очекивања* Чарлса Дикенса и *Воденица на Флоси* Џорџ Елиот оправдано су део програма студија англистике јер показују како приче о животима појединаца доприносе бољем разумевању историјских околности и културолошког контекста у Енглеској током прве половине XIX века. Богата слика коју граде укључује тамне и светле стране тог времена, тешкоће и прилике за успех у приватном и јавном животу, друштвене улоге, норме и очекивања, која су нераскидиво повезана са материјалним околностима и положајем у друштву. Наведено потврђује трајну вредност ових романа и њихов значај за боље разумевање људског искуства.

Кључне речи: викторијанско доба; викторијански роман; студије англистике; Чарлс Дикенс; Вилијам Мејкпис Текери; Џорџ Елиот.



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