ALTERNATE WORLD:

Edwin A. Abbott’s criticism on Victorian Society in his novel “Flatland“

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1. Preface-Why did I choose this topic?

The topic of my report goes about two centuries back in time. It refers to the reign of Queen Victoria in the 19th century.

First of all, it is important to say that Queen Victoria, who still today belongs to the most famous persons in Great Britain\(^1\), also because she was Queen for a long time and a whole era was named by her, ruled in a time of progress and development. As well, there were great economical, social and cultural changes during her reign, this time is being considered with many prejudices, too. The novel “Flatland” does not try to show the “good sides” of the Victorian era, but it lets the reader see what else is hidden behind social changes during this time and which follows it had for the population and the social structure.

One reason for which I chose this novel is to understand history from another point of view because “Flatland” is a fiction, but it alludes to true historical facts by criticising Victorian society. So, it is important not just to see the achievements of this time, but to see the negative sides for the population, too.

An interesting point of the book is that it is divided into two parts, whereas the first one is about a “Flatlander” describing his world and experiences he makes in course of the book. This part I will be concentrating on. The second part is very mathematical and geometrical because it is playing with theories of further dimensions, as the third and the fourth dimension. On the one hand, it is interesting to show the diversity of “Flatland” and its other aspects. On the other hand, it also refers to the topic of the novel because it shows the limited sight and life of the people not developing further in their way of life. I think that one can relate this to today, too. Sometimes you just have your own point of view and do not look above it or have different opinions from yours.

But, to come back to my actual topic, I would like to make history of Victorian Society more clearly, to have a sight into Victorian lifestyle and the opinion of the author Edwin A. Abbott. Finally, he presents it as a parody in a more exaggerated and ironic way, but with true facts behind it which I would like to investigate more and come to a final conclusion.

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\(^1\) Jahnson, Christa: Queen Victoria: Symbol einer Epoche, in: In the Footsteps of Queen Victoria, hrsg.von: Jahnson, Christa, Lit 2003, p. 3
2.1 The Author: Edwin Abbott Abbott

The author of the novel “Flatland” Edward Abbott Abbott is born in London on 20 December 1838. He is educated at the City of London School where he studies mathematics. There he wins a scholarship to St. John’s College in Cambridge, studies classics and becomes a college fellow.

First, he is ordained to become a priest, but he resigns the fellowship in order to be able to marry. After his marriage to Mary Elizabeth Rangeley, he works as the headmaster of the Great City of London School from the years 1865 to 1889. Within this time, he becomes a famous and celebrated person because he inspires many pupils who are later known in a range of subjects and professions, as teaching future prime minister H. H. Asquith. Through him the school became “one of the best in the country.”\(^2\) In addition to his profession as a headmaster, his other vocation lies in writing. Because of that, he retires with 50 years to devote more time to literature and writing.

“As a scholar, Abbott was very broad writing excellent works on a wide variety of topics. He published Shakespearean Grammar (1870), English Lessons for English People (1871) and How to Write Clearly (1872). He was a leading expert on Francis Bacon, published Bacon and Essex (1877) and wrote an introduction to Bacon’s Essays (1886). Some of his works on textual criticism contain excellent statistical analyses, for example Johannine Vocabulary (1905) and Johannine Grammar (1906). Among numerous religious writings we mention Philochristus (1878), Onesimus: Memoirs of a Disciple of Paul (1882), and Silanus the Christian (1906).”\(^3\) Flatland is published by him in the year 1884, but it is written under the pseudonym A. Square. A. Square is playing the main role in the novel, explaining and telling the story of his world Flatland by being a square of the middle class. On the one hand, this book is a parody of Victorian lifestyle, values and society. On the other hand, Abbott uses geometrical and natural scientific theories, as Einstein’s theory of relativity to establish three and four-dimensional worlds. This shows his interest in subjects as chemistry and English literature which were taught as subjects at his school, too.

