

Victorian age

Life



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ABSTRACT

The name Victorian English literature is borrowed from the royal matriarch of England, Queen Victoria, who sat on the throne between 1837 and 1901. The Victorian age had the highest level of progress in the history of English. This progress swept through literature, technological advancement, science, discoveries, political and intellectual transformation, productivity, commerce and practically in all spheres of life.

This study examines the Victorian period extensively, it portrays the features of the period, the success and the generated doubt of the period, the influence on writers of the period and generally the works of the period. It looks into the Victorian novel which is the most prominent genre of the period, poetry, drama, children literature, nature and other literatures that characterized the period. It gives both the students and the lecturer quality background knowledge of the period and the importance of the period in the whole English history.

The exclusive use of the internet and consultations from different books were used to collect data and information about the period like the information containing the features of the age, list of writers and works and all other information inclusive. The result of this project shows that the reign of Victoria and the entire Victorian age is the most progressive and prolific in the English History. Therefore, students should take note that in writing the History of the English people, the Victorian age should never be left out as such record of history will be incomplete. In conclusion, the progress which the Victorian age brought is witnessed in all spheres of life especially The

Industrial Revolution which will be discussed in subsequent paragraphs. The students knowledge of the Victorian age will enable them know the driving force of the age and the impact of this age in literature especially.

INTRODUCTION:

The Historical Development and Characteristics of The Period The Victorian age pned between 1832-1901.

The name Victorian literature which is given to the period is borrowed from the royal matriarch of England, Queen Victoria, who sat on the throne from 20th June 1837 to 22nd January 1901. It is that literature that was produced during her reign. It formed a link and transition between the writers of the romantic period and the very different literature of the 20th century. The literature of the Victorian age entered in a new period after the romantic revival. The literature of this era expressed the fusion of pure romance to gross realism.

In the history of English, the English people never had the kind of progress they had like the progress they had during the Victorian period. The progress pned through education, science, discovery, technological advancement, political transformation, intellectual impact, commerce and production. In 1832, a reformed bill was passed which gave the political sphere a definite and redefined change. It marked what is called Democratization which is the beginning of democracy.

The bill gave middle class political power it needed to consolidate and to hold the economic position. The bill extended voting right to every citizen that had u to 10 pounds as annual income or owned an estate or capital property that amounted to 10 pounds. The bill showed recognition and

voting right for the middle class and even the lower class. This really brought the spread and improvement of democracy on like the previous years where voting years were just for the land and capital owners, the owners of the factors of production and generally the upper class people.

This bill and change made the political sphere enviable at that time. The upper class did not rule wholly, but the middle class also became increasingly powerful and they began to control the economy of England. This democracy arrangement suppressed aristocracy and gave prominence and enthronement to Democracy. In the Victorian age, there was the Great INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION. The Industrial Revolution is a process that began in the middle of the 18th century and covers a wide period of more than a century.

Britain became for the first time the richest country in the world, though they did so at the price of being the first to encounter the immense social problems that arise from the rapid development of urban industry. In 1837, Britain was still a rural nation with 80% of the population living in the countryside. Most people were farmers and others who spun wool and cotton to weave into cloth. Soon new machines were invented that could do these jobs in a fraction of the time. This left many people out of work, so they flocked to the towns in search of jobs in new industries.

By the middle of the nineteenth century over 50% of the population lived in towns and cities. This period marked the important shift from a way of life based on ownership of land (agriculture) to a modern urban economy based on trade and manufacturing. The shift had created a profound economic and social change including a mass migration of workers to Industrial towns. The <https://assignbuster.com/victorian-age/>

Agricultural Revolution had important effects on society. The new methods of farming made it profitable as never before, but they required capital investment and large scale enclosure.

Unable to adapt to the new circumstances the peasant farmer had to sell and he migrated to the colonies or drifted to the industrial towns where there was a growing demand for labour. This rapid urban growth was of course produced by the development of new factories operating with steam power (Watt), other discoveries such as the battery (Volta) and the textile mill (Cartwright). The Industrial Revolution rapidly gained pace during Victoria's reign because of the power of steam. Victorian engineers developed bigger, faster and more powerful machines that could run whole factories.

This led to a massive increase in the number of factories (particularly in textile factories or mills). By 1870, over 100, 000 steam engines were at work throughout Britain. The industry depended on steam and steam depended on coal. The number of coalfields doubled between 1851 and 1881. During the Victorian era, science grew into the discipline it is today. Now, it is worthy of note here that though the Industrial revolution brought wealth for Britain, it also had its disadvantages and negative vices. During the period, many factory owners put profit above the health and safety of their workers.

Children and young women were employed in terrible conditions in textile mills and mines. Furnaces were operated without proper safety checks and safety costumes. Workers in factories and mills were deafened by steam hammers and machinery hours were long and there were no holidays. It was as a result of these poor health and living conditions that writers got inspired

and saw it as an obligation to write about this and be a voice to the voiceless, be an interpreter of the pleas and sufferings of the poor and oppressed. Intellectuals saw it as a duty to speak out against the injustices of the whole new world and revolution.

Furthermore, another feature of the age is the Imperial Expansionism. This is the planting of English colonies. There was a great expansion of Britain in the 19th century. The scattered colonies increased mightily in wealth and power. These colonies were closely federated into an empire with the same speech, ideas and interest in justice and liberty. For Britain, the period witnessed a renewed interest in the empire's overseas holdings. Many places in the British colonies were named after Queen Victoria. This expansion brought about Enthusiasm, anxiety, doubt, uncertainty and discomfort.

The Victorian age was also characterized by Rebellion. The rebellion was especially on the path of the females. The females were tired of the patriarchy in which men possessed all the power. The women were restricted especially by their lack of education and social life. There was the problem of the place of women in the society which was called The Woman Question. The women had very little power and they had to fight for the change they wanted. The women were influenced by the wind of change of the period. By taking up their pens and writing different works (poetry, novels, drama), the women displayed their rebellion.

