

19th-Century British Literature

Course units pertaining to the lectures materials:

4	BAN1409	Brit irodalomtörténet 2. A 19. század irodalma	British Literature 2. The 19th Century
5	OAN1108	A brit irodalom fő korszakai	The Main Periods of British Literature

Final exam topics related to the course:

BA final exam:

5. 19th-century British literature and culture
 - a. English Romantic poetry
 - b. Victorian poetry
 - c. The novel in the Romantic period (Jane Austen and Walter Scott)
 - d. The Victorian novel (Dickens, the Brontës, Eliot, Hardy)
 - e. New Ways in British drama at the turn of the century: Shaw and Wilde

Teacher trainers comprehensive exam:

- 2/ Major trends, themes, genres and poets in the history of British poetry to 1900.
- 3/ Major trends, themes, genres and authors of the British novel to 1900.
- 4/ Major trends, themes, genres and authors of British drama to 1900.

Course schedule

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2	Romanticism, general features. William Blake	Romantic poetry
3	The first generation of Romantic poets: Wordsworth	
4	The first generation of Romantic poets: Coleridge	
5	The second generation of Romantic poets: Shelley	
6	The second generation of Romantic poets: Keats	
7	The novel between 1800 and 1830	The novel in the Romantic age
8	The Victorian age in general	
9	Charles Dickens	The Victorian novel
10	The Brontë sisters	
11	George Eliot	
12	Thomas Hardy	
13	Alfred Tennyson and Robert Browning	Victorian poetry
14	19 th century drama, George Bernard Shaw	19 th c. and early 20 th c. drama

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Romantic Poetry (1800-1830)

What is Romanticism? Historical and political background

1. Romanticism is basically middle-class movement against the aristocratic spirit of Neoclassicism.

Keats, Shelley and most of the Romantic poets came from this background. The reason for this was that towards the middle and end of the 18th century, middle class was on the rise (which also facilitated the birth of the novel). The increased luxury and wealth inspired a desire for the unusual, for the different, which Romanticism provided.

2. The Romantic age was the first to feel the negative effects of the Industrial Revolution.

As soon as machines were introduced to industry, many people lost their jobs. The flourishing providing luxury stood in contrast with the negative aspects of industrialisation, which created a profound dissatisfaction.

3. Ideologically, the French Revolution also had an enormous influence on the birth of Romanticism.

This was the first such occasion that included a whole continent (Napoleonic Wars). Also, the French Revolution promised a major breakthrough towards an egalitarian society, but in a few years it turned into dictatorship and bloodshed (the revolutionaries started to execute each other), and what started as the abolishment of monarchy led to a new kind of monarchy in about 10 years (Napoleon crowned himself Emperor in 1804). The huge disappointment in the failed revolution inspired many Romantic poets.

The main features of Romantic art and literature

Romantic art is basically the art of escapism.

Where did they want to escape?

TEMPORALLY: The Middle Ages: An interest in the glorious past, an essentially false recreation of the Middle Ages as the Romantics imagined it. The Middle Ages came to be seen as a source of inspiration and imitation in literature, painting and architecture. It motivated the **Gothic** revival (which goes back to the 18th century), an interest in settings and

events that suggested **obscurity, something ancient, darker, fearsome and mysterious**, in general, things that characterised the period before the glorious renaissance of arts. Gothic architecture (see the Parliament buildings of both England and Hungary), the Gothic novel, the pre-Raphaelite movement, numerous reworkings of the Arthurian legend, James MacPherson's false Ossian poems, Walter Scott's antiquarian interest are all part of this trend.

SPATIALLY: Nature: Of course, Nature was written about in every literary period: very often, however, Nature meant a convenient, decorative background, or the justification of the perfectness of divine creation. The Neoclassical period tried to remove every supernatural element from Nature, always wrote about it without human beings (see Neo-classical landscapes!). For the Romantics: external nature and human nature cannot be divided. Nature reflects a state of mind. Human nature corresponds to nature outside. Nature is regarded as a **teacher, a guide, a moral standard, a place of innocence**. Cities, on the contrary, are seen as not natural environment for human beings, the places of alienation, corruption and vice.

SPATIALLY: The Orient, the "exotic": Not exactly what we mean today. While Medievalism sought to draw inspiration from an idealised past, Orientalism would have liked to do this in space. For the Romantics "Oriental" was not always Japan or China, but everything that was supposed to be an exotic, remote place. They were not really interested in the wise past of the orient, but just in the exotic element. See for instance Coleridge's "Kubla Khan", Byron's "Childe Harold's Pilgrimage" "Don Juan" or "Giaour", and the countless "exotic" settings and characters in fiction.

- **Primitivism / Innocence:** An interest in a less advanced stage of civilisation and the idea that it brings greater happiness to the people. Morally, **savage** conditions produce better people (think of Kipling's *Jungle Book* or the idealisation of the **countryside**, see Wordsworth), who live in innocent, primitive conditions, while urban civilisation corrupts and distorts man.

EMOTIONALLY: Anti-intellectualism is also a key feature of Romanticism, based on the Anglo-American distrust of the logical and belief in common sense (going back to Locke and Hobbes). The central idea is that certain aspects of life may not be explained on a purely rational basis, some sort of obscurity is always needed.

- **Emotionalism:** The enjoyment of emotion for its own sake (not for didactic purposes as it was done in the neo-Classic age). For the Romantics, a poem could be written about a sort of feeling (happiness), without further justification. The Romantic poet expresses himself and does not follow rules or conventions.
- **Confessionalism, lyricism:** The unprecedented occurrence that the major subject for the poet became himself, who reveals his own ideas to the reader. The main

characteristic of poetry in this period is that it is mainly lyrical poetry (not narrative), expresses one or several particular, subjective emotions.

- **Originality / Creativity:** Up to the end of the Classical period, originality was not required, simply the way of formulating the stories or poems was important, how the poet can use the well-established classical devices. In Romanticism, **originality** becomes required. The main reason for this was the **heightened sense of individuality** and the fact that Romantics were expected to fulfil the demands of the middle class: there was no need to refer to earlier traditions, writers had to invent their own style. The ideal Romantic artist creates something out of nothing.
- **Belief in the purgative (cleaning) purpose of the art:** according to Aristotle, the purpose of tragedy is the purgation of the audience through pity and fear (catharsis). This changes in Romanticism inasmuch as the reason for writing is the purgation of the *writer* himself, a kind of self-analysis that uncovers the hidden depths of the soul.

SOCIALLY: Humanitarianism: This, again, is not a new idea, since Humanitarianism was frequently made use of by the church. The Romantic idea, however, does not derive from this religious stance, but it claims that it is our duty to provide the minimum of physical necessities and maximum of human opportunities to everyone. An institutionalised support to the helpless should always derive from the state, not from the church.

POLITICALLY: The belief in progress is based on Hegel's idea of history (dialectics). The basic idea is that man is constantly progressing towards a better future. In this sense, **revolutions** may be, time to time, necessary to promote development. See Shelley's "Ode to the West Wind"

- **Democracy:** All the major Romantics went through a Republican period in their lives. A republic is always based on human equality, which is not the invention of the Romantic period. The Romantics, however, added the emotional aspect to this.

Two generations of Romantic poets

I. Blake, Wordsworth, Coleridge - 1793-1810

- Started out as supporters of the French Revolution.
- Later they got disappointed because their Romantic poetry was based on the change of the world.

II. Byron, Shelley, Keats - 1810-1824

- Remained supporters of the idea of the French Revolution
- Up to the end of their lives they had not given up their ideas

The first generation of Romantic poets

William Blake (1757-1827)



- ✓ Some critics consider him a Romantic, others a pre-Romantic poet.
- ✓ Blake started earlier than most of the Romantics (Wordsworth's and Coleridge's *Lyrical Ballads* were published in 1798).

- ✓ Blake never belonged to any school, or group; he was one of the most individual, idiosyncratic poets in England.
- ✓ He was both a poet and a painter-engraver, he made illustrations to his works.

