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## Victorian Days

Like others of you perhaps, I take a break now and then from my frequent pattern of reading, which is nonfiction and often history, and strike out elsewhere with a spate of new books. This time it is the often ornate language of novels from the Victorian period, mostly American and British of the time or thereabouts, although yes even one short Russian novel. And, I have to fess up and say that the books were all purchased. Don't tell my Library friends, but seven paperbacks from the Dover Thrift Editions at a total cost of about \$25 just made that too convenient.

This is how the on-line Encyclopedia Britannica describes the Victorian era: "in British history, the period between approximately 1820 and 1914, corresponding roughly but not exactly to the period of Queen Victoria's reign (1837–1901) and characterized by a class-based society, a growing number of people able to vote, a growing state and economy, and Britain's status as the most powerful empire in the world."

A class-based society for sure, and that is very much projected in more than one of the books that I selected. From the upper class viewpoint of course. The books are as follows with original dates of publication.

- (1) Chopin, Kate, "The Awakening" (1899);
- (2) James, Henry, "Washington Square" (1880);
- (3) Forester, E.M., "Where Angels Fear to Tread" (1905);
- (4) Fitzgerald, F. Scott, "This Side of Paradise" (1920);
- (5) Wharton, Edith, "Ethan Frome" (1911);
- (6) James, Henry, "What Maisie Knew" (1897);
- (7) Dostoyevsky, "The Gambler" (1866).

For the lover of history, the period novel is the writer painting images in oil, so to speak, of the life of the times. Victorian era English ladies of society wear corsets for style of figure, and they wear corsets for their places in society too, although two of the above authors are women nevertheless. Automobiles are unimagined, and then they are; traveling by wheeled vehicle means by horse-drawn carriage, until it doesn't. Who knew of transistors or e-mail or cell phones when radio was only to come? And deoxyribonucleic acid (DNA) and microbiology were not even Webster Dictionary words yet.

It may have been easier for the preeminent science fiction writer H.G. Wells, arising from the Victorian era himself (1866-1946), to conjure a future in "The First Men in the Moon" (1901), well before anyone even got to fly across the Atlantic, than for many of us to conjure a Victorian past. That is what period novels do; they take the reader on a trip, in a "time machine" of sorts. But, unlike with Wells in another of his classics, "The Time Machine" of more than a century ago, it is to go backward, rather than forward.

I find each kind of literary travel, backward and forward, exciting and mind-stretching. Both lead me to wonder why so many people opt for sightseeing the earth mainly in

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current time, especially as done often in retirement by those of means, with seemingly so much less interest in traveling backward and forward in variable literary time.

That latter kind of traveling is always available at your public Library and the fare is a free pass, the Magic Library Card.

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