Not just taking up their pens alone, the subjects on which these women wrote on showed their rebellion and shook off their chains of bondage. Jane Austen and Charlotte Bronte for example were satirical in their novels. They targeted the society, its class structure and the inequality in the society. In

addition, Elizabeth Browning, her sonnets example, ' from sonnets from the Portuguese described the stages for love and relationship. According to her, the subject of love and relationship is a rebellion. If you look and study her life, her father refused to allow her and any of his 10 children to marry.

She eloped with her husband Robert Browning and that also shows her own way of rebellion. Also, her work " the cry of the children" shows the attack on the mining practices where children were employed to work deep in mines as already stated above in the last two paragraphs, where as a result of the industrial revolution, little children and frail women were made to work in deep mines. Browning describes, " They are weeping in the playtime of the others / In the country of the free" (Lines 11-12). Elizabeth wrote to give a voice to this oppression and child abuse thereby condemning it.

The topics of these female writers were really daring and severe. Women of strong character began to open up professions hitherto closed to them. They became writers, journalists and nurses. In industrial areas they began to achieve economic independence at a low level as workers in factories. The Married Women's Property Act of 1882 and 1892 moved the rights and ego of women by removing the husband's control over his wife's money. Yet political changes did not take place until after the First World War when the 1918 Act allowed women over 30 to vote. Women over 21 had to wait until 1939.

The patriarchy was so firm and it took so long for female writers to gain grounds. Some authors like Mary Ann Evans in order to gain recognition published like two (2) of her first novels ' Adam Bede' and ' Sanes of Clerical life' under the false male name (pseudonym) of a male George Elliot.

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Another feature of The Victorian age is Pessimism especially towards Religion. Pessimism is the tendency to believe that bad things will happen. The transition from Romantic poetry to Victorian poetry is dark and pessimistic. Queen Victoria's ideals were very puritan.

Being a puritan meant that she believed in strict Christianity and discipline. But this notion was contended with the advances of the scientific knowledge and surge of the Industrial Revolution and this influenced the works of writers. The heavy reliance on machinery and science during that point in history highly impacted the society. There was that struggle between religion and science. There was an increased level of corruption in the soursed faith-based society due to this struggle. Some writers and their works revealed that they were pessimistic about the future religious morals and values of the society.

This is evident in the work of Lord Alfred Tennyson "In Memoriam" where he explores his feeling of the emerging scientific notions of his days. Lines 5 and 6 state "Are God and nature then at strife, that nature sends such evildreams". He was disheartened by the clash of religion and science and wondered what nature was doing by offering strange evil ideas through science. To buttress my point more on the pessimism and theme of the decline of religion, Matthew Arnold's "stanza from the Grande Chartreuse" also shows his curiosity and opinions about the mixed thoughts and confusion of the society.

According to his culture, he is straight forward in his opinions about the influence of the faith in machinery in the Industrializing age. The perception of God and nature changed negatively with the emerging of machineries.

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The people who believed in the existence and supremacy of God had doubts of him when they saw machineries that could do almost practically everything. Therefore, their faith and loyalty was shifted from God to these machines because they posed to be more reliable and visible than God who was not visible and could just be a mere fragment of their imaginations. Charles Darwin's findings made the situation worse.

His theories of evolution and natural selection brought humanity down to the level of mere animals and reduced the meaning of life to the Struggle for survival. This was contrary to the Christian notion that man was made in the image of God and he can therefore not be referred to as an ' animal'. Therefore, the praise of nature, wild nature to be precised, which was fashionable in the previous age, that is the Romantic age, was not prevalent in the Victorian age. Writers of the era were all influenced by the characteristics stated above and this is evident in the settings, themes and general concerns of this works. The Victorian age prospered more in the genre called " The Novel" on like in the previous age (Romantic age where poetry was the most prominent genre.

THE VICTORIAN NOVEL

The 19th century saw the novel triumph and become the leading form of literature in English. Some point in the Victorian era, the novel replaced the poem as the most fashionable vehicle. Actually, poetry was popular, but prose more popular. It was the ideal form to describe contemporary life and to entertain the middle class. Human beings have always told stories, but not always read the long prose narratives of the kind known as novels.

The reign of novel has now lasted so long as to appear natural. There had been crazes for the Gothic novel and for Scott's fiction, yet it was only in the 1840s, with Charles Dickens, that the novel again reached the popularity it had enjoyed in the 1740s. Between 1847 and 1850 appeared Jane Eyre, Wuthering Heights, Vanity Fair and David Copperfield. In 1860, Dickens was still at his peak, Mrs. Gaskell and Trollope were going strong, and George Eliot had begun to publish. The popular franchise was extended in 1876, against Liberal opposition, by a Conservative government.

Its leader was Benjamin Disraeli (1804-81), who in the 1840s had set his political beliefs, using fiction to advance a critique of contemporary society which built on those of A. W. Pugin and Carlyle, views later developed by Ruskin. The young Disraeli was not a sage but a political visionary, and he was both more and less than a novelist. The novel was now so popular that it could be used to advance a religious thesis, as by Kingsley, Wiseman and Newman, or a social reform, as by Dickens. CHARLES DICKENS (1812-1870)
Charles Dickens is the most famous Victorian novelist (1812-70).

He has no interest in the theory of fiction. Among the Victorian novelists were two men who were frequent rivals in the race for fame and fortune. Thackeray, well born and well bred, with artistic tastes and literary culture, looked doubtfully at the bustling life around him, found his inspiration in a past age, and tried to uphold the best traditions of English literature. Dickens, with little education and less interest in literary culture, looked with joy upon the struggle for democracy, and with an observation that was almost microscopic saw all its picturesque details of speech and character and incident.

He was the eye of the mighty Victorian age, as Tennyson was its ear, and Browning its psychologist, and Carlyle its chronic grumbler. As a boy, he was far from robust. Having no taste for sports, he amused himself by reading romances or by listening to his nurse's tales,--beautiful tales, he thought, which "almost scared him into fits." His selfish fancy in childhood is probably reflected in Pip, of *Great Expectations*.