Blake was not really considered an outstanding poet in the 19th century. As it happens with great artists so often, his talent was discovered later by those who sought justification for their work and taste. Blake was “discovered” by W. B. Yeats and James Joyce in the 20th century.

Why was Blake discovered so late?

Blake created a **wholly individual, private mythology**. In his first work (*Poetical Sketches*, 1783 – mind the word “sketches” referring to an unfinished work, as opposed to the perfection of Neo-Classicism) – he refers to well-known names (Apollo, Minerva) but later creates his own names (Urizen, Thel, Los, Ahania, Zoa).

There are several conjectures as to why Blake turned to this highly individual tone.

1. One answer is that he **did not receive any formal, classical education**, though knew a lot about it, but nobody explained it to him.
2. It may be that he thought all the classical mythological figures worn, outdated and wanted to do **something original**; another way of saying this is he rejected Neoclassicism as a Romantic.
3. In addition, he never really talked about the external world (was not interested in political events), but mainly about **internal forces** determining the soul.

HIS POETRY

After *Poetical Sketches*, the two most important publications of this period form a twin-book: ***Songs of Innocence (1789) and Songs of Experience (1793)***.

Songs of Innocence: this is an imaginative picture of **the state of innocence**. Blake uses various sources: the Bible, the pastoral tradition, the fascination with childhood (a characteristic trait of Romanticism) and an enthusiasm for a supposed primitive condition.

- The symbolic animal and central poem in this volume is “The Lamb”.

Songs of Experience: the volume contrasts the innocent, joyful existence with one’s **experience about the actual world**, which include **suffering, injustice, inhumanity**. These experiences, however, are not absolutely evil, but represent a higher, deeper form of existence. The two (innocence and experience) complete and do not exclude each other.

- The symbolic animal and poem is “The Tyger”. It is depicted not as evil, but showing the complicated creation of God (“He who made the Lamb”), that brings joy and suffering at the same time.



"The Lamb"

from *Songs of Innocence*

Little Lamb who made thee
Dost thou know who made
thee
Gave thee life & bid thee feed.
By the stream & o'er the mead;
Gave thee clothing of delight,
Softest clothing wooly bright;
Gave thee such a tender voice,
Making all the vales rejoice:
Little Lamb who made thee
Dost thou know who made
thee

Little Lamb I'll tell thee,
Little Lamb I'll tell thee:
He is called by thy name,
For he calls himself a Lamb:
He is meek & he is mild,
He became a little child:
I a child & thou a lamb,
We are called by his name.
Little Lamb God bless thee.
Little Lamb God bless thee.

"The Tyger"

from *Songs of Experience*

Tyger Tyger, burning bright,
In the forests of the night:
What immortal hand or eye,
Could frame thy fearful symmetry?

In what distant deeps or skies.
Burnt the fire of thine eyes!
On what wings dare he aspire!
What the hand, dare sieze the fire?

And what shoulder, & what art,
Could twist the sinews of thy heart?
And when thy heart began to beat,
What dread hand? & what dread feet?
What the hammer? what the chain,
In what furnace was thy brain?
What the anvil? what dread grasp,
Dare its deadly terrors clasp!

When the stars threw down their spears
And water'd heaven with their tears:
Did he smile his work to see?
Did he who made the Lamb make thee?
Tyger, Tyger burning bright,
In the forests of the night:
What immortal hand or eye,
Dare frame thy fearful symmetry?

Marriage of Heaven and Hell (1790)

- calls into question the popular view since Dante and Milton that Hell is the place of punishment.
- **Instead, Blake tries to imagine Hell and Heaven as the duality of innocence and experience:** Hell as the source of pagan energy, a mystical power, as opposed to the clean and strictly regulated Heaven. The following passage illustrates this theory, and is also a good example of the highly symbolic and Romantic writing of Blake:

*"Without Contraries is no progression. Attraction and Repulsion,
Reason and Energy, Love and Hate, are necessary to Human existence.*

From these contraries spring what the religious call Good & Evil.

*Good is the passive that obeys Reason. Evil is the active springing
from Energy. Good is Heaven. Evil is Hell."*

One of his most well-known poems, a quasi national anthem, is "**Jerusalem**".

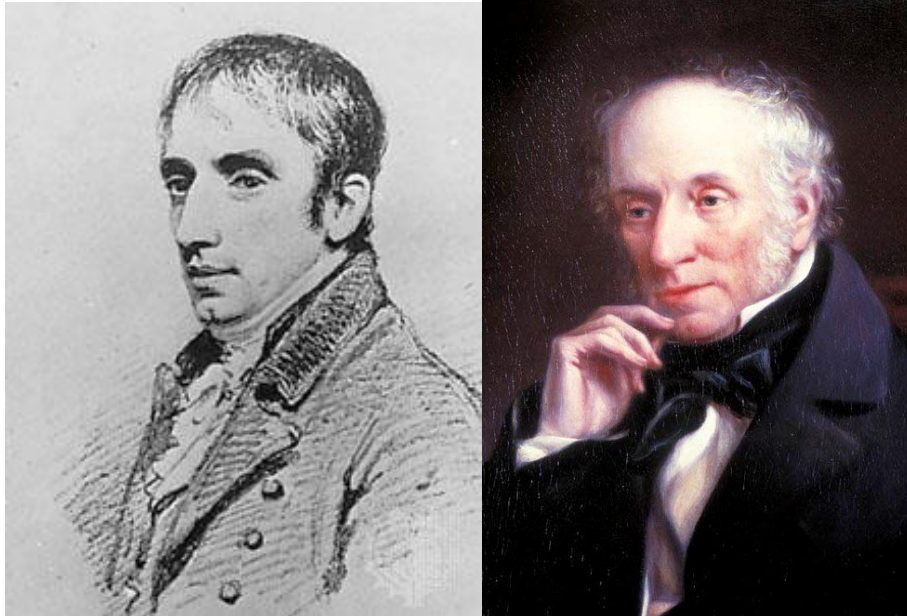
And did those feet in ancient time
Walk upon Englands mountains green:
And was the holy Lamb of God,
On Englands pleasant pastures seen!

And did the Countenance Divine,
Shine forth upon our clouded hills?
And was Jerusalem builded here,
Among these dark Satanic Mills?

Bring me my Bow of burning gold:
Bring me my arrows of desire:
Bring me my Spear: O clouds unfold!
Bring me my Chariot of fire!

I will not cease from Mental Fight,
Nor shall my sword sleep in my hand:
Till we have built Jerusalem,
In Englands green & pleasant Land.

William Wordsworth (1770-1850)



Wordsworth is the poet of Nature.

His poetry is in strong contrast with the visionary and symbolic poetry of Blake. His style is thoroughly simple, understandable, which was, however, a conscious part of the programme of Romanticism.

Wordsworth lived up to the age of 80, but his effective career lasted about two decades (~1790-1810). He started to deal with poetry around 1785. While attending the University of Cambridge between 1787 and '91, he became acquainted with the poetry of sensibility, as reflected in his early poems "An Evening Walk" and "Descriptive Sketches". These poems, however, are still part of the poetry of the 18th century, he expresses no particular and individual feelings in them.

The turn in his career can be attributed to his travels in France (1790-1793) and his meeting and **friendship with Coleridge in 1795**. The fruit of their co-operation was *Lyrical Ballads* (1798), regarded as the **first Romantic publication in England**. Out of the 23 poems published in this volume, 19 were produced by Wordsworth and only four by Coleridge. In 1810, their friendship ended, and although they reconciled two years later, they could never reach the productivity of the early years. Wordsworth published his last work in 1842. The next year, after Robert Southey's death, he was appointed *Poet Laureate* (koszorús költő).

Wordsworth's main idea of poetry is based on the **essential unity of the self and Nature**, expressed in the following quotation: "we are part of all that we behold". According to

Wordsworth, the universe should be considered as an absolute unity, so divinity can be found in nature and in human nature, too (the two are one).