In the year 1926 Edwin A. Abbott dies of influenza at his home in Hempstead, England where he is buried at the Hempstead cemetery.\(^4\)

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2.2 Summary of the novel “Flatland”

The novel “Flatland, A Romance of Many Dimensions” is written by Edwin Abbott Abbott and was published in the year 1884 during the Victorian Era. It is divided up into two parts and treats the story of A. Square, an inhabitant of the two-dimensional world Flatland who explains his world and gets to know one- and three-dimensional worlds which he never believed in before.

First of all, the narrator A. Square is a person who has the shape of a square because he lives in the two-dimensional world Flatland in which society is build up as a hierarchy related to the rights of the classes: The Women are Straight Lines, after that Soldiers and Lower Workmen follow as Triangles, Equilateral Triangles are formed by the Middle Class and the Professional Gentlemen form Squares or Five-Sided Figures. Only the Nobility begins at Six-Sided Figures and rises in the number of their sides until it cannot be distinguished from a Circle anymore. Then it will belong to the Priests, the Highest Class of all.

But, the different classes are hardly to recognize from one another because in a two-dimensional world all figures appear as straight lines. So, to recognize each other, methods of Hearing and recognition of Feeling are used by the Women and Lower Classes. Among the Higher Classes difficult recognition of Sight is taught in University Courses. In Flatland, there is no sun, so geographic directions as north and south have to be recognized by different methods, too.

Moreover, Flatland is strictly ruled by the Higher Classes and the State’s Law. The houses must have a certain figure and Women and Men have to use different entrances. All rights of the inhabitants are related to their knowledge, intelligence and ability which are stated by the aristocratic constitution and the Law of Nature. But, not all persons are regularly shaped and the ones who are irregular are not allowed. Because of that an Irregular Figure either is destroyed, or under police surveillance without any rights or privileges. To revolutionaries the same thing happens because they are sent to prison, so that the order in Flatland does not get out of governmental control.

In part two of the novel, A. Square has a vision of the one-dimensional world Lineland. There all motion is limited to a Point and a Straight Line. A. Square wants to explain his world to the king of Lineland, but he is not successful because the king cannot imagine this world. At the end, he becomes very furious and A. Square awakes of his dream. At the same day, he is visited by a stranger from Spaceland who has the shape of a cube. It is the last day of the 1999th year and the stranger from Spaceland wants to explain his
three-dimensional world to a Flatlander. Always before a new century is starting, Spaceland sends an inhabitant to Flatland in order to convince him and his society of a three-dimensional world. First, A. Square cannot believe him, either. But after some time, he is able to see Spaceland and gets convinced of more dimensions than the one he lives in. Now his task is to convince his other people, too. He starts with his grandson who does not believe him and then goes to the government. Finally, the same as in Lineland happens to him, since there is nobody believing him and his try to convince the President fails. At the end, he is treated with disbelief and insanity, so that he is lastly sent to prison, being very unhappy, but still believing what the person from Spaceland once told him.
2.3 Victorian Society

Queen Victoria was the longest British reigning monarch with nearly 64 years of rule (1832 - 1901). Next to social and economic changes caused by the industrialisation, her British Empire was huge by having many dominions and colonies as Victoria was also “Empress of India”.\(^5\)

In this time, the role of women, the rising of the middle class and the family are common and important values, as they were important for Queen Victoria, too. The social structure at this time can be divided up in a class system beginning with the working class, the lower middle class, the middle class and ending with the aristocracy, the upper class. On the one hand, this time is progress-oriented because of the industrialisation which brought new jobs, technological development and social mobility with it. On the other hand, it caused urbanisation through growing towns and cities to which the rural population moved. The population in towns doubled in contrast to the population on the countryside because new jobs and employees were needed for production of goods and building railroads. That is the reason why the middle class rose and grew in population and diversity: “No part of British society grew more rapidly; none advanced its position or asserted its values more effectively”.\(^6\) They worked as merchants, entrepreneurs, businessmen and in insurance companies, as well as shopkeepers and teachers who belong to the lower middle class. So, this class established new and aspired towards prestige and wealth. The lower class to which belongs the working class, meaning labourers, earned their money in wages and worked in the towns, factories and mines. But, their biggest problem was to adapt to these new circumstances and to learn other jobs than before because “Many skilled artisans found themselves in direct competition with new forms of production.”\(^7\) Furthermore, the life of the working class was unsecure because there was no “unemployment insurance” or any “medical or health plans”\(^8\) Since all depended on financial status in Victorian Society, the poor working class was not able to rise in the social stratum. Self help-organisations as the trade union were the only ways to prevent the people from economic misfortune.