He had a strong dramatic instinct to act a story, or sing a song, or imitate a neighbor's speech, and the father used to amuse his friends by putting little Charles on a chair and encouraging him to mimicry,--a dangerous proceeding, though it happened to turn out well in the case of Dickens. This really informed and boosted his love for literature. He had a passion for private theatricals, and when he wrote a good story he was not satisfied till he had read it in public. When *Pickwick* appeared in 1837, the young man, till then an unknown reporter, was brought before an immense audience which included a large part of England and America.

Thereafter he was never satisfied unless he was in the public eye; his career was a succession of theatrical incidents, of big successes, big lecture tours, big audiences,--always the footlights, till he lay at last between the pale wax tapers. His first literary success came with some short stories contributed to the magazines, which appeared in book form as *Sketches by Boz* (1835). A publisher marked these sketches, engaged Dickens to write the text or letterpress for some comic pictures, and the result was *Pickwick*, which took England and America by storm.

Then followed *Oliver Twist*, *Nicholas Nickleby*, *Old Curiosity Shop*,--a flood of works that made readers rub their eyes, wondering if such a fountain of

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laughter and tears were inexhaustible. Dickens held his place as the most popular writer in English. With his novels he was not satisfied, but wrote a history of England, and edited various popular magazines, such as Household Words. Also he gave public readings which aroused long applauses wherever he went. He died, worn out by his own exertions, in 1870. He had steadily refused titles and decorations, but a grateful nation laid his body to rest in the Poets' Corner at Westminster Abbey.

WORKS OF DICKENS

His first work was called Sketches by Boz. Dickens could hardly write a work without bringing a child in, and not just an ordinary child or one that could make the reader smile, but a wistful or pathetic child whose sorrows, since we cannot help them, are apt to make our hearts ache. The second notable work of Dickens is the " Pickwick", written in a harum-scarum way, is even more typical of Dickens in its spirit of fun and laughter. He had been engaged, as we have noted, to furnish a text for some comic drawings, thus reversing the usual order of illustration.

From the plot, the pictures were intended to poke fun at a club of sportsmen; and Dickens, who knew nothing of sport, bravely set out with Mr. Winkle on his rook-shooting. Then, while the story was appearing in monthly numbers, the illustrator committed suicide. Dickens was left with Mr. Pickwick on his hands, and that innocent old gentleman promptly ran away with the author. Not being in the least adventurous, Mr. Pickwick was precisely the person for whom adventures were lying in wait; but with his chivalrous heart within him, and Sam Weller on guard outside, he was not to be trifled with by cabman or constable.

So these two took to the open road, and to the inns where punch, good cheer and the unexpected were awaiting them. Critics could not help but appreciate that never was such another book! It is not a novel; it is a medley of fun and drollery resulting from high animal spirits. In his next novel, *Oliver Twist*, the author makes a new departure by using the motive of horror. One of his heroes or rather the hero of the novel is an unfortunate child, but when sympathies want to arise in the mind of the readers for the little fellow and even stretched to the point of tears, Dickens turns over a page with a comic relief and relieves us laughter.

Also he has his usual medley of picturesque characters and incidents, but the shadow of Fagin, the horror is over them all. One cannot go into any house in the book, and lock the door and draw the shades, without feeling that somewhere in the outer darkness this horrible creature is prowling. The horror which Fagin inspires is never morbid; for Dickens with his healthy spirit could not err in this direction. It is a boyish, melodramatic horror, such as immature minds seek in "movies," dime novels, secret societies, detective stories and "thrillers" at the circus.

In the fourth work, *Nicholas Nickleby*, there is a limit and difference in plot on like other works. In this novel he seems to rest a bit by writing an old-fashioned romance, with its hero and villain and moral ending. Almost all Dickens works possess these four elements namely, an unfortunate child, humorous interludes, a grotesque or horrible creature who serves as a foil to virtue or innocence, and a medley of characters good or bad that might be transferred without change to any other story.

The most interesting thing about Dickens's men and women is that they are human enough to make themselves at home anywhere. The works of Dickens just like other writers portrayed and condemned the child abuse at the factories where little underage children were made to work deep in the mines without any form of safety precaution as a negative effect of the Industrial Revolution. Dickens had a great sense of humor and as already stated above, most of his works centered on children.

WILLIAM MAKEPEACE THACKERAY (1811-1863)

William is another example of a great novelist in the Victorian age. In fiction Thackeray stands to Dickens as Hamilton to Jefferson in the field of politics. The radical difference between the two novelists is exemplified in their attitude toward the public. Thackeray was intellectual; he looked at men with critical eyes, and was a realist and a pessimist while Dickens on the other hand was emotional; he looked at men with kindled imagination, judged them by the dreams they cherished in their hearts, and was a romanticist and an optimist.

Both men were undisputedly humorous but Thackeray was delicately satirical, causing the reader to show a momentary smile, Dickens was broadly comic or farcical, winning the readers by hearty laughter. Thackeray had a great tenderness for children, a longing for home and homely comforts; but as a child he was sent far from his home and I guess this informed his tenderness for children.

WORKS OF THACKERAY

The Rose and the Ring, one of his novels is a kind of fairy story, with a poor little good princess, a rich little bad princess, a witch of a godmother, and

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such villainous characters as Hedzoff and Gruffanuff. The lot attracts children more because of the fairy tale which children love. It was written for some children whom Thackeray loved, and is almost the only book of his which leaves the impression that the author found any real pleasure in writing it.

Critics' claim that most of his works were written laboriously and not pleasurably. Another important novel is *Henry Esmond* (1852), it is a historical novel with the scene laid in the eighteenth century, during the reign of Queen Anne; and it differs from most other historical novels in this important respect: the author knows his ground thoroughly, he is familiar not only with political events but with the thoughts, ideals, books, even the literary style of the age which he describes.