His poetic mind and main ideas on poetic creation are reflected in one of the most important documents of European Romanticism, "Preface" to the second edition of *Lyrical Ballads* (1800). The main theses of the Preface are the following:

*"The principal object, then, proposed in these poems was **to choose incidents and situations from common life**, and to relate or describe them, throughout, as far as possible, in **a selection of language really used by men**, and, at the same time, to throw over them a certain **colouring of imagination**, whereby ordinary things should be presented to the mind in an unusual aspect; and further, and above all, to make these incidents and situations really interesting by tracing in them, truly, though not ostentatiously, the primary laws of our nature: chiefly as far as regards the manner **in which we associate ideas in a state of excitement.**"*

*"I have said that poetry is **the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings: it takes its origin from emotion recollected in tranquillity**: the emotion is contemplated till, by a species of reaction, the tranquillity gradually disappears, and an emotion, kindred to that which was before the subject of contemplation, is gradually produced, and does itself actually exist in the mind. In this mood successful composition generally begins, and in **a mood similar to this it is carried on**; but the emotion, of whatever kind, and in whatever degree, from various causes, is qualified by various pleasures, so that in describing any passions whatsoever, which are voluntarily described, the mind will, upon the whole, be in a state of enjoyment."*

Here is how Coleridge wrote about the story of writing *Lyrical Ballads*:

*"In this idea originated the plan of the Lyrical Ballads; in which **it was agreed, that my endeavours should be directed to persons and characters supernatural, or at least romantic**, yet so as to transfer from our inward nature a human interest and a semblance of truth sufficient to procure for these shadows of imagination that **willing suspension of disbelief for the moment, which constitutes poetic faith**. Mr. Wordsworth, on the other hand, was to propose to himself as his object, to **give the charm of novelty to things of every day, and to excite a feeling analogous to the supernatural**, by awakening the mind's attention from the lethargy of custom, and directing it to the loveliness and the wonders of the world before us; an inexhaustible treasure, but for which in consequence of the film of familiarity and selfish solicitude we have eyes, yet see not, ears that hear not, and hearts that neither feel nor understand."*

Again, the main principles:

- *to choose incidents and situations from common life,*
- *in a selection of language really used by men,*
- *(use) colouring of imagination, whereby ordinary things should be presented to the mind in an unusual aspect;*
- *(trace incidents) in which we associate ideas in a state of excitement.*

- *poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings: it takes its origin from emotion recollected in tranquillity*
- *Mr. Wordsworth, (wanted) to give the charm of novelty to things of every day, and to excite a feeling analogous to the supernatural,*
- *(Coleridge's) endeavours should be directed to persons and characters supernatural, or at least romantic*
- *willing suspension of disbelief for the moment, which constitutes poetic faith.*

Outstanding poems:

“Lines Composed a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey on Revisiting the Banks of the Wye During a Tour, 13 July 1798” (often abbreviated to “Tintern Abbey”) (1798)

*“Five years have passed; five summers, with the length
Of five long winters! and again I hear
These waters, rolling from their mountain-springs
With a soft inland murmur. Once again
Do I behold these steep and lofty cliffs,
That on a wild secluded scene impress
Thoughts of more deep seclusion; and connect
The landscape with the quiet of the sky...”*

(...)

*These beauteous forms,
Through a long absence, have not been to me
As is a landscape to a blind man's eye:
But oft, in lonely rooms, and 'mid the din
Of towns and cities, I have owed to them
In hours of weariness, sensations sweet,
Felt in the blood, and felt along the heart;
And passing even into my purer mind,
With tranquil restoration.*

(...)

*For I have learned
To look on nature, not as in the hour
Of thoughtless youth; but hearing oftentimes
The still, sad music of humanity,
Nor harsh nor grating, though of ample power*

*To chasten and subdue. And I have felt
 A presence that disturbs me with the joy
 Of elevated thoughts; a sense sublime
 Of something far more deeply interfused,
 Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,
 And the round ocean and the living air,
 And the blue sky, and in the mind of man;
 A motion and a spirit, that impels 100
 All thinking things, all objects of all thought,
 And rolls through all things. Therefore am I still
 A lover of the meadows and the woods,
 And mountains; and of all that we behold
 From this green earth; of all the mighty world
 Of eye, and ear,--both what they half create,
 And what perceive; well pleased to recognise
 In nature and the language of the sense,
 The anchor of my purest thoughts, the nurse,
 The guide, the guardian of my heart, and soul 110
 Of all my moral being.
 (...)*

I Wandered Lonely (The Daffodils)

I wandered lonely as a cloud
 That floats on high o'er vales and hills,
 When all at once I saw a crowd,
 A host of golden daffodils;
 Beside the lake, beneath the trees,
 Fluttering and dancing in the breeze.

Continuous as the stars that shine
 and twinkle on the Milky Way,
 They stretched in never-ending line
 along the margin of a bay:
 Ten thousand saw I at a glance,
 tossing their heads in sprightly dance.

The waves beside them danced; but they
 Out-did the sparkling waves in glee:
 A poet could not but be gay,

in such a jocund company:
I gazed - and gazed - but little thought
what wealth the show to me had brought:

For oft, when on my couch I lie
In vacant or in pensive mood,
They flash upon that inward eye
Which is the bliss of solitude;
And then my heart with pleasure fills,
And dances with the daffodils.

The Solitary Reaper

Behold her, single in the field,
Yon solitary Highland Lass!
Reaping and singing by herself;
Stop here, or gently pass!
Alone she cuts and binds the grain,
And sings a melancholy strain;
O listen! for the Vale profound
Is overflowing with the sound.

No Nightingale did ever chaunt
More welcome notes to weary bands
Of travellers in some shady haunt,
Among Arabian sands:
A voice so thrilling ne'er was heard
In spring-time from the Cuckoo-bird,
Breaking the silence of the seas
Among the farthest Hebrides.

Will no one tell me what she sings?—
Perhaps the plaintive numbers flow
For old, unhappy, far-off things,
And battles long ago:
Or is it some more humble lay,
Familiar matter of to-day?
Some natural sorrow, loss, or pain,
That has been, and may be again?

Whate'er the theme, the Maiden sang
As if her song could have no ending;
I saw her singing at her work,
And o'er the sickle bending;—

I listened, motionless and still;
And, as I mounted up the hill,
The music in my heart I bore,
Long after it was heard no more.

Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1772-1834)



Like Wordsworth, Coleridge also belonged to the first generation of Romantic poets. His work and personality, however, seems to be less even and perhaps more complicated than that of his friend.

One of the reasons why Wordsworth became **alienated** from him is that Coleridge took to **opium** partly because of his lack of will, partly due to his unhappy marriage. Coleridge went to Cambridge but left without a degree.

He became not only a poet but a significant literary critic and theorist as well. He was thoroughly interested in politics, religion, philosophy, (and especially German) metaphysics.

After 1803 wrote no significant work, and felt his whole career a failure.

HIS POETRY

Coleridge is the poet of intense inner vision and fantasy.

Coleridge's main work of literary criticism is *Biographia Literaria, or, Biographical Sketches of my Literary Life and Opinions*. This piece contains often unstructured thoughts about the evolution of English Romanticism and Coleridge's own development as a poet. The most cogent part of the work is Chapter 14, which is similar to the above-mentioned "Preface" to Lyrical Ballads. In this Chapter, Coleridge introduces the concepts of "fancy" and "imagination".

1. According to Coleridge, a poem must not in any way appeal to achieving any kind of truth; that is the task of science. A poem must give pleasure (in an aesthetic sense): ***"A poem is that species of composition which is opposed to works of science by proposing for its immediate object pleasure, not truth"***. Thus, a distinction between the function and role of science and art. Poetry's main aim / function is to give pleasure by suspending our expectation of truth.

This idea is similar to the one in the "Preface" to the Lyrical Ballads: ***"In this idea originated the plan of the Lyrical Ballads; in which it was agreed, that my endeavours should be directed to persons and characters supernatural, or at least romantic, yet so as to transfer from our inward nature a human interest and a semblance of truth sufficient to procure for these shadows of imagination that willing suspension of disbelief for the moment, which constitutes poetic faith."***

2. This pleasure should **derive from the whole of the work**, not from different components (rhyme, decoration, theme, rhythm), conceived of as decorations, as the neo-Classics would have liked it. Coleridge here sheds light on the **organic nature of the poem and its totality**: its parts mutually support and explain each other.