\(^5\) Jahnson, Christa: Queen Victoria: Symbol einer Epoche, in: In the Footsteps of Queen Victoria, hrsg.von: Jahnson, Christa, Lit 2003, p. 41
\(^7\) Black, Eugene C.: Victorian Culture and Society, Macmillan 1973, p. 152
\(^8\) Black, Eugene C.: Victorian Culture and Society, Macmillan 1973, p. 154
If all that did not help, they only had the possibility to go to the pawnshop or to live under poor conditions in working houses which were established after the Poor Law Amendment Act in 1834.\footnote{Picard, Liza: The Working Classes and the Poor, Workhouses. O.J. Online in Internet: http://www.bl.uk/learning/histcitizen/victorians/poor/workingclass.html [Stand 4.4.2012]}

In comparison to the working class, the upper classes and the aristocracy had a luxurious and wealthy life by having “\textit{enhanced standards of life and expectations}” what is summed up by the term “\textit{Victorian prosperity}”. Because of the technological development at this time, Victorian fashion and a wider range of cheap goods established and brought a better living standard for many Britons with it.\footnote{Black, Eugene C.: Victorian Culture and Society, Macmillan 1973, p. 155}

During the Victorian Era, the role of the woman is also an important aspect because women were regarded as being “\textit{inferior}” and the domestic family life was the core of the society in which the man as the patriarch had to be supported by his wife.\footnote{Meyer, Michael: The Pleasures of Men and the Subjection of Women, in: In the Footsteps of Queen Victoria, hrsg.von: Johnson, Christa, Lit 2003, p. 180} Women had to care for the household, educate the children and “\textit{fulfil their central function in society to promote others’ happiness and morals, and to serve as [...] companions to men}”\footnote{Meyer, Michael: The Pleasures of Men and the Subjection of Women, in: In the Footsteps of Queen Victoria, hrsg.von: Johnson, Christa, Lit 2003, p. 182} Even Queen Victoria resisted against Women’s Emancipation and in 1878 schools were only allowed to teach girls in domestic economy and later in cooking. Universities did not really accept women, either. In 1881, the Cambridge University offered the same education to men and women, but they did not award women degrees.\footnote{Meyer, Michael: The Pleasures of Men and the Subjection of Women, in: In the Footsteps of Queen Victoria, hrsg.von: Johnson, Christa, Lit 2003, pp. 189 - 190} If women worked in factories, it was under bad conditions and they did not receive the same income as men received. So, they did not receive the same approval as men, too. Furthermore, they were not allowed to vote since men represented their wives and were afraid of women’s competition.\footnote{Meyer, Michael: The Pleasures of Men and the Subjection of Women, in: In the Footsteps of Queen Victoria, hrsg.von: Johnson, Christa, Lit 2003, p. 197}

The cultural aspects were also important for Victorian lifestyle as fashion, music and theatre played an important role, even for the lower classes.\footnote{Black, Eugene C.: Victorian Culture and Society, Macmillan 1973, p. 279 - 280}

In general, this time was marked by the high status of the family and the technological development through the industrialisation which caused new jobs and urbanisation. But, because of that, the class division became worse and social distinctions became much clearer.
3. The Influence and Intention of criticism on Victorian Society by the fictional society of „Flatland“