The hero of the novel, Colonel Esmond, is represented as telling his own story which is the first person point of view; he speaks as a gentleman spoke in those days, telling us about the politicians, soldiers, ladies and literary men of his time, with frank exposure of their manners or morals. As a realistic portrayal of an age gone by, not only of its thoughts but of the very language in which those thoughts were expressed, *Esmond* is the most remarkable novel of its kind in our language. It is a prodigy of realism, and it is written in a charming prose style.

The hero, after ten years of devotion to a woman, ends his romance by happily marrying with her mother. The humans in Thackeray works are human and therefore unpredictable. The two social satires of Thackeray are *Vanity Fair* (1847) and *The History of Arthur Pendennis* (1849). The former, that is "Vanity fair" takes its title from that fair described in Pilgrim's

Progress, where all sorts of cheats are exposed for sale; and Thackeray makes his novel a moralizing exposition of the shams of the society.

The slight action of the story revolves about two unlovely heroines, the unprincipled Becky Sharp and the spineless Amelia. We call them both unlovely, though Thackeray tries hard to make us admire his tearful Amelia and to detest his more interesting Becky. Meeting these two contrasting characters is a variety of fools and snobs, mostly well-drawn, all carefully analyzed to show the weakness or villainy that is in them. *Pendennis* is another novel of the novelist. It is the ethical study (like George Eliot's *Romola*), and the story is often interrupted while we listen to the author's moralizing.

As a result of individual differences, to some readers this is an offense; to others it is a pleasure, since it makes them better acquainted with the mind and heart of Thackeray, the gentlest of Victorian moralists. The last notable works of Thackeray are like afterthoughts. "The Virginians" continues the story of Colonel Esmond, and "The Newcomes" recounts the later fortunes of Arthur Pendennis. *The Virginians* has two or three splendid scenes.

The BRONTE SISTERS AND NOVELS

The Bronte sisters, Anne, Charlotte and Emily, made a tremendous sensation in England when, from their retirement, they sent out certain works of such passionate intensity that readers who had long been familiar with novels were startled into renewed attention. Reading these works now we recognize the genius of the writers, but we recognize also a morbid, unwholesome quality, which is a reflection not of English life but of the personal and

unhappy temperament of three girls who looked on life first as a gorgeous romance and then as a gloomy tragedy.

The Bronte sisters wrote fiction rather different from that which was common at that time. Some of their works include: - * "Wuthering heights" (1847) which is Emily's only work is an example of Gothic Romanticism from a woman's point of view, which examines class, myth and gender. * "Jane Eyre" and "Villette". (1847) by Charlotte, is another major nineteenth century novel that has gothic themes. * "The Tenant of Wildfell Hall" (1848) by Anne was written in realistic rather than romantic style, and it is mainly considered to be the first sustained feminist novel.

Other Notable novelists. MARY ANN EVANS, "GEORGE ELIOT" (1819-1880)
More than other Victorian story-tellers George Eliot regarded her work with great seriousness as a means of public instruction. Her purpose was to show that human life is effective only as it follows its sense of duty, and that society is as much in need of the moral law as of daily bread. Other novelists moralized more or less, Thackeray especially; but George Eliot made the teaching of morality her chief business.

She used the pseudonym name "George Eliot" to pose as a man in order to gain recognition as already stated above during the course of discussion of the Woman Question and Rebellion against patriarchy. WORKS. George Eliot's first works in fiction were the magazine stories which she published later as Scenes of Clerical Life (1858). These were produced comparatively late in life, and they indicate both originality and maturity which were the messages she tried to pass across to the readers.

The message of morality, originality and maturity is also reflected in "Amos Barton" and "Janet's Repentance,". This message can be summarized in four main cardinal principles which are that duty is the supreme law of life, that the humblest life is as interesting as the most exalted, since both are subject to the same law; that our daily choices have deep moral significance, since they all react on character and their total result is either happiness or misery; and that there is no possible escape from the reward or punishment that is due to one's individual action.

This message of morality was necessary and built up for the age because of the emerging struggle between science, religion and Nature. Therefore, the once faith-based society was turning into a corrupt one and the message of Morality and maturity by Eliot was to call people to order. Adam Bede (1859) is another book which has been called a story of early Methodism, but in reality it is a story of moral principles which work their inevitable ends among simple country people.

The same may be said of *The Mill on the Floss* (1860) and of *Silas Marner* (1861). The former is as interesting to readers of George Eliot as *Copperfield* is to readers of Dickens, because much of it is a reflection of a personal experience; but the latter work, having more unity, more story interest and more cheerfulness, is a better novel with which to begin our acquaintance with the author. The scene of all these novels is laid in the country; the characters are true to life, and move naturally in an almost perfect setting.

These novels leave an impression so powerful that we gladly, and perhaps uncritically, place it among the great literary works of the Victorian era. Other works of Eliot are "Daniel Deronda", "Middlemarch" "Romola". Eliot

portrayed life not as she had seen and known and loved it, but as she found it reflected in her immediate environment which was affected by the great changes of the period and at second hand in the works of other writers. She views life as an unanswerable puzzle. She advocates self – sacrifice for the good of others.

OTHER VICTORIAN NOVELISTS

- Charles Reade (1814-1884) who wrote “ Peg Woffington” and “ The Cloister and the Hearth (1861). ”
- Anthony Trollope (1815-1882) who wrote “ Barchester Towers”
- Bulwer Lytton (1803-1873) who wrote “ Rienzi” and “ The Last Days of Pompeii”
- Richard Blackmore (1825-1900). * Lorna Doone (1869) who wrote “ Cranford”
- Charles Kingsley (1819-1875) who wrote “ Hypanthia”, “ Westward Ho! ” “ Heroes and “ Water Babies”
- Robert Louis Stevenson (1850-1894) “ Kidnapped” and “ David Balfour” Treasure Island (1883) Master of Ballantrae, Weir of Hermiston and Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde; various collections of essays, such as Virginibus Puerisque and Familiar Studies of Men and Books; and some rather thin sketches of journeying called An Inland Voyage and Travels with a Donkey.