As opposed to a poem, in science not the whole gives pleasure but only parts. Poetry, according to Coleridge, is ***another way of getting to know the world besides science***. The latter analyses and pulls the world into pieces, discrete segments, while poetry (and art in general) aims at getting to know the world synthetically, organically, supposing a union with the subject and the perceived world.

The two most important poems in this period are "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" (1797/98, final form: 1817) and "Kubla Khan" (1798).

"The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" is the most valuable English art ballad in this period.

The source of the poem is the medieval legend of the Jewish tradesman who taunted Jesus Christ on his way to the Crucifixion; as a punishment, he was condemned to wander all around the globe and tell his story until Christ's Second Coming ("the wandering Jew"). Here, the focus is on the Ancient Mariner's soul. The mariner committed an offense against Nature's law, shot a helpless albatross for no reason. Now he has to suffer. The Albatross is of course a manifold symbol – stands for the soul, Nature's sacred law, creative powers (in which case the Mariner is the allegory of a poet who kills his own abilities, like Coleridge).

Coleridge's Notes to "Kubla Khan" (1816)

"In the summer of the year 1797, the Author, then in ill health, had retired to a lonely farm house between Porlock and Linton, on the Exmoor confines of Somerset and Devonshire. In consequence of a slight indisposition, an anodyne had been prescribed, from the effect of which he fell asleep in his chair at the moment that he was reading the following sentence, or words of the same substance, in 'Purchas's Pilgrimage: 'Here the Khan Kubla commanded a palace to be built, and a stately garden thereunto: and thus ten miles of fertile ground were inclosed with a wall.' The author continued for about three hours in a profound sleep, at least of the external senses, during which time he has the most vivid confidence, that he could not have composed less than from two or three hundred lines; if that indeed can be called composition in which all the images rose up before him as things, with a parallel production of the correspondent expressions, without any sensation or consciousness of effort. On awaking he appeared to himself to have a distinct recollection of the whole, and taking his pen, ink, and paper, instantly and eagerly wrote down the lines that are here preserved. At this moment he was unfortunately called out by a person on business from Porlock, and detained by him above an hour, and on his return to the room, found, to his no small surprise and mortification, that though he still retained some vague and dim recollection of the general purport of the vision, yet, with the exception of some eight or ten scattered lines and images, all the rest had passed away like the images on the surface of a stream into which a stone had been cast, but alas! without the after restoration of the latter:

.....Then all the charm
 Is broken -- all that phantom-world so fair,
 Vanishes, and a thousand circlets spread,
 And each mis-shape the other. Stay awhile,
 Poor youth! who scarcely dar'st lift up thine eyes--
 The stream will soon renew its smoothness, soon
 The visions will return! And lo! he stays,
 And soon the fragments dim of lovely forms
 Come trembling back, unite, and now once more
 The pool becomes a mirror.

Yet from the still surviving recollections of his mind, the Author has frequently purposed to

finish for himself what had been originally, as it were, given to him. ...but the to-morrow is yet to come.

As a contrast to this vision, I have annexed a fragment of a very different character, describing with equal fidelity the dream of pain and disease.”

From Thomas de Quincey’s *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater* (1821-22)

*“The first notice I had of any important change going on this part of my physical economy, was from re-awaking a state of eye oftentimes incident to **childhood**. I know not whether my reader is aware that many children have the power of painting, as it were, upon the darkness all sorts of **phantoms**; in some that power is the mechanic affection of the eye; others have a voluntary or semi-voluntary power to dismiss or summon such phantoms; or as a child once said to me, when I questioned him on the matter, ‘**I can tell them to go, and they go, but sometimes they come when I don’t tell them to come.**’ ... In the middle of 1817 this faculty became increasingly distressing to me: at night, when I lay awake in bed, vast processions moved along continually in mournful pomp...*



*...the creative state of the eye increased... so whatsoever things capable of visually represented I did but think of in the darkness, immediately shaped themselves into phantoms for the eye... This and all other changes in my dreams were accompanied by **deep-seated anxiety and funeral melancholy**, such as are wholly incommunicable by words. I seemed every*

night to descend – not metaphorically, but literally to descend – into chasms and sunless abysses, depth below depths, from which it seemed hopeless that I could ever re-ascend. Nor did I, by waking, feel that I had re-ascended....

*The sense of space, and in the end the sense of time, were both powerfully affected....Space swelled, and was amplified to an extent of **unutterable and self-repeating infinity...***

*The minutest incidents of childhood or forgotten scenes of later years were often revived. I could not be said to remember them... but I **recognised** them instantaneously.... Of this at least, I feel assured that **there is no such thing as ultimate forgetting; traces once impressed upon the memory are indestructible...**”*

Kubla Khan or, a Vision in a Dream. A Fragment

*In Xanadu did Kubla Khan
A stately pleasure-dome decree :
Where Alph, the sacred river, ran
Through caverns measureless to man

Down to a sunless sea.*

*So twice five miles of fertile ground
With walls and towers were girdled round :
And there were gardens bright with sinuous rills,
Where blossomed many an incense-bearing tree ;
And here were forests ancient as the hills,
Enfolding sunny spots of greenery.*

*But oh ! that deep romantic chasm which slanted
Down the green hill athwart a cedarn cover !
A savage place ! as holy and enchanted
As e'er beneath a waning moon was haunted
By woman wailing for her demon-lover !
And from this chasm, with ceaseless turmoil seething,
As if this earth in fast thick pants were breathing,
A mighty fountain momentarily was forced :
Amid whose swift half-intermitted burst*

*Huge fragments vaulted like rebounding hail,
 Or chaffy grain beneath the thresher's flail :
 And 'mid these dancing rocks at once and ever
 It flung up momentarily the sacred river.
 Five miles meandering with a mazy motion
 Through wood and dale the sacred river ran,
 Then reached the caverns measureless to man,
 And sank in tumult to a lifeless ocean :
 And 'mid this tumult Kubla heard from far
 Ancestral voices prophesying war !*

*The shadow of the dome of pleasure
 Floated midway on the waves ;
 Where was heard the mingled measure
 From the fountain and the caves.*

*It was a miracle of rare device,
 A sunny pleasure-dome with caves of ice !*

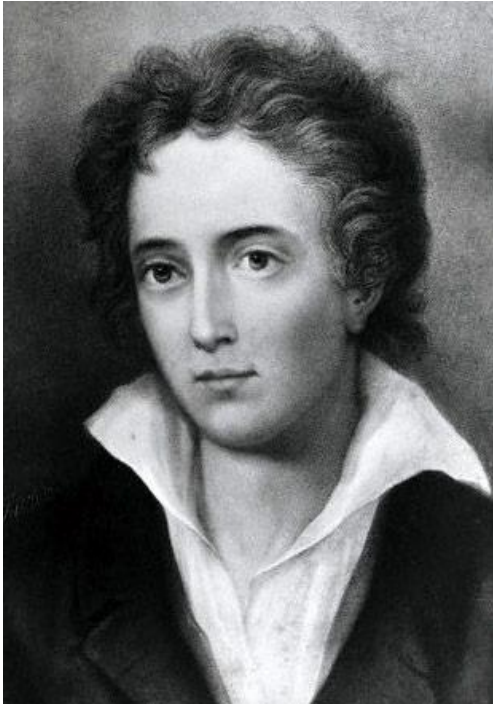
*A damsel with a dulcimer
 In a vision once I saw :
 It was an Abyssinian maid,
 And on her dulcimer she played,
 Singing of Mount Abora.*

*Could I revive within me
 Her symphony and song,
 To such a deep delight 'twould win me,*

*That with music loud and long,
 I would build that dome in air,
 That sunny dome ! those caves of ice !
 And all who heard should see them there,
 And all should cry, Beware ! Beware !
 His flashing eyes, his floating hair !
 Weave a circle round him thrice,
 And close your eyes with holy dread,
 For he on honey-dew hath fed,
 And drunk the milk of Paradise.*

The second generation of Romantic poets

Percy Bysshe Shelley (1792-1822)



Shelley is the poet of unlimited freedom.