3.1 Hierarchy and different classes of society

In the novel “Flatland”, the society is build up in a social class system consisting of five different classes, whereas the class someone belongs to becomes visible through one’s physical form: “Our Women are Straight Lines. Our Soldiers and Lowest Classes of Workmen are Triangles with two equal sides [...]”\(^{16}\) With the rise of the number of sides, the rise in class of society is connected. So, it is impossible for someone of the Lower Class to become a Priest in the Highest Class because his physical form will never allow him to do so. The author Edwin A. Abbott already appeals to Victorian Society’s class distinction which consisted of the low-, middle, and higher class, whereas in Flatland Women have a special status because they are at the bottom of the class system and they do not have a say on anything, to which I will come later.

Furthermore, Abbott describes an evolutionary process because he says that a male child shall always have one more side than his father, “so that each generation shall (as a rule) rise up one step in the scale of development and nobility”. This is a Victorian conviction in which the main point of progress in evolution is related to progressing in a higher status, meaning to get better financial - and better living standards towards a higher class. This belief could probably come from a misinterpretation of Darwin’s theory of evolution which he elaborated during Victorian time.\(^{17}\)

However, it is rapidly recognized that this “Law of Nature” does not apply for everyone because the Lower Classes as the Soldiers, Workmen and Women who are at the bottom of the hierarchy are not able to rise in society:”[...] and the son of an Isosceles [...] remains Isosceles still.”\(^{18}\) But, if the case is found that an Equal-Sided Triangle is produced from Isosceles parents, the child will be immediately taken away from his parents and is given to childless Equilateral parents where it shall be prevented from falling back into his old hereditary level.\(^{19}\)

On the one hand, this is connected with the “common [Victorian] feature of hierarchical societies that the lower classes ‘know their place’ and do not strive to improve their

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\(^{17}\) Stewart, Ian: The Annotated Flatland, Basic Books 2008, p. 45
situation.” Furthermore, they know that a try to rebel against the reigning nobility would lead to “violent repression” and because of that, “life is much simpler if you know your place”.

On the other hand, the lower classes become hopeful when they see that “improvements for their children” are achieved and the upper classes permit these. So, this has advantages for the upper classes because they do not have to be afraid of revolutions and by the principle of permitting “improvements” to the lower classes they are able to “keep the masses quiet”.20

To conclude, Abbott strongly criticises on Victorian class system and the differences between the classes, especially the lower classes who do not have a chance on rising up in the social scale and depend on decisions of the reigning classes. Next to all progress through industrialisation, the class system was strengthened and only improvements for the middle and upper classes were guaranteed, but the situation of the lower classes became worse.

Abbott was “more egalitarian than those of many of his contemporaries”. Finally, he shows this in the “attitudes of his school” where he states that they are “progressive”, “liberal and democratic”, that the “doors of C.L.S. [City of London School] were open from the first” and “he founded a scholarship for a Board School boy at C.L.S.”21 This shows his interest in educating everyone and that he did not make big differences between education of females and lower or higher classes.

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3.2 Rights and relations among the class system

In the fictional novel “Flatland”, the society as already known, is made up in a class system where the affiliation depends on ability, knowledge and intelligence of the person. The Priests, as the Highest Class of all, have the shape of a Circle although they are no real circles; they have so many sides that they cannot be distinguished from a circle anymore. But, the Circles are very keen on maintaining their race because they have the problem that, as the race climbs higher in social scale, the fertility declines in the same proportion. The priests are at the top of all classes: “our priests are administrators of all Business, Art, and Science; Directors of Trade, Commerce, Generalship, [...] doing nothing themselves, they are the Causes of everything worth doing, that is done by others.”

The rights and education of the individuals belonging to their Classes depend on “one’s social pedigree” which predominates all other things “-talent, intelligence, ability- just as it did for the Victorians.” So, a Woman will never be able to receive the same education as a Priest or even a person of the Middle Class. For an example, the methods of recognition of one another in Flatland are divided up in the different Classes. Women are only allowed to use the method of recognition of feeling and the Circles use the higher recognition of sight which is learned in University, but will never be allowed to Women. “Attend to your Configuration” is the principle of the rights of every inhabitant in Flatland. The Priests are the Chiefs in the government. They have more influence when they have more sides and so is their “policy of making Configuration the leading idea in every mind” what means that the rights of every person and his status in society depends on his Configuration, his body shape.

