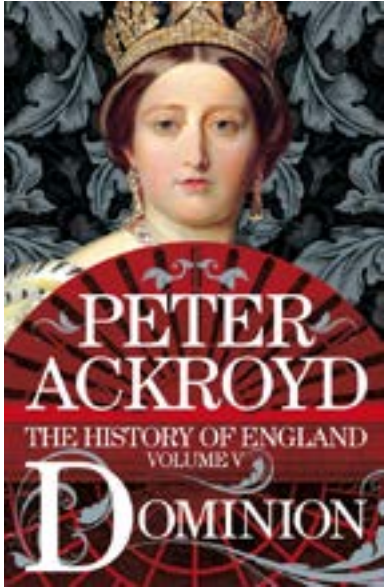


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Dominion: The History of England, Volume 5

by Peter Ackroyd

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Illustrations, plates

Reviewed by Ingrid Perkins
Ballarat High School, Ballarat

The greatest strength of *Dominion: The History of England from the Battle of Waterloo to Victoria's Diamond Jubilee* lies in Peter Ackroyd's evocative writing, through which the reader finds themselves transported to the Victorian laneways of London, or embroiled in the salacious gossip surrounding the 'The Tichborne affair.' His opening promise to 'dust down the puppets, animate the Victorian world ... and give it its characteristic flavour of cunning, greed and good spirits' promises the reader a rich sojourn into the 'the Georgian era [as it] gave way to that of Victoria.'

For this purpose, the work has been structured in a way that allows the reader to dip into different aspects of the period. In the chapter entitled 'City Lights,' Ackroyd explores life in Dickensian London and makes passing reference to the Mancunian novels. He does not provide any direct quotes or analyses of these texts, nor does he explore the well-documented social, political and religious pre-occupations and conflicts between the industrialised north and factory-owning classes of the south. The chapter entitled 'Blood Lust' discusses diverse military engagements including the Second Opium War, the Crimean War and the conflict in Ireland. Well-known political personalities such as Palmerston, Disraeli and Sir Robert Peel are given more detailed treatment in this work, although coverage of Queen Victoria provides few new insights into the woman, her motivations or her reign. The remarkable industrial and scientific advancements of Victorian Britain are treated perfunctorily in the nine-page chapter 'Steam and Speed.'

There are some notable omissions from the cursory chapter on women entitled 'The Angels,' such as any reference to the highly significant Married Women's Property Act, 1882. Sometimes in choosing to illustrate a point using 'great nineteenth-century novelists,' either Ackroyd does not fully develop his argument, or the obscurity of the reference clouds his meaning. An example of this is when he links class with religious evangelism by relying upon a quote from Mrs Gaskell's *Mary Barton*, but fails to make mention of Trollope's quintessential critique of religious and social mores in *The Barchester Chronicles*.

A lack of citations, particularly for the primary sources used, makes the book frustrating for the academic reader, and the illustrations are frequently provided without context, explanation or accurate dating. The bibliography indicates that the author has delved deeper in some areas of personal interest, but with only a handful of references to research post-2010 and the bulk of references made to twentieth-century works, recent scholarship is decidedly lacking. A volume such as this, being the fifth volume of Ackroyd's six-part *History of England*, will by its nature compromise depth for breadth. *Dominion* is therefore most useful as an overview, a book that assists in identifying interests for more detailed readings, or to provide a broad understanding of historical setting and context for English Literature or middle years History.