Life

Shelley was perhaps the most intellectual poet of the second generation. He came from an upper-middle class background (as the son of an MP).

Shelley's poetry was influenced by **radical political and religious ideas**. He identified himself with the enlightened and anarchistic theories of **William Godwin** (*An Enquiry into Political Justice*, 1793) – the effect of these ideas can be felt on his being a co-author of a pamphlet entitled “The Necessity of Atheism” (1811) (the other author was Thomas Jefferson Hogg). For this writing he was expelled from University College, Oxford. His explicit political views appear later in his poems “Song to the Men of England” (1819) and “The Masque of Anarchy” (1819).

Later, Shelley married a lower-middle class girl (Harriet Westbrook). The marriage turned out to be a failure, Shelley asked Hogg to live in an open marriage with them, then abandoned his pregnant wife. Three years later Shelley married the daughter of William Godwin, Mary (the later author of *Frankenstein*). In 1816, Harriet committed suicide. Following this, Shelley and Mary Shelley moved to Italy. Shelly died drowning in the Mediterranean Sea on the board of his ship *Don Juan*. His funeral was also Romantic: Byron had a funeral pyre built on the seashore.



His poetry

Shelley is the poet of freedom and the unlimited, unchained human soul.

Shelley's figure became synonymous with "the" suffering, self-torturing Romantic poet. As Matthew Arnold put it in the Victorian age, Shelley seemed to be a "*beautiful and ineffectual angel beating in the wind his luminous wings in vain*".

Main ideas:

1. **People are innately good, but man-made institutions are essentially corrupt.** Shelley believes that reason should govern man in terms of morals and behaviour and that mankind can be perfected.
2. Social change, however, must originate not from the individual but from the **complete restructuring of the entire political scheme.**
3. This political radicalism is coupled with strong **atheism**. Shelley claims that all religions are false, profess love **hypocritically** to maintain their own status quo of tyranny and cruelty. "God" is created by Church, which is viewed by Shelley as the main obstacle of changing society.

Poetic theory

Shelley summarised his poetic faith in his study entitled “The Defense of Poetry”. It was written as the answer for Thomas Love Peacock’s “The Four Ages of Poetry”. Peacock argues that says poetry lives on for a while, but it is inevitable that it becomes outdated, because science will replace poetry.

Shelley tries to contradict this and claims that “**Poets are unacknowledged legislators of the world**”. (This view is close to Petöfi’s idea of the poet as the leader of the people.) He sees the poet as a **prophet** who can see more than the average human beings. Shelley maintains that poetry is absolutely necessary for the society, for poetry can reveal things hidden for the science (calculation).

Ozymandias

I met a traveller from an antique land
 Who said: "Two vast and trunkless legs of stone
 Stand in the desert. Near them on the sand,
 Half sunk, a shattered visage lies, whose frown
 And wrinkled lip and sneer of cold command
 Tell that its sculptor well those passions read
 Which yet survive, stamped on these lifeless things,
 The hand that mocked them and the heart that fed.
 And on the pedestal these words appear:
 'My name is Ozymandias, King of Kings:
 Look on my works, ye mighty, and despair!
 Nothing beside remains. Round the decay
 Of that colossal wreck, boundless and bare,
 The lone and level sands stretch far away.

Ode to the West Wind

O WILD West Wind, thou breath of Autumn's being—
 Thou from whose unseen presence the leaves dead
 Are driven, like ghosts from an enchanter fleeing,
 Yellow, and black, and pale, and hectic red,
 Pestilence-stricken multitudes!—O thou

Who chariotest to their dark wintry bed
 The wingèd seeds, where they lie cold and low,
 Each like a corpse within its grave, until
 Thine azure sister of the Spring shall blow
 Her clarion o'er the dreaming earth, and fill 10
 (Driving sweet buds like flocks to feed in air)
 With living hues and odours plain and hill—
 Wild Spirit, which art moving everywhere—
 Destroyer and Preserver—hear, O hear!

Thou on whose stream, 'mid the steep sky's commotion, 15
 Loose clouds like earth's decaying leaves are shed,
 Shook from the tangled boughs of Heaven and Ocean,
 Angels of rain and lightning! they are spread
 On the blue surface of thine airy surge,
 Like the bright hair uplifted from the head 20
 Of some fierce Mænad, ev'n from the dim verge
 Of the horizon to the zenith's height—
 The locks of the approaching storm. Thou dirge
 Of the dying year, to which this closing night
 Will be the dome of a vast sepulchre, 25
 Vaulted with all thy congregated might
 Of vapours, from whose solid atmosphere
 Black rain, and fire, and hail will burst:—O hear!

Thou who didst waken from his summer-dreams
 The blue Mediterranean, where he lay, 30
 Lull'd by the coil of his crystalline streams,
 Beside a pumice isle in Baiæ's bay,
 And saw in sleep old palaces and towers
 Quivering within the wave's intenser day,
 All overgrown with azure moss, and flowers 35
 So sweet, the sense faints picturing them! Thou
 For whose path the Atlantic's level powers
 Cleave themselves into chasms, while far below
 The sea-blooms and the oozy woods which wear
 The sapless foliage of the ocean, know 40
 Thy voice, and suddenly grow gray with fear
 And tremble and despoil themselves:—O hear!

If I were a dead leaf thou mightest bear;
 If I were a swift cloud to fly with thee;
 A wave to pant beneath thy power, and share 45
 The impulse of thy strength, only less free
 Than thou, O uncontrollable!—if even
 I were as in my boyhood, and could be
 The comrade of thy wanderings over heaven,
 As then, when to outstrip thy skiey speed 50
 Scarce seem'd a vision,—I would ne'er have striven
 As thus with thee in prayer in my sore need.

O lift me as a wave, a leaf, a cloud!
 I fall upon the thorns of life! I bleed!
 A heavy weight of hours has chain'd and bow'd 55
 One too like thee—tameless, and swift, and proud.

Make me thy lyre, ev'n as the forest is:
 What if my leaves are falling like its own!
 The tumult of thy mighty harmonies
 Will take from both a deep autumnal tone, 60
 Sweet though in sadness. Be thou, Spirit fierce,
 My spirit! be thou me, impetuous one!
 Drive my dead thoughts over the universe,
 Like wither'd leaves, to quicken a new birth;
 And, by the incantation of this verse, 65
 Scatter, as from an unextinguish'd hearth
 Ashes and sparks, my words among mankind!
 Be through my lips to unawaken'd earth
 The trumpet of a prophecy! O Wind,
 If Winter comes, can Spring be far behind? 70

John Keats (1795-1821)



Keats was the last-born among the second-generation Romantic poets and the youngest to die.

He was also **the lowest in social rank** (lower middle class). His mother died in tuberculosis. Keats worked as an apprentice to an apothecary and a surgeon. In 1818, the first traces of TBC appeared. He went to Rome to recover, where he died at the age of 25. On his grave the

following line is written: “Here is one whose name was written in water”. Shelley wrote “Adonais” on Keats’s death.

His first volume was published in 1817 (*Poems by John Keats*), and it was rather coldly received. During 1819, Keats had to face growing problems, financial difficulties, family matters and hopeless love. His second volume came out in 1820, bringing him moderate success.

Keats is the least politically minded poet of the three, and is often regarded as the forerunner of “aesthetic movement” (*l’art pour l’art*), the representative of the cult of beauty.

The importance of sensation is a recurring theme in the relationship between art and life with Keats. He displays some dominant features of Romanticism such as the interest in medievalism, folklore, the concept of imagination and the role of poet. A crucial concept of his literary theory is “*negative capability*”. According to Keats the basic requirement of being a poet and being the receiver of the poem is the ability to live in uncertainties.