This also determines the behaviour to other Classes and among the Classes itself. A Woman with no rights depends on her husband and is a part of the Lowest Class of all where she has no chance to rise up in the social scale of development. The same thing is with the Soldiers and Lowest Workmen who are servants in Flatland and only have a few rights. Both do not receive any approval by the Priests and are regarded as servants, but nothing more. For an example, a Woman in Flatland has no reason and Men only

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talk to Women about irrational and emotional topics because Women do not understand rational thinking, thus they are not taught in arithmetic and mathematics. This education is guaranteed to boys of the Upper Classes, whereas the Lower Classes have to help their parents to be able to survive and do not have the time to go to University as a “common Tradesman cannot afford to let his son spend a third of his life in abstract studies”, whereas the children of the Higher Classes “are sent to higher seminaries of an exclusive character [...]”

The author Edwin A. Abbott shows the distance and approval among the social classes in Victorian time. There is few acceptance to the lower classes, especially to women. The reigning nobility creates laws and regards the lower classes as their servants and as being inferior to them. That is why they shall not receive the same education as the children of the upper classes and in Flatland “among our Higher Classes ‘Feeling’ is discouraged and absolutely forbidden.” At the end, he alludes to the different education of boys (only upper class boys) and girls who were forbidden to learn sciences and mathematics.

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3.3 The Status of Women

As women had no acceptance in Victorian society the novel “Flatland” wants to impress this status and wants to show that the typical roles of women were unnecessarily limited to domestic domains and dependence on their husbands. At the beginning of the novel the status and rights of Women in the two-dimensional world Flatland already become clear because a Woman is at the bottom of the social hierarchy and does not have any rights hitherto. Being at this position, she is unrecognized and unnoticed by the rest of the population because she is distanced from the other classes: “Just so is it is with one of our Women. When her side is turned toward us, [...] then we see nothing but a highly lustrous point; but when the back is presented to our view [...] her hinder extremity serves her as a kind of Invisible Cap.”

That is why Women in Flatland depend on a Code they shall obey to, so that they do not become dangerous for the public when they are invisible and a collision with a Woman could be a peril. So, their obligation is to move all the time and to keep up a “Peace-cry” and some Women are only allowed to walk outside with her son or her husband. But, this is not the only danger going out from a woman. If women are not constantly suppressed by and “inferior” to men and their husbands, they will be able to “vent their spleen upon their husbands and children” because of dissatisfaction and they can even destroy a whole male population. Another point is that Women in Flatland are totally “devoid of brain-power, and have neither reflection, judgement nor forethought, and hardly any memory.” The author underlines the big oppression and assignment to domesticity as women’s tasks during Victorian era. They were not allowed to vote and women had to obey their husbands who were the patriarch of the family, whereas the woman was considered as a childcare provider and a housekeeper, but nothing else. Furthermore, a Woman has to look up to her man who is the “master of the household” and only in houses of the Working Man or respectable Tradesman she is allowed to turn her back towards her husband while doing her household work. In Flatland Women are in the last class and there is nobody who cares about them or appreciates them because they do not have any intelligence and thus, nobody wants to listen to them. “...the wife has absolutely nothing to say, and absolutely no constraint of sense, or conscience to prevent her from saying it, not a few cynics have been found to aver that

they prefer the danger of the death-dealing but inaudible sting to the safe sonorousness of a Woman’s other end.”31 Finally, a Woman in Flatland has absolutely no rights, totally depends on her husband because she does not have any “brain-power” and no chances or hopes to rise in society as male children have. “Once a Woman, always a Woman is a decree of Nature”32