THE STYLE OF THE VICTORIAN NOVEL

Victorian novels tend to be idealized portraits of difficult lives in which hard work, perseverance, love and luck win out in the end; virtue would be rewarded and wrongdoers are suitably punished. They tended to be of an

improving nature with a central moral lesson at heart. While this formula was the basis for much of earlier Victorian fiction, the situation became more complex as the century progressed.

STRUCTURE AND TECHNIQUE IN THE VICTORIAN POLITICAL NOVEL

The political novel juxtaposes the houses and halls of power with the factory and the dwellings of the poor; it already sets the over rationalized schoolroom against the circus; North and South; past and present; city and country; honest and vicious; clean and filthy; victim of industrial life and prosperous (sometimes even well-meaning) factory owner.

The characteristic gesture of the Victorian political novel is to expose the shocking world (Gaskell's homes of workers; Dickens' schools and workhouses; Kingsley's sweatshops and dwellings of the urban poor) and to insist that these zones of disease, degradation, and dehumanization are not only part, but the other half, of England. To call attention to (if not to redress) the evils that afflict the whole nation, political novels choose representative evils to stand for this other nation.

These choices notoriously fail to represent working people either as convincing individuals or as diverse groups with their own elaborate social strata. Furthermore, the binary structure of the two nations occludes the variety of suffering endured by workers and the poor in Britain, and this effect was often manipulated to serve political ends. (The history of the Corn Law Repeal and the sequence of the Reform Acts is one of alliance politics, which requires the over Simplification of losses and gains in order to consolidate support. Conditions of England novels record the desires of a

culture that hopes to reconcile its material needs with both its political and its altruistic hopes. By attempting diagnosis, these novels distance themselves from the "condition" of the others they describe, even as they expose selected targets within the economic, industrial, and political establishments. The Victorian novel really grew surpassed poetry and was the most prominent genre of the period. It had so many novelists and novels written.

VICTORIAN POETRY

In the Victorian age, unlike every other age, poetry was not so emphasized but even at that, it made a great impact as to explaining what the age really entails. In the early years of the Victorian period, poetry was still the most visible of all the genres of Literature. In the 19th century, poetry was still written in abstract imagery and themes of the earlier generation. While essayists and novelists were confronting social issues, poets on their own part were having mixed feelings. This remained, and by mid-century, most poets had moved away from the abstraction of the Romantics and fashioned a more down-to-earth realistic kind of verse.

The Victorian age provided a significant development of poetic ideals such as the increased use of the Sonnet as a poetic form, which was to influence later modern poets. Poets in the Victorian period were to some extent influenced by the Romantic Poets such as John Keats, William Blake, P. B. Shelley and William Wordsworth. Wordsworth was Poet Laureate until 1850, therefore, he can be viewed as a bridge between the Romantic period and the Victorian period. Wordsworth was succeeded by Lord Tennyson, who turned out to be Queen Victoria's favorite poet.

As earlier said, though Poetry was not really popular in this age, Victorian Poetry was an important period in the history of poetry, providing the link between the Romantic Movement and the modernist movement of the 20th Century. It is not always possible to neatly categorize poets in these broad movements. For example Gerard Manley Hopkins is often cited as an example of a poet who maintained much of the Romantics sensibility in his writings. Lord Alfred Tennyson was the master of simple, earthy lyricism to which everyone could relate.

The obsession with the natural world and the imagination that so clearly distinguished the Romantic poets was supported during the Victorian age by a clear-headed, almost useful kind of poetry.

STYLE AND TECHNIQUES OF VICTORIAN POETRY

This session more or less deals with the techniques or styles poets used in writing their poems in the Victorian age. . Along with the spirit of pessimism and doubt, there was also the romantic spirit of desire for the lost, past and the ideal. There was also the old romantic thirst for beauty, love and art.

Since the Victorian age came after Romantic age, there were still some little features of Romantic poetry in the Victorian poetry. Most Victorian poetry was written in perfected musical stanzas but its expression was usually lyrical and romantic. Every Victorian poetry always have at least two out of all these: pessimistic subject, elegiac tone, lyrical expression, musical description of the misery of the poor or old people, theme of dissatisfaction with the loss of old values and sudden modernization and degradation of the society.

The Comic Verse abounded in the Victorian era and it was fuelled by a greedy demand for content from literary magazines. The most famous collection of Victorian comic verse is the “ Bab Ballads. ” Both Matthew Arnold and Gerard Manley Hopkins wrote poems which sit somewhere in between the exultation of nature of the romantic Poetry and the Georgian Poetry of the early 20th century. This era continued the romantic ideals of promoting love and nature. The poetry of this period was a direct reflection of the popular attitudes of the time. Alfred, Lord Tennyson wrote poetry which dealt with all of the hot topics of the era.

His poems were both lyrical and mechanical in their structure. An example of his poems that shows that he writes a lyric is “ The Throstle” (a song that will appeal especially to all bird lovers), beginning: “ Summer is coming, summer is coming, I know it, I know it, I know it; Light again, leaf again, life again, love again”— Yes, my wild little poet! Here Tennyson is so merged in his subject as to produce the impression that the lyric must have been written not by an aged poet but by the bird himself.

Reading the poem one seems to hear the brown thrasher on a twig of the wild-apple tree, pouring his heart out over the thicket which his mate has just chosen for a nesting place. In the poem we can see the evident poetic devices of repetition like summer summer, know, know, know. Alliteration and assonance is also evident in each line and the consonant sounds are /s/, /n/,/l/ represented in the words summer, know, light, leaf, life and love respectively; the vowel sounds are /i/ and /? / represented in the words it and again respectively. Robert Browning on the other hand was noted for his harsh style and subject matter.