I had not a dispute but a disquisition with Dilke, upon various subjects; several things dovetailed in my mind, and at once it struck me what quality went to form a Man of Achievement, especially in Literature, and which Shakespeare possessed so enormously - I mean Negative Capability, that is, when a man is capable of being in uncertainties, mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason - Coleridge, for instance, would let go by a fine isolated verisimilitude caught from the Penetratium of mystery, from being incapable of remaining content with half-knowledge. This pursued through volumes would perhaps take us no further than this, that with a great poet the sense of Beauty overcomes every other consideration, or rather obliterates all consideration. (1817)

1817: *Poems by John Keats*

Endymion, a Poetical Romance (1818). The title poem in this volume is the only one long poem (more than 1,000 lines) completed by Keats. “Endymion” is an extended parable of how the speaker wants to have a full communion with the essence of beauty. The poem is a reworking of the Greek mythological story of the Moon Goddess, Selene, who visits her lover, Endymion, every night to kiss him. Endymion was among the most handsome creatures and favoured by Zeus, who let him choose anything he wanted. Endymion chose everlasting sleep by which he may stay young forever. Others identify Selene with Hypnos.

*A thing of beauty is a joy for ever:
 Its loveliness increases; it will never
 Pass into nothingness; but still will keep
 A bower quiet for us, and a sleep
 Full of sweet dreams, and health, and quiet breathing.
 Therefore, on every morrow, are we wreathing
 A flowery band to bind us to the earth,
 Spite of despondence, of the inhuman dearth
 Of noble natures, of the gloomy days,
 Of all the unhealthy and o'er-darkened ways::
 Made for our searching: yes, in spite of all,
 Some shape of beauty moves away the pall
 From our dark spirits.*



Lamia, Isabelle, The Eve of St. Agnes and Other Poems (1820): this volume contains all the poems that made Keats famous. **No English poet could publish a single volume which included excellent works, all in one.** The volume contains

- “Hyperion”

- “La Belle Dame Sans Merci”
- “Ode to a Nightingale”
- “Ode on a Grecian Urn”

“**La Belle Dame Sans Merci**” (“The Beautiful Lady Without Mercy”) is an art ballad based on the medieval legend that if somebody eats from the fairy food, that person will be taken from the land of the living. He returns after seven years, and will find the physical world distasteful. In the poem the story is used for different purposes. A knight-at-arms is taken away by la belle dame, when he returns, he cannot love anybody except for the “belle dame”.

“**Ode to a Nightingale**” is a very cleverly constructed poem based on contrasts. In one stanza the poet is in bed, suffering in the next one: the Nightingale becomes the symbol of immortality. In the last stanza: a question not really answered whether poetic imagination is an over-exaggerated experience or an escape from reality. The poem ends as “Was it a vision, or a waking dream? / Fled is that music:—Do I wake or sleep?” The poem is an example of Keats’s theory of “negative capability”.

“**Ode on a Grecian Urn**” presents a Greek vase, with two drawings on each side. One scene is a marriage ritual, the other is a representation of sacrifice, thus the two sides of life, happiness and sadness are contrasted. The poem again explores the relationship of art and reality: “heard melodies are sweet but those unheard are sweeter”. The other issue is how art is the aspect of immortality in life, though the creators, we are mortals. The poem concludes with the famous summary “**Beauty is truth and truth beauty**”, **implying that Beauty is the only thing that has value in life, that is worth living for**. The exclusion of social/political aspects from life and the concentration on the self-enclosed work of art in its totality is the forerunner of the end of the 19th century **l’art pour l’art** idea.



Ode On a Grecian Urn

Thou still unravish'd bride of quietness,
 Thou foster-child of silence and slow time,
 Sylvan historian, who canst thou express
 A flowery tale more sweetly than our rhyme:
 What leaf-fring'd legend haunt about thy shape
 Of deities or mortals, or of both,
 In Tempe or the dales of Arcady?
 What men or gods are these? What maidens loth?
 What mad pursuit? What struggle to escape?
 What pipes and timbrels? What wild ecstasy?

Heard melodies are sweet, but those unheard
 Are sweeter: therefore, ye soft pipes, play on;

Not to the sensual ear, but, more endear'd,
 Pipe to the spirit ditties of no tone:
 Fair youth, beneath the trees, thou canst not leave
 Thy song, nor ever can those trees be bare;
 Bold lover, never, never canst thou kiss,
 Though winning near the goal - yet, do not grieve;
 She cannot fade, though thou hast not thy bliss,
 For ever wilt thou love, and she be fair!

Ah, happy, happy boughs! that cannot shed
 Your leaves, nor ever bid the spring adieu;
 And, happy melodist, unwearied,
 For ever piping songs for ever new;
 More happy love! more happy, happy love!
 For ever warm and still to be enjoy'd,
 For ever panting, and for ever young;
 All breathing human passion far above,
 That leaves a heart high-sorrowful and cloy'd,
 A burning forehead, and a parching tongue.

Who are these coming to the sacrifice?
 To what green altar, O mysterious priest,
 Lead'st thou that heifer lowing at the skies,
 And all her silken flanks with garlands drest?
 What little town by river or sea shore,
 Or mountain-built with peaceful citadel,
 Is emptied of this folk, this pious morn?
 And, little town, thy streets for evermore
 Will silent be; and not a soul to tell
 Why thou art desolate, can e'er return.

O Attic shape! Fair attitude! with brede
 Of marble men and maidens overwrought,
 With forest branches and the trodden weed;
 Thou, silent form, dost tease us out of thought
 As doth eternity: Cold Pastoral!
 When old age shall this generation waste,
 Thou shalt remain, in midst of other woe
 Than ours, a friend to man, to whom thou say'st,
 "Beauty is truth, truth beauty," - that is all
 Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know.

The Novel Between 1800 and 1830

These three decades conveniently describe the period of English **Romanticism**, and historically, the **Regency Era** (1811-20, or in an extended sense, 1795-1837). The novels produced between these years cannot, however, be described as “Romantic” – in fact, the terms “novel” and “Romanticism” seem to be two opposing terms since it is very difficult to match the lyric and transcendental self-expression of Romanticism with the traditional, narrative and linear structure of the novel form.

There are very few *truly* Romantic novels in the 19th century, perhaps Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* (1818) and Emily Brontë’s *Wuthering Heights* (1847) may be taken as a good example, which, characteristically, denies basic conventions of plot and narrative structure.

The two outstanding figures dominating the literary scene in this period are Jane Austen and Walter Scott, the former creating the genre of the *novel of manners* and the latter *the historical novel*.

Jane Austen (1775-1817) and the Novel of Manners



Austen apparently showed **no apparent awareness of what she was doing** and she often dismissed her own works as “**just**” novels. Rumour has it that she wrote her novels in secret, and whenever someone entered the family parlour, she quickly hid her papers with a piece of embroidery. Obviously this is in close connection with her being a woman writer.

Her birth and upbringing considerably determined the focus of her novels. She was born in **Steventon**, a small village in Hampshire, and lived there with her parents in a quiet little house. Although **she never married** and rarely went out, she could masterfully describe the country characters, the behaviour of the country gentry, clergy and the landed aristocracy. Austen does not describe the lower classes.

Themes

As we can see, she set for herself a very limited theme: “*three or four families in a country village is the very thing to work on,*” as she put it, and their everyday concerns. She deals with **daily routines** of balls, exchanges of letters, visits, gossips, and so on. These are seemingly trivial matters, but Austen has an excellent eye for detail.

If we summarise the plots of the novels, they, in themselves, do not seem to be interesting. What is capturing is the faithful account of everyday life coupled with the voice of the narrator. She never makes generalisations and her concerns always remain deliberately **small**; as she put it in a letter: her purpose was to **sketch her novels “on to the little bit of ivory (two inches wide) on which [she] work[s] with so fine a brush.”**

Her novels are *miniatures* of contemporary English society. With a simple descriptive sentence Austen is able to give a **sense of social order**, fine and subtle relations governing social intercourse. In this social order individuals are important but they always belong to (or are defined) by a social/community pattern.

The smallest important unit is the family, then comes the circle of relatives, then of acquaintances, then of class. The central problems in these communities are **social prestige, marrying well, inheriting property and social mobility**. Thus, Austen, after the experimental literature of the Sentimental age, seems to redirect the English novel to its chief preoccupations, and her novels again become the expressive means of the desires and social **aspirations of the middle class**, in this case rendered from the perspective of a woman.