The author Edwin A Abbott shows the Victorian society in which way women are disregarded, humiliated and dependent on their husband. They were not allowed to receive any other education than caring for the household what Abbott found “needlessly limiting” because as a headmaster he was interested in educating women. “In the 1880s he became involved in the promotion and reform of women’s education.”32 Through this he came in contact with several feminists as “Dorothea Buss, [...] headmistress of Cheltenham Ladies’ College”33 and George Eliot, a novelist and a female intellectual who amongst others understood his satirical and ironical intention in his novel Flatland: “By making Flatland men treat their women with undisguised contempt, he was pointing out how common this attitude was in Victorian society” because he was often criticised by others for “the book’s treatment of women”.34

To conclude, one could say that the author wants to show that women do have rights and that they are no machines for the domestic domains. They should be regarded equally to men and should have a right on education. Finally, they should be allowed to give their opinion which was not guaranteed in Victorian era because they did not have the right to vote. They were inferior to their husband and first in 1970 all individual colleges accepted students of both sexes.35

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3.4 The oppression of the nation and revolutions

The oppression of some individual inhabitants in Flatland starts with the segregation and treatment of those people who do not fit into the society of Flatland. Nearly every citizen of Flatland is a Regular Figure because “the social life in Flatland rests upon the fundamental fact that Nature wills all Figures to have their sides equal.”  

But, there are also exceptions as there might occur Figures whose sides are not equal and who are called “Irregular Figures”. Those creatures would break off the whole stability and order of Flatland since Irregular Figures cannot be recognized by the methods of seeing and feeling which would last too long. So, nobody could at least trust each other and could conclude from the profession of this person because he would not know to which Class the Irregular Figure belongs to. “[…] if no one could calculate the Regularity of a single Figure in the company, all would be chaos and confusion, and the slightest panic would cause serious injuries, or – if there happened to be any Women or Soldiers present- perhaps considerable loss of life.”

To conclude, in Flatland Irregular Figures are either watched by the police, held as slaves and clerks in a seventh class without any rights or murdered at birth.

Another reason for the oppression of inhabitants in Flatland by the reigning Nobility is the fear of a revolutionary act against the stability of the country and the privileges of the aristocracy.

In the history of Flatland, one incident is known where this case happened: The Universal Colour Bill. This system was launched in by Chromatistes, a revolutionary pentagon and it rapidly spread over the whole country. At this time, it issued to paint every figure - dependent on the number of his sides - in different colours and made distinction of Figures by recognition of sight superfluous. But, for the reigning Nobility it brought one big disadvantage with it because it made Women and Circles equal. By having no sides and using the same colours, Women and the Highest Class of all looked the same way and were hardly to differ from one another. Because of that, the Priests were very dissatisfied with their position and their fear became much bigger as the inhabitants also claimed that all Classes should become equal and aristocratic privileges should be abolished because they were superfluous.

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But, with help of military force, the Nobility was at least able to oppress the revolution and to safeguard their position and aristocratic privileges in the society. Finally, the Universal Colour Bill had not been successful and no change to the social class system was brought. All revolutionaries came into prison, so that they were no danger for the government anymore.

In this context, Edwin Abbott Abbott appeals to Victorian methods of oppression of the own people by segregating the ones who did not fit into the society and revolutionaries who were oppressed by military force. On the one hand, he mentions the Victorian sight of Irregularity because this society had very less tolerance for it. In Victorian times it was associated with “criminal tendency”. Furthermore, they blamed an abnormal behaviour on a different body shape and the “unusuals were segregated from the rest of society in asylums.” There they could be watched by ordinary people through “viewing galleries” in order to deter them from “activities and antics of the inmates.”  

On the other hand, the author points to the fact that the Victorians did not hesitate with using “military force to suppress the rights of subject people”. One famous example related to this is the “Mutiny of 1857”: India, as a British dominion, was divided into several units. But, in the year 1857, Indian troops revolted against British rule and Christian values which contravened against their own religion. They also had a leader like the revolution in Flatland and the fighting went on until to the year 1858.

