**THE VICTORIAN AGE (1830-1901)**

* Some of the writers of the period celebrated the fast-paced expansion of England whereas some of them felt that leadership in commerce and industry was being paid for at a terrible price in human happiness, that a so-called progress had been gained only by abandoning traditional rhythms of life and traditional patterns of human relationships.
* Many writers dealt with the currently political matters in their works. They show the most marked response to the industrial and political scene. Charles Kingsley, Elizabeth Gaskell, and Benjamin Disraeli are some of them.
* In this period writers had begun to define themselves in opposition to a general public; poets pursued art for art’s sake; mass publication included less and less serious literature.
* The novel was dominant form in Victorian literature. **The 19th c. was to produce work in fiction of far greater significance than the ‘terror’ tale.**
* **As their size suggests, Victorian novels seek to represent a large and comprehensive social world, with the variety of classes and social settings that constitute a community. They contain a multitude of characters and a number of plots. They present themselves as realistic, that is, as representing a social world that shares the features of the one we inhabit.** As the novels, such as *Jane Eyre* and *Vanity Fair*, indicate, Victorian society was preoccupied not only with legal and economic limitation on women’s lives but with the very nature of woman. As Victorian novels illustrate, the basic problem was political, economic, and educational. It was how women were regarded, and regarded themselves, as members of a society.
* Whether written by women or men, the Victorian novel was extraordinarily various. It included a wealth of styles and genres from the extravagant comedy of Dickens to the Gothic romances of the Brontë sisters, from the satire of Thackeray to the probing psychological fiction of Eliot, from the social and political realism of Trollope to the sensation novels of Wilkie Collins.
* Jane Austen was one of the most important fiction writers of the 19thc.
* For the past she has no curiosity, and the events which stirred the Europe of her day leave no impression on her pages. In the same manner she detaches herself from the weakness of her predecessors.
* She regarded the novel as a form of art which required a close and exacting discipline.
* There is a narrow circle in her works.
* Her art exacts the novel shall have a classical precision of structure. This central design is manipulated through incidents exactly defined in their realism, and all regulated for their function in the novel as a whole. Added to this is the gift of phrase, humorous, illuminating, and economical.
* She had a gift for dialogue.
* Her later novels have a mere complex portrayal of character, a more subtle irony, a deeper, possibly a warmer-hearted attitude to the players on her scene.
* **In the 19th c. novel Charles Dickens is preeminent. The comedy is never superimposed, for it is an effortless expression of a comic view of life.**
* Dickens seems to see things differently, an amusing and exaggerated way, and he plunges with much exuberance from one adventure to another, without any thought of plot or design.
* He enjoyed life, but hated the social system into which he had been born.
* He was half-way towards being a revolutionary, and in many of the later novels he was to attack the corruptions of his time.
* In *Oliver Twist* pathos is beginning to intrude on humour, and Dickens, appalled by the cruelty of his time, is feeling that he must convey a message through fiction to his hard-hearted.
* With *Nicholas Nickleby* plot grows in importance, and Dickens shows his talent for the melodramatic.
* *Barnaby Rudge* is his first attempt in the historical novel.
* In *David Copperfield* he brought the first phase of his novel-writing to an end in a work with a strong autobiographical element.
* While in all his work Dickens is attacking the social conditions of his time, in *Hard Times* he gives this theme a special emphasis.
* A social bias again governs *Little Dorrit*, in which Dickens attacks the Circumlocution Office and the methods of bureaucracy; the picture of prison life is a serious theme in the portrayal of the debtors’ prison.
* With *The Tale of Two Cities* he returned to the historical novel, and laid his theme in the French Revolution.
* *Vanity Fair* showed William Makepeace Thackeray at his best, in a clear-sighted realism, a deep detestation of insincerity, and a broad and powerful development of narrative.
* His characterization and, indeed, all his effects are more subtle than in Dickens.
* He is less troubled by presenting a moral solution than by evoking an image of life as he has seen it.
* In a very different way Mrs. Gaskell exposed the cruelty of the industrial system as she had seen it in Manchester in *Mary Barton* and *North and South*.
* She had a talent for combining social criticism and melodrama.
* Emily Bronte in her single novel *Wuthering Heights* created somehow out of her own imagination a stark, passionate world.
* Charlotte Bronte combined scenes from her own life, in Yorkshire and in the school at Brussels, with the far richer and more romantic experiences which she had imagined. Thus her work is grounded in realism, but goes beyond into a wish-fulfilment.
* *Jane Eyre* shows the elements that make up her conception of life.
* The air of mystery which can be felt by the reader in every fibre of his being is created in Rochester’s house. This was Charlotte Bronte’s power, the creation of an atmosphere of terror without departing from a middle-class setting.
* George Eliot (Mary Ann Evans) was the most learned of all the women novelists of the 19th c.
* For Spencer, she was ‘morbidly intellectual.’
* *The Mill on the Floss* is about the life of a brother and a sister, which has a melodramatic close.
* In *Middlemarch* she has returned from the past to contemporary times, and gathers into sympathetic portraiture the lives of a number of families and studies their reactions.
* Eliot’s desire is to enlarge the possibilities of the novel as a form of expression: she wishes to include new themes, to penetrate (enter) more deeply into character.
* Henry James’ early novels, such as *Daisy Miller*, portray the contact of Americans with European life.
* He seemed to seek for every fine nuance of feeling and he discriminated, with microscopic clarity, moods and changes that had not been before apparent.
* His strength as an artist lay in the consistency of this invented world, which was so faithfully recorded that often one could believe that it was not invented at all, but only an elegant reality that one had missed.
* An architect by profession, Thomas Hardy gave to his novels a design that was architectural, employing each circumstance in the narrative to one accumulated effect.
* The final impression was one of malign Fate functioning in men’s lives, corrupting their possibilities of happiness, and beckoning (sign) them towards tragedy.
* The intellect contributed to it in revolting against the optimism of 19th c. materialism, and in refusing the consolations of the Christian faith.
* He has pity for the puppets of Destiny.
* He had supremely the gift of anecdote, the power of inventing lively incidents through which his story could move.
* His knowledge of country life made vivid the details in his stories, coloured and attractive in themselves.
* Nature appeared to Hardy as cruel and relentless.
* His kindliest characters are those who have lived away from the towns in a quiet rural life, refusing to challenge the wrathful spirits which play such havoc with life.
* **Victorian poetry developed in the context of the novel. As the novel emerged as the dominant form of literature, poets sought new ways of telling stories of verse.**
* Some poets, like Matthew Arnold, held that poets should **use the heroic materials of the past**; others, like Elizabeth Barrett Browning, felt that **poets should represent “their age”.**
* **Some poets writing in the second half of the c. embrace on Romanticism, art pursued for its own sake**. Turning from the mode of Browning’s early poetry, modelled on Shelley, Browning began writing **dramatic monologues.**
* **Victorian poetry was in long narrative and in the dramatic monologue. It tends to be pictorial, to use detail to construct visual images** **and sound – Victorian poets seek to represent psychology in a different way. Their most distinctive achievement is a poetry of mood and character.**
* **Victorian poetry uses sound in a distinctive way (alliteration, and vowel sounds).**
* **In this age theatrical entertainments were popular; and this popularity made theatre a powerful influence in other genres.** However, in literary terms there were not successful plays on the stage until 1890s.
* **After Ibsen, Shaw began writing “problem plays” that addressed difficult social issues. In the 1890s Shaw and Wilde transformed British theatre with their comic masterpieces. They both created a kind of comedy that took aim at Victorian pretense and hypocrisy.**