Irony

Jane Austen completed her first novels around 1797-98, when the English literary scene was, on the one hand, dominated by the Gothic novel, and on the other hand, by the emerging Romantic poetry (*Lyrical Ballads* by Wordsworth and Coleridge appeared in 1798). **Her novels, however, are neither Gothic, nor Romantic** (in the literary historical sense of the word). Austen, like Fielding about half a century before, began her career with a reaction against the dominant genre of the period, writing a **parody of the Gothic novel** in *Northanger Abbey*, which was eventually published in 1818.

This choice signifies a major shift in her concept of the novel: she does not opt for the cult of heightened emotions and exotic elements of the novel, or general questions of morality. On the contrary: all her novels have a **rational, mildly sarcastic**, ironic narrator or protagonist who is usually an outsider and looks down on the extravagant passions of the other characters, propagating calmness and acute observation.

Jane Austen is often referred to as an *ironic observer*. The source of irony in Austen is often the **social and financial position given by wealth and landed property as opposed to the qualities provided by personal character and intelligence**. For instance, in *Pride and Prejudice*, Lady Catherine de Burgh's social position is excellent but her manners are not really so. Mary, with her humble social position behaves outrageously, and Collins is simply a puppet of social rules. As opposed to them, the Gardiners are models of the perfectly mannered landed gentry.

Irony often originates from the **very structure of contemporary society**. Let us not forget that we are in the period of the Napoleonic wars, which are, by the way, never mentioned in the novels. The class, however, that mostly profited from this war (**Corn Laws**), is very much there, that is, the **"new rich"** (*nouveaux riches*) who were not only rich by inheritance but by the fact that they made considerable wealth by corn trade.

The members of this class got rich in towns and having gained enough money, they retired from trade and moved to the countryside where they mingled with the aristocracy. They usually bought or rented a country house and lived a life of leisure. The inevitable **clash between these two classes** is depicted with irony by Austen. This gives rise to her main genre, **the novel of manners**.



A Regency ball in *Pride and Prejudice*

Perspective

1. The **technical means with which she achieves this ironic tone is the new use of the point of view**. Defoe used the first person narration – Robinson, Moll Flanders, Roxana and the others tell their own stories; Richardson wants us to decide between the several points of view represented in the different letters; Fielding introduces the omniscient third-person narrator, frequently addressing the reader directly and pointing out to him/her what to think about a particular character.

Austen, however, often mixes the narrator's voice and that of the character, creating a tension between the two and introducing the so-called *free indirect speech*.

Pride and Prejudice begins with perhaps the best opening sentences of English literature:

“It is a truth universally acknowledged that a single man in possession of a good fortune must be in want of a wife.” (5)

Whose voice are we listening to? Technically, it said by the narrator, but the content of the sentence may describe, for instance, Lydia or Mrs. Bennett. Besides, the sentence is obviously absurd: it is *not* a universal truth that all rich men want to get married. Thus, the narrator puts on the mask of one of her characters and speaks in her voice but also shows that she does not agree with her and shows her folly.

Let's look at this quotation from *Mansfield Park* in which the point of view is shifting between the narrator and that of Fanny Price:

“He went; but there was no reading, no China, no composure for Fanny. He had told her the most extraordinary, the most inconceivable, the most unwelcome news; and she could think of nothing else. To be acting! After all his objections – objections so just and so public! After all that she had heard him say, and seen him look, and known him to be feeling. Could it be possible? Edmund so inconsistent. Was he not deceiving himself? Was he not wrong? Alas! it was all Miss Crawford's doing.” (161)

2. On the other hand, her viewpoint is clearly that of a **woman**, a feature greatly admired by Virginia Woolf. For instance, *Pride and Prejudice* could not have been written by a man; the **powerful heroines** in her novels, Emma or Elizabeth Bennett can be associated with the author. Jane Austen was the first woman novelist who was **clearly writing as a woman**. Previously there were women on the literary scene as well: Aphra Behn, Maria Edgeworth, the forerunner of the regional novel, Mary Shelley, the author of *Frankenstein*, Clara Reeve and Ann Radcliffe, the authors of Gothic novels, but none of them wrote consciously as women, there was no clear female voice discernible.

Jane Austen's novels include *Sense and Sensibility* (1811) (begun as *Elinor and Marianne* before 1797); *Pride and Prejudice* (1813) (original title: *First Impressions*, 1797); *Mansfield Park* (1814); *Emma* (1816); *Northanger Abbey* (1798-1803, published posthumously in 1818) and *Persuasion* (1818).

Walter Scott (1771-1832) and the Historical Novel

Hardly can two more different writers be found in this period of the English novel than Austen and Scott. In Austen's novels we hardly get any sense of the groundbreaking historical (and historic) events of Europe. Walter Scott, conversely, was the very creator of the *historical novel* in England.

The genre was totally new in the 19th century. Before that period we can find no historical awareness or historically-oriented reflection on previous events. Walter Scott was also deeply aware of the difficulty of writing, in the case of his *Waverley* which is about events that took place sixty years before its completion in 1815. He ponders upon this dilemma in the "Preface" to *Waverley*:

"But my second or supplemental title was a matter of much more difficult election [...] Had I, for example, announced in my frontispiece, 'Waverley, a Tale of other Days,' must not every novel reader have anticipated a castle scarce less than that of Udolpho, of which the eastern wing had long been uninhabited, and the keys either lost, or consigned to the care of some aged butler or housekeeper, whose trembling steps, about the middle of the second volume, were doomed to guide the hero, or heroine, to the ruinous precincts? Would not the owl have shrieked and the cricket cried in my very title-page? [...]"

Again, had my title borne, 'Waverley, a Romance from the German,' what head so obtuse as not to image forth a profligate abbot, an oppressive duke, a secret and mysterious association of Rosycrucians and Illuminati, with all their properties of black cowls, caverns, daggers, electrical machines, trap-doors, and dark-lanterns?"

Or if I had rather chosen to call my work a 'Sentimental Tale,' would it not have been a sufficient presage of a heroine with a profusion of auburn hair, and a harp, the soft solace of her solitary hours, which she fortunately finds always the means of transporting from castle to cottage, although she herself be sometimes obliged to jump out of a two-pair-of-stairs window, and is more than once bewildered on her journey, alone and on foot, without any guide but a blowzy peasant girl, whose jargon she hardly can understand?"

Or, again, if my Waverley had been entitled 'A Tale of the Times,' wouldst thou not, gentle reader, have demanded from me a dashing sketch of the fashionable world, a few anecdotes of private scandal thinly veiled, and if lusciously painted, so much the better?" (34-35).



The Birth of the Historical Novel

The new genre was, in fact, end-product of a long process that includes the **Enlightenment, the French revolution, the formation of the national identity**. The revolutions that swept through Europe in the first half of the 19th century were all “national” in character.

As a result, *the concept of history changed*. Previously, history meant the history of the world based on the Bible, that is, from the Creation to the Last Judgement. The German philosopher Hegel was the first to prove that social man is the product of his own historical activity and conversely, history is made by people themselves. This is called a dialectic process. The view also started to spread that history takes a distinct course, it moves forward, bringing with it development: the notion of **historical progress** was something new.

The second most important reason why the historical novel became popular in England at the beginning of the 19th century was that around the end of the 18th century the *reading public changed*. The publishers realized that publishing was indeed a great business and they tried to satisfy the demands of the ever-increasing middle class reading public. Lending libraries also appeared. There was great demand for fiction around the 1820s, but no great author could be found in the period, with the possible exception of Jane Austen. Scott managed to fill this gap.

He wrote “Romantic” stories with interesting plots while remaining true to historical events. He provided footnotes, added appendices to novels, explained the real life models of characters, that is, in this sense, **he was not a Romantic author**. As he put it in *Waverly*: “*These*

Introductory Chapters have been a good deal censured as tedious and unnecessary. Yet there are circumstances recorded in them which the author has not been able to persuade himself to retrench or cancel.”