However, the British acted very cruel and thousands of civilians and hundreds of Indian troops were killed during the fights and after “perfunctory trials” what finally led to suppression and the British rule over India.  

To conclude, the author shows the methods of oppression during Victorian time in comparison to the life of the inhabitants of Flatland, whereby the reader recognizes how similar Victorian behaviour on minorities and people with a different behaviour is.

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41 Stewart, Ian : The Annotated Flatland, Basic Books 2008, p. 95
4. How did “Flatland” affect Victorian readers and what impact did the novel have?

The novel “Flatland” has been translated into at least nine languages and there exist twelve different English-language editions which are currently in print. Furthermore, there are numerous editions with introductions by different persons. But, above all these facts Flatland did not have a big effect in Victorian times. First of all, it is difficult to establish a common or shared opinion of the book by Victorian readers. This results because many Victorian readers know Abbott’s works from theological and scholarly background and not from a social satire, as Flatland to a big part is. On the one hand, some contemporary readers recognized the satire in Flatland which mirrored the regulated and stratified Victorian society that also controlled his own life and profession as a headmaster. On the other hand, many readers misread the novel and understood it as a misogynist book about women whereas Abbott was hardly criticised. That is why he published a second and revised edition in which he justifies his novel: “It has been objected that he is a woman-hater; and as this objection has been vehemently urged by those whom Nature’s decree has constituted the somewhat larger half of the Spaceland race, I should like to remove it, so far as I can honestly do so.” Unfortunately, a large archive of Abbott’s letters and personal documents of the City of London School has been mysteriously disappeared about 60 years ago. Moreover, the history of the school only shortly mentions the book and Abbott’s obituaries and the “Dictionary of National Biography” do not mention it at all.

One thing which is known is that the novel was very popular in the United States because it has been reprinted several times after the American edition was published in 1885. But, it seems to have disappeared from the British scene until the year 1926 where several editions were printed, but the effect of the novel during the Victorian era was very low and not many reactions are found although the author created a work on investigation of social class distinction.

Finally, it was Abbott’s intention to let the people see themselves in which country and under which circumstances they live. It has never been his intention to interpret his work to the reader by himself.

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5. Epilogue

In my Jahresarbeit I wanted to investigate the Victorian era, especially the Victorian society at the time of the rule of Queen Victoria and the criticism on it by the fictional novel “Flatland”.

During the work on the topic I learned a lot about the historical aspects and could gain more knowledge about Victorian people and their living standards at this time. Thus, it is very important to say that especially women had a very hard and difficult life because they were oppressed by their husbands and put into typical “female domains” at this time, as caring for the household. From my point of view, the attitude and will of the author Edwin A. Abbott is shown very well in this context because he was different from the majority of men. His very interest and wish always lays in educating what made him such a famous and celebrated headmaster, too. That is why, he wanted to educate all people and he did not care about to which sex or class they belong.

For me, this is the point that makes “Flatland” a novel which is not just a “little parody” on Victorian society. The author transfers a message with his novel because he is showing his own people how they treat the other ones. Of course, the situation as it now is cannot be compared to these times anymore because the social structure has changed.

But, I think his message that education is for everyone and everybody should be treated equally is still current and can also be projected on daily life because today not everyone is treated equally to the other ones.

What I think is a pity, is that the novel was not accepted or perceived by the Victorian readers at this time for who this book was determined. But, maybe a reason for this is that the novel shows a “lost situation” because it showed the situation of the society, but it did not give any advice or help to the people as finally A. Square himself is in prison. However, it was the intention of the author to let the people think about their situation themselves and improve it by themselves. To conclude, the picture at the bottom shows that “Flatland” is a book with more dimensions than the aspects of criticism on Victorian society because it names different mathematical and natural scientific theories which should not be neglected, too although they did not play a role for my Jahresarbeit, but make the novel diverse and have “many dimensions” for the reader.
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