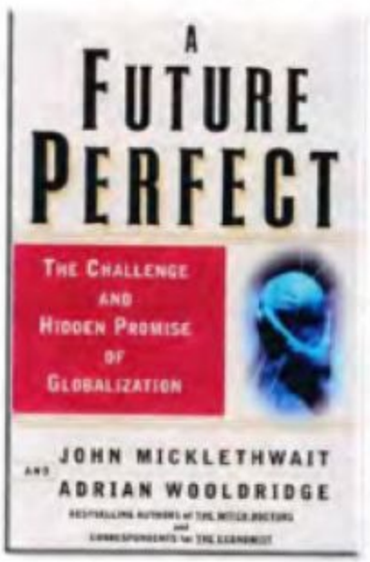
Perhaps we resemble the Victorians more than we think.

A Future Perfect: The Challenge and Hidden Promise of Globalization
By John Micklethwait and Adrian Wooldridge
416 pages, Crown Business, $28

LIKE US, THE VICTORIANS lived in an industrial society undergoing a technological revolution. It shouldn't be surprising, then, that Marie Corelli became Queen Victoria's—and England's—favorite author with her first novel in 1886, *A Romance of Two Worlds*. The heroine visits a utopian Saturn, a technologically fantastic Jupiter, and the universe's center, where God dwells as electricity. In Corelli's novels, primitive science fiction and spiritualism blend bizarrely. In *The Mighty Atom* (1906), for example, a rich atheist excludes religion from his son's education, and the boy's tutors—teaching a Victorian version of the big bang theory—explain that the universe resulted from a primordial atom's explosion. When his mother leaves his autocratic father and a little girl he loves dies, the heartbroken boy hangs himself after praying to the highest power he knows of—the Mighty Atom.



After her death in 1924, many of Corelli's fans believed she'd predicted wireless technology; during television's early days, the "telly" became "the Marie" in Cockney rhyming slang. Marie Corelli's popularity is a weird historical footnote to the fact that the Victorians experienced disruptive technologies and social upheavals equalling any we face today. Indeed, when the percentage of 19th century commerce that was international is reckoned—and considered with the immigration flows in an era when passports were unnecessary—the Victorian age depended more on globalization than does our own.

Which bring us to *A Future Perfect: The Challenge and Hidden Promise of Globalization*. The authors are John Micklethwait and Adrian Wooldridge, two editors at the *Economist*, and they start by making the point that the world has reached this juncture before. Taking the figure of economist John Maynard Keynes as emblematic of the 20th century's drift away from and then back to globalization, they quote Keynes's description of that pre-1914 era when an inhabitant of London, drinking tea in bed, could order by telephone "the various products of the whole earth" and invest internationally, since the majority of the securities traded in London were foreign ones. Keynes, writing this retrospectively in 1919 in *The Economic Consequences of the Peace*, the work that made him famous, predicted that the settlement imposed by the Allies after World War I would lead to economic collapse and the resumption of war in Europe. Mr. Micklethwait and Mr. Wooldridge show how by the late '20s, as the economic scene deteriorated, Keynes himself retreated from being a devout advocate of free trade into a protectionist. He reëmbraced globalization only in 1944, presiding at the Bretton Woods conference and pushing through creation of the International Monetary Fund and World Bank.

So far, so good. However, *A Future Perfect*'s authors have effectively reproduced an *Economist* piece at book length, down to those subheadings with which a magazine's copy editors break up articles for easier reading. Walter Bagehot, the *Economist*'s Victorian founder, wrote what all successful journalists know: "The two million, or whatever number of copies it may be, they publish, are not purchased because the buyers wish to know new truth. The purchaser desires an article which he can appreciate at first sight; which he can lay down and say: 'An excellent article...exactly my own sentiments.'" So it is with this book. Readers will confront unexceptional good sense, not exceptionally novel ideas.

Shouldn't we, given the fevered rhetoric pro and con globalization, take all the modest good sense we can get? It's a little less than some of us—this reviewer, anyway—might have hoped for. Sure, the points can't be made too often that global economic integration isn't a zero-sum game; that globalization's costs tend to be more obvious to many folks than its benefits, which they attribute to their own virtuous lifestyles; and that the hard truth is that the bigger the gains from trade, the greater the dislocations, because trade reduces demand for people and capital where those are less efficient.

A Future Perfect makes all those kinds of points. But it's too moderate to press hard on the question that Youssef Boutros Ghali, Egypt's trade minister, asked after Seattle: "Why, all of a sudden, when third world labor has proved to be competitive, do industrial countries start feeling concerned about our workers?"