An evident and a very good example is his poem " My Last Duchess" where he presented a duke that really doesn't care about his duchess and having no human feelings, kills her for her quietness. The first of these objects is a portrait of his " last" or former duchess, painted directly on one of the walls of the gallery by a friar named Randolph. The Duke keeps this portrait behind a curtain that only he is allowed to draw. While the servant sits on a bench looking at the portrait, the Duke describes the circumstances in which it was painted and the fate of his unfortunate former wife.

The duke was an epitome of wickedness, brutality and he was a sadist. He killed the duchess because he felt her kind and easy going behavior was going to drag the name of his household of 900 years to the mud. Apparently the Duchess was easily pleased: she smiled at everything, and seemed just as happy when someone brought her a branch of cherries as she did when the Duke decided to marry her. She also blushed easily. The Duchess's genial nature was enough to throw the Duke into a jealous, psychopathic rage, and he " gave commands" (line 45) that meant " all smiles stopped together" (line 46).

Matthew Arnold composed deeply emotional poetry. He focused on his pessimistic outlook on the fate of humanity. He was a man of two distinct moods: in his poetry he reflected the doubt or despair of those whose faith had been shaken by the alleged discoveries of science; in prose he became almost light-hearted as he bantered middle-class Englishmen for their old-fogy prejudices, or tried to awaken them to the joys of culture. In both moods he was coldly intellectual, appealing to the head rather than to the heart of

his readers; and it is still a question whether his poetry or his criticism will be longest remembered.

MAJOR THEMES IN VICTORIAN POETRY

During the days of Queen Victoria, poets wrote about bohemian ideas and also furthered the imaginings of the romantic poets. BOHEMIAN means living in a very informal or relaxed way and not accepting society's rules or behaviour. Victorian poetry shares a lot of characteristics, it tends to be pictorial. While most writers use imagery and the senses to convey scenes, the Victorian writers went further using imagery and other common elements. One notable theme in this period is that of the use of sensory elements. Lord Alfred Tennyson lives up to this characteristic in his works.

One notable example is the poem "Mariana". He wrote: "The doors upon their hinges creaked The blue fly sung in the pane; the mouse Behind the mouldering wainscot shrieked" This image of the creaking door, the blue fly singing in the window and the mouse with the moldy wood paneling all work together to create a much defined image of an active, yet lonely farmhouse where Shakespeare's lady waits. Another notable theme in Victorian poetry is the theme of the exposition of the struggle between God and Science. This is seen in "In Memoriam" which contains Tennyson's exploration of his feelings of the emerging scientific notions of his day.

In stanza 55, Tennyson makes his concerns clear, he writes: "Are God and Nature then at strife? That nature lends such evil dreams" In line 5-6, Tennyson seems disheartened by the clash of religion and science. He wonders to himself why nature is offering up such strange ideas through science. Thirdly and ironically in contrast with the above, is the theme of the

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reconciliation of Religion and Science. Tennyson lived during the period of great scientific advancement. He used his poem to work out the conflict between religious faith and scientific discoveries. There were notable findings and theories in this period.

These discoveries challenged traditional religion understanding of nature and natural history. Tennyson was greatly interested as well as troubled by these discoveries. His poem "Lockley Hall" (1842) expresses his ambivalence about technology and scientific progress. There, the speaker feels tempted to abandon modern civilization and return to a savage life in the jungle. In the end, he chooses to live a civilized, modern life and endorses and adores technology. Another theme in relation to the previously mentioned theme is the virtues of preference and optimism. This is the belief that good things are going to happen.

Tennyson rarely wrote and battled with alcoholism after the death of his friend Arthur Hallam. Many of his poems are about the temptation to give up and fall prey to pessimism but they also discuss the importance of struggle in life. These poems suggest and portray that though there is the struggle with life, the struggle between faith and science in the period, there was that hope that good things will happen. This is seen in the poem "The Lady of Shelley" where she leaves her seclusion to meet the outer world, determined to seek the love missing in her life.

(PROMINENT) POETS OF THE PERIOD

Lastly on the subject of Victorian poetry are the poets in that age. Without the poets, there can be no poem therefore it is important to look into the lives of the people that made Victorian poetry come to life today. Prominent <https://assignbuster.com/victorian-age/>

among these poets are Alfred Lord Tennyson, Robert Browning and Matthew Arnold among others. ALFRED, LORD TENNYSON Alfred, Lord Tennyson reigned from 1809 to 1892. He was one of the greatest poets in the Victorian age. By the time he was 15, he had completed an epic poem. His crafted verse expresses the Victorian feeling for order and harmony. There was a reason for his silence.

Though the Victorian age is notable for the quality and variety of its prose works, its dominant figure for years was the poet Tennyson. He alone, of all that brilliant group of Victorian writers, seemed to speak not for himself but for his age and nation; and the nation, grown weary of Byronic rebellion, and finding its joy or sorrow expressed with almost faultless taste by one whose life was noble, gave to Tennyson a whole-souled allegiance such as few poets have ever won. In 1850 he was made Laureate to succeed Wordsworth, receiving, as he said, "This laurel, greener from the brow of him that uttered nothing base;"

And from that time, he steadily adhered to his purpose, which was to know his people and to be their spokesman. Of all the poets who have been called to the Laureateship, he is probably the only one of whom it can truthfully be said that he understood his high office and was worthy of it. In 1833 his dearest friend, Arthur Hallam, died suddenly in Vienna, and it was years before Tennyson began to recover from the blow. His first expression of grief is seen in the lyric beginning, "Break, break, break," which contains the memorable stanza: "And the stately ships go on To their haven under the hill; But O for the touch of a vanished hand,

And the sound of a voice that is still! " Then he began that series of elegies for his friend which appeared, seventeen years later, as *In Memoriam*. Influenced by his friends, Tennyson broke his long silence with a volume containing " *Morte d'Arthur*," " *Locksley Hall*," " *Sir Galahad*," " *Lady Clare*" and a few more poems which have never lost their power over readers; but it must have commanded attention had it contained only " *Ulysses*," that magnificent appeal to manhood, reflecting the indomitable spirit of all those restless explorers who dared unknown lands or seas to make wide the foundations of imperial England.

It was a wonderful volume, and almost its first effect was to raise the hidden Tennyson to the foremost place in English letters. WORKS OF TENNYSON There is a wide variety in Tennyson's work: legend, romance, battle song, nature, classic and medieval heroes, problems of society, questions of science, the answer of faith,--almost everything that could interest an alert Victorian mind found some expression in his poetry.

It ranges in subject from a thrush song to a religious philosophy, in form from the simplest love lyric to the labored historical drama. Of the shorter poems of Tennyson there are a few which should be known to every student: first, because they are typical of the man who stands for modern English poetry; and second, because one is constantly meeting references to these poems in books or magazines or even newspapers.

Among such representative poems are: " *The Lotos-Eaters*," a dream picture characterized by a beauty and verbal melody that recall Spenser's work; " *Locksley Hall*" and " *Locksley Hall Sixty Years After*," the one a romance throbbing with youth and hope, the other representing the same hero grown

old, despondent and a little carping, but still holding fast to his ideals; " Sir Galahad," a medieval romance of purity; " Ulysses," an epitome of exploration in all ages; " The Revenge," a stirring war song; " Rizpah," a dramatic portrayal of a mother's grief for a wayward son; " Romney's Remorse," a character study of Tennyson's later years; and a few shorter poems, such as " The Higher Pantheism," " Flower in the Crannied Wall," " Wages" and " The Making of Man," which reflect the poet's mood before the problems of science and of faith. To these should be added a few typical patriotic pieces, which show Tennyson speaking as Poet Laureate for his country: " Ode on the Death of Wellington," " Charge of the Light Brigade," " Defense of Lucknow," " Hands all Round," and the imperial appeal of " Britons, Hold Your Own" or, as it is tamely called, " Opening of the Indian and Colonial Exposition. " The beginner may also be reminded of certain famous little melodies, such as the " Bugle Song," " Sweet and Low," " Tears," " The Brook," " Far, Far, Away" and " Crossing the Bar," which are among the most perfect that England has produced.

And, as showing Tennyson's extraordinary power of youthful feeling, at least one lyric of his old age should be read, such as " The Throstle". Of the longer works of Tennyson the most notable is the Idylls of the King, a series of twelve poems retelling part of the story of Arthur and his knights. Tennyson seems to have worked at this poem in haphazard fashion, writing the end first, then a fragment here or there, at intervals during half a century. Finally he welded his material into its present form, making it a kind of allegory of human life, in which man's animal nature fights with his spiritual aspirations.

As Tennyson wrote, in his “ Finale” to Queen Victoria: “ Accept this old, imperfect tale, New-old, and shadowing

Sense at war with Soul. ” A list of some of Tennyson’s works includes:

- Charge of the Light Brigade
- The Lady of Shallot
- The Lotos Eaters
- Ulysses
- Mariana
- The throstle
- Morte d’Arthur
- Locksley Hall
- Sir Galahad
- Lady Clare
- Merlin
- The Gleam
- Crossing the Bar

In Memoriam one of his major works. “ In Memoriam” occupied Tennyson at intervals for many years, and though he attempted to give it unity before its publication in 1850, it is still rather fragmentary. Moreover, it is too long; for the poet never lived who could write a hundred and thirty-one lyrics upon the same subject, in the same manner, without growing monotonous.

There are three more or less distinct parts of the work, corresponding to three successive Christmas seasons. The first part (extending to poem 30) is concerned with grief and doubt; the second (to poem 78) exhibits a calm,

serious questioning of the problem of faith; the third introduces a great hope amid tender memories or regrets, and ends (poem 106) with that splendid outlook on a new year and a new life, "Ring Out Wild Bells." This was followed by a few more lyrics of mounting faith, inspired by the thought that divine love rules the world and that our human love is immortal and cannot die. The work ends, rather incongruously, with a marriage hymn for Tennyson's sister.

The spirit of *In Memoriam* is well reflected in the "Proem" or introductory hymn, "Strong Son of God, Immortal Love"; its message is epitomized in the last three lines: "One God, one law, one element, And one far-off divine event To which the whole creation moves." The charm of Tennyson is twofold. As the voice of the Victorian Age, reflecting its thought or feeling or culture, its intellectual quest, its moral endeavor, its passion for social justice, he represents to us the spirit of modern poetry; that is, poetry which comes close to our own life, to the aims, hopes, endeavors of the men and women of to-day. With this modern quality Tennyson has the secret of all old poetry, which is to be eternally young.

He looked out upon a world from which the first wonder of creation had not vanished, where the sunrise was still "a glorious birth," and where love, truth, beauty, all inspiring realities, were still waiting with divine patience to reveal themselves to human eyes. There are other charms in Tennyson: his romantic spirit, his love of nature, his sense of verbal melody, his almost perfect workmanship; but these the reader must find and appreciate for himself. The sum of our criticism is that Tennyson is a poet to have handy on the table for the pleasure of an idle hour. He is also (and this is a better test)

an excellent poet to put in your pocket when you go on a journey. So shall you be sure of traveling in good company.

ROBERT BROWNING

He reigned from 1812 to 1889. He was rooted for perfecting the dramatic monologue. He is the most famous for the development of the dramatic monologue, for his psychological insight and his colloquial poetic style. Since boyhood Browning had been writing romantic verses, influenced first by Byron, then by Shelley, then by Keats. His first published works, *Pauline* and *Paracelsus*, were what he called soul-studies, the one of a visionary, "a star-treader" (its hero was Shelley), the other of a medieval astrologer somewhat like Faust. These two works, if one had the patience of a puzzle-worker to read them, would be found typical of all the longer poems that Browning produced in his sixty years of writing.