Why does a speaker at a rally against Chinese entrance into the World Trade Organization, for that matter, rant that 20 percent of America's populace owns almost half America's wealth and in the same breath rage that his audience might be deprived—though they're among the 20 percent of Earth's population that consumes 80 percent of global resources—of some

SHELF LIFE

The Verificationist, by Donald Antrim (Alfred A. Knopf, $21)

In this era of psychopharmacology, the Freudian theory that human behavior can be explained by one's unconscious desires and repressed traumas has fallen by the wayside in favor of the view that most psychological disorders are mere chemical imbalances. These days Prozac is far more likely than talk shrinkery to be prescribed for depression.

To add insult to injury, psychoanalytical explanations are losing their hold on the popular imagination, with evolutionary biology—however disgusting and specious a theory it may be—rising as an alternative explanation for behavior. Sexual promiscuity, for instance, is now frequently explained in pseudo-Darwinian terms (men cheat because of a biological drive to promulgate their genes), rather than as a result of social conditions or upbringing.

Given the demise of psychoanalysis, Donald Antrim's *The Verificationist* can be taken either as the last in a dying line of psychoanalytic fiction or a lampoon of the field. The story centers around Thomas, a puckish, middle-aged psychoanalyst who works at the Krakower Institute. The majority of the action takes place at a pancake dinner he attends with several colleagues from his department.

At dinner the situation disintegrates quickly. Thomas behaves childishly and erratically to get attention, much to the chagrin of his companions. It becomes clear that he is as psychologically stunted as many of his patients. No one is more aware of this fact than Thomas himself, who readily admits that he is avoiding having a baby with his wife because he doesn't want to accept his own adulthood.

Dr. Bernhardt, the director of the institute, refuses to let Thomas continue his antics. Immobilized, Thomas regresses to an infantile state and fantasizes that he is floating near the ceiling. From this vantage point, he begins playing out the psychosexual dramas of the department as he quietly observes the tensions and desires at work in the booths below. Events get ever more surreal and sexually charged. Thomas generates an elaborate fantasy, which becomes creepier with each passing page, involving himself and a young waitress.

The novel ends with a feeling of bankruptcy and decay. Thomas has grown no more mature, and the pathetic lives of his fellow analysts have been laid bare. *The Verificationist* is definitely not for the literal-minded, and even readers who are prepared for Mr. Antrim's farcical look at the foibles of psychoanalysis will find this an unsettling tale. —*Peter Rojas*

of their wealth? How can a German Green Party official (one Benedikt Haerlin) say that saving African or Asian lives is secondary to preventing the spread of genetically modified food, after an African official of the United Nations tells him that the organic farming practiced by 800 million of the world's poor isn't working?

Of course, this kind of thing is the genuinely identifying behavior of those habituated to privilege in our planetary class system. For the fact is that anybody in the developed nations is wealthier than the vast majority elsewhere; generally, the most impoverished inner-city American family is richer than the richest household in a village in the undeveloped world. Mightn't we even ask ourselves, then, whether we should assert that people in industrialized countries have entitlements to retain the same manufacturing jobs they've held for decades if folks anywhere else can do them more efficiently? It's not as though enough qualified Americans exist to fill all this country's well-paid jobs—this reviewer knows a kid who flunked out of university with a heroin problem, cleaned up, qualified after four months for Microsoft certification, and started his first job at $125,000 annually.

But most people in the industrialized nations won't accept the hardships of reëducation for such jobs happily. The question the authors of *A Future Perfect* implicitly raise, but are too much the professional journalists to ask aloud, is this: if people in the developing countries can do those manufacturing jobs and need them—and we mostly don't—shouldn't they have them? Isn't it their turn?

To ask this question out loud would be radically naive, of course. Yet globalization, Mr. Micklethwait and Mr. Wooldridge have already warned us, isn't at all inevitable. Politicians, they complain, promote it to voters in terms of gains from exports, then accede readily to protectionist measures. Complaining that politicians in a democracy respond to their constituents, though, is as futile as preaching free-market dogma at people worried about losing their jobs. The only option may be to reframe the debate about globalization by publicly putting the question in front of voters in these terms: isn't it their turn?

Which brings us back to the Victorians. Like them, we have decided that free markets will determine in large measure how we live. However, since most of us lack the inflexible religious beliefs that informed Victorian morality, the idea that many in the industrialized nations would accept globalization's disruptions if these were framed as morally right seems improbable initially. Yet perhaps we resemble the Victorians more than we think. After all, the master idea of our age and theirs—the progressive accumulation of human knowledge and technology, and their democratization through the markets—has been shared by no other era. We even believe that, as the Bible says, we all go to a common place. Though it's not the grave, of course, but that life beyond which is—as Marie Corelli would have understood—the world of the future.

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