These early works were not read, were not even criticized; and it was not till 1846 that Browning became famous, not because of his books but because he eloped with Elizabeth Barrett, who was then the most popular poet in England. [Footnote: The fame of Miss Barrett in mid century was above that of Tennyson or Browning. She had been for a long time an invalid. Her father, a tyrannical kind of person, insisted on her keeping her room, and expected her to die properly there. He had no personal objection to Browning, but flouted the idea of his famous daughter marrying with anybody.] The two went to Florence, discovered that they were "made for each other," and in mutual helpfulness did their best work. They lived at "Casa Guidi," a house made famous by the fact that Browning's *Men and Women* and *Mrs.*

Browning's Sonnets from the Portuguese were written there. There are at least two ways in which Browning's work differs from that of other dramatists. When a trained playwright produces a drama his rule is, " Action, more action, and still more action. " Moreover, he stands aside in order to permit his characters to reveal their quality by their own speech or action. For example, Shakespeare's plays are filled with movement, and he never tells you what he thinks of Portia or Rosalind or Macbeth, or what ought to become of them. He does not need to tell. But Browning often halts his story to inform you how this or that situation should be met, or what must come out of it.

His theory is that it is not action but thought which determines human character; for a man may be doing what appears to be a brave or generous deed, yet be craven or selfish at heart; or he may be engaged in some apparently sinful proceeding in obedience to a motive that we would acclaim as noble if the whole truth were known " It is the soul and its thoughts that make the man," says Browning, " little else is worthy of study. " So he calls most of his works soul studies. If we label them now dramas, or dramatic monologues, or dramatic lyrics (the three classifications of his works), we are to remember that Browning is the one dramatist who deals with thoughts or motives rather than with action.

A brief list of Robert Browning's works.

- My Star
- By the Fireside
- Evelyn Hope
- The Last Ride Together.

- “ The Pied Pipe
- Herve Riel
- How they Brought the Good News
- Home Thoughts from Abroad
- Prospice
- The Boy and the Angel
- “ Up at a Villa—Down in the City. ”
- My last Duchess
- Love among the Ruins
- My Star
- By the Fireside
- I Send my Heart
- Oh Love—No Love
- There’s a Woman Like a Dewdrop
- The Ring and the Book

In the criticism of Robert Browning, critics believe that his words were gritty. For Browning differs from all other poets in this: that they have their moods of doubt or despondency, but he has no weary days or melancholy hours.

They sing at times in the twilight, but Browning is the herald of the sunrise. Always and everywhere he represents “ the will to live,” to live bravely, confidently here; then forward still with cheerful hearts to immortality: “ Grow old along with me! The best is yet to be, The last of life, for which the first was made: Our times are in his hand Who saith, “ A whole I planned, Youth shows but half: trust God: see all, nor be afraid! ”

MATTHEW ARNOLD

He reigned from 1822 to 1888. The work of this poet (a son of Dr. Arnold of Rugby, made famous by Tom Brown's Schooldays) is in strong contrast to that of the Brownings', as one is an optimist and the other an emotionalist.

He was a man of two distinct moods: in his poetry he reflected the doubt or despair of those whose faith had been shaken by the alleged discoveries of science; in prose he became almost light-hearted as he bantered middle-class Englishmen for their old-fogy prejudices, or tried to awaken them to the joys of culture. In both moods he was coldly intellectual, appealing to the head rather than to the heart of his readers; and it is still a question whether his poetry or his criticism will be longest remembered. Arnold is called the poet of Oxford, as Holmes is of Harvard, and those who know the beautiful old college town will best appreciate certain verses in which he reflects the quiet loveliness of a scene that has impressed so many students, century after century.

In brief, Arnold is always a stimulating and at times a provoking critic; he stirs our thought, disturbs our pet prejudices, challenges our opposition; but he is not a very reliable guide in any field. What one should read of his prose depends largely on one's personal taste. The essay On Translating Homer is perhaps his most famous work, but few readers are really interested in the question of hexameters. Culture and Anarchy is his best plea for a combination of the moral and intellectual or, as he calls them, the Hebrew and Greek elements in our human education. Among the best of the shorter works are "Emerson" in Discourses in America, and "Wordsworth," "Byron" and "The Study of Poetry" in Essays in Criticism.

WORKS OF MATTHEW ARNOLD

Some of his works include:

- Dover Beach Morality and The Future
- Switzerland
- Resignation
- The Forsaken Merman
- The Last Word

Geist's Grave Other poets in this age include:

- Elizabeth Barrett Browning (1806-1861).
- Dante Gabriel Rossetti (1828-1882)
- William Morris (1834-1896)
- Algernon Charles Swinburne (1837-1909).

The above, which includes the features, style of poets and poems of Victorian era portrays a part of the works which were as a result of the obvious changes occurring in Britain.

OTHER LITERATURES OF THE PERIOD CHILDREN'S LITERATURE

Like the concept of childhood, children's literature is very much a cultural construct that continues to evolve over time. Children's literature comprises those texts that have been written specifically for children and those texts that children have selected to read on their own, and the boundaries between children's literature and adult literature are surprisingly fluid. The Victorians are credited with 'inventing childhood', partly via their efforts to stop child labour and the introduction of compulsory education. As children

began to be able to read, literature for young people became a growth industry, with not only established writers producing works for children (such as Dickens' *A Child's History of England*) but also a new group of dedicated children's authors. Writers like Lewis Carroll, R. M. Ballantyne and Anna Sewall wrote mainly for children. Victorian children's literature reflected the culture's separate spheres for men and women with different types of books written for girls and boys.

Stories for girls were often domestic and celebrated the family life, such as Alcott's "Little Women" or Kate Douglas Wiggin's *Rebecca of Sunnybrook Farm* (1903). Stories for boys, such as Mark Twain's "The Adventures of Tom Sawyer" (1876) and its sequel "Adventures of Huckleberry Finn" (1884), encouraged boys to have adventures. While Victorian children's literature developed the character of the good and bad boy, female characters were allowed less flexibility. Adventure stories—such as R. M. Ballantyne's "The Coral Island" (1858), Robert Louis Stevenson's "Treasure Island" (1883), and RUDYARD KIPLING's