Thirdly, the question arises **why it was a Scotsman** who created the historical novel in England. To answer the question, we have to go back to 1707, that is, the unification of Scotland and England. At that time, this unification was purely functional, England wanted to defend its borders and provide a further economic basis to the development that began after the Glorious Revolution of 1688. It was very important that Scotland profited greatly from this Union, which led to great prosperity there after 1707, unlike in Ireland whose unification with England in 1801 proved to be disastrous – Ireland was heavily exploited. The birth of Great Britain was the result of a **relatively peaceful unification**, so it is easy to understand that after 1707 the Scottish had absolutely no reason to be nationalistic, so Scott’s historical novel is not the product of national protest against England.

The 18th century is age of the formation of **British identity**. “**Britishness**,” as opposed to “Englishness” is an artificial and retrospectively created identity. The crucial period of the evolution of British identity is the **Seven Years’ War** against the French, from 1756 to 1763. “British” at that time meant “not French, not Catholic, empirical, practical.” During this (artificial) evolution of British identity, England, simply speaking, “stole” most national symbols of the Scottish and built them into this newly born British concept. For instance, concepts like courage, strength, patriotism, perseverance, Calvinism, were represented as *British*, and not Scottish features in England’s wars anymore. Several Scotsmen really fought – not for England but – for the British Empire, as soldiers and military engineers. The consequence of this was that England, very systematically, *deprived Scotland of the means of national protest*.

Walter Scott is, in fact, a characteristic figure of the kind of **false Scottish nationalism** born at the turn of the 18th and 19th centuries, when, for instance, the “Ossian poems” were “discovered” (in reality, they were fakes written by James MacPherson), kilts became fashionable, and so on. **In 1822, Scott was appointed master of ceremonies at the visit of George IV**. During this visit, Scottish highlanders wore kilts, but not as a sign of national protest but as a sign of loyalty to the English king. According to Hugh Trevor-Roper,

“The result was a bizarre travesty of Scottish history, Scottish reality. Imprisoned by his fanatical Celtic friends, carried away by his own romantic Celtic fantasies, Scott seemed determined to forget historic Scotland, his own Lowland Scotland, altogether.” (30)



George IV's visit to Scotland was the first visit of a reigning monarch in nearly two centuries

The royal family also began to take up this fashion of **new interest in Scotland**: Queen Victoria bought **Balmoral** Castle in Scotland in 1848, and the cult of Scotland has been unharmed ever since. Even today, the members of the Royal family have to go to Scotland every year, watch the Highland Games and wear kilts at certain occasions.

Therefore it is wrong to speak about Scott as a Romantic author in the strict sense of the world. Scott was NOT a Romantic nationalist, on the contrary, he was a faithful and loyal Tory. In his historical novels he wanted to show the difference and distance between Scotland then and Scotland now; he does not express any nostalgia towards the Scottish past.

Three important features should finally be mentioned with Scott:

(1) **Historical realism**: faithful description is very important, we can identify the place and time precisely. The characters are always depicted as people of the period in which they lived. History is no more only an interesting or spectacular backdrop but a determining factor of the characters' thinking and actions.

(2) **Everyday heroism**: a key concept with Scott. He shows how history influences the common man, how he is affected by the historical process and how he experiences a conflict. Scott presents history as an everyday reality not as a series of battles between heroic kings and knights. In *Waverley*, for instance, the 1745 Jacobite rebellion is presented through the love story of Edward, an English officer and Flora McIvor, the daughter of a Scottish chieftain.

(3) **Objectivity**: Scott avoided "myth making" and creating national heroes. As far as it was possible, he tried to present both sides of a conflict objectively. He often used a non-heroic person and showed how he was affected by both sides. Scott tried to give a balanced picture, as illustrated by the following quotation:

"The drum advanced, beating no measured martial tune, but a kind of rub-a-dub-dub, like that with which the fire-drum startles the slumbering artisans of a Scotch burgh. It is the object of this history to do justice to all men; I must therefore record, in justice to the drummer,

that he protested he could beat any known march or point of war known in the British army, and had accordingly commenced with 'Dumbarton's Drums,' when he was silenced by Gifted Gilfillan, the commander of the party, who refused to permit his followers to move to this profane, and even, as he said, persecutive tune, and commanded the drummer to beat the 119th Psalm. As this was beyond the capacity of the drubber of sheepskin, he was fain to have recourse to the inoffensive row-de-dow as a harmless substitute for the sacred music which his instrument or skill were unable to achieve. This may be held a trifling anecdote, but the drummer in question was no less than town-drummer of Anderton. I remember his successor in office, a member of that enlightened body, the British Convention. Be his memory, therefore, treated with due respect." (*Waverley*, end of Chapter 34)

The most important works by Scott include (altogether he wrote 39 novels): *Waverly* (1814); *Guy Mannering* (1815); *Rob Roy* (1817); *The Heart of Midlothian* (1818); *Ivanhoe* (1819); *Kenilworth* (1821) and *Quentin Durward* (1823). His novels may be divided roughly into three groups:

(1) Ones dealing with the history of England and Europe in the Middle Ages: (*Ivanhoe*, *Quentin Durward*, *The Tale of the Crusaders*);

(2) novels taking place in the Tudor and Stuart periods (16-17th century) (*Woodstock*, *Kenilworth*) and

(3) novels dealing with the Scottish past and near-present, such as *Waverly*, *The Heart of Midlothian* and *Old Mortality*.

The Victorian Age (1837-1901)

The years between 1837 and 1901, that is, the rule of Queen Victoria gained the shape of a well-recognisable period that cannot be confused with anything else.

When one thinks of these six decades, one remembers the bustling London, full of passengers in black suits, perhaps shrouded in fog, horse-driven cabs, railway lines in the countryside, great industrial cities with factories with large halls, full of women and children, and above all, serious-looking, children begging in the streets, respectable gentleman making transactions in offices, and decent women in clothes that reveal no part of their bodies, staying at home and giving orders to servants. No age before seemed to be more serious, even morose than this one – and all this was largely the legacy of Queen Victoria. In the novel, elements of satire, extravagance, ironic observation, playfulness almost totally disappeared, and most novels had a social relevance. Only at

the end of the century do doubts about the Victorian values appear.



The Victorian period can perhaps be characterised by saying it was two-sided: at once embodying progress and optimism and symbolising doubts and uncertainties. Let us look at the two sides.

The Positive Aspects of the Era

The keywords of the period were *reform, progress, evolution, liberalism, laissez-faire economy, stability and respectability*.

If one looks at the map of Europe in the nineteenth century, one can see that revolutions broke out to abolish the remnants of the obsolete feudal system in almost all countries on the continent (just remember the “spring of nations” in 1848, when uprisings broke out in Italy, France, Germany and in Hungary). In the United Kingdom, however, political and social tensions were solved more or less peacefully. Apart from the riots of the 1820s, the country

enjoyed peace basically for about a hundred years. The main means of avoiding riots and revolutions was the *extension of the franchise* (the right to vote) that happened in three steps: in 1832, all middle class men got the right to vote, in 1867, working class people in towns were given this right, and in 1884, working classes in rural districts were also enfranchised; that is, by the 1880s, all men above 21 years of age had the right to vote. Women had to wait until 1928 to get the same rights.

Social and labour reforms also took place. In 1833, the Factory Reform Act (the state inspection of factories) was introduced, the same year, slavery was abolished in the Empire. The next year the Poor Laws Amendment Act was passed. It meant setting up **workhouses**, which was not altogether a positive step, since it just confined poverty within walls. The Shaftesbury Mines Act of 1842 prohibited the employment of children underground and under the age of 10. Compared to the widespread practice of child labour, this was a relatively significant act. In 1867, the Factory Acts were extended, and the criminal laws were also reformed (1837) and less severe punishments were introduced. The setting up of Metropolitan Police in London was also a significant step in this period – English policemen got the nickname “bobbies” because the Metropolitan Police was set up under the premiership of Robert Peel.

By the middle of the century, the United Kingdom became the leading industrial power of the world; for instance it produced – an incredible figure – almost half of the world’s total iron and steel output, and besides this, agricultural production also reached its highest potential. By the middle of the century, half of the population lived in cities. The event that most spectacularly demonstrated Britain’s supremacy was *the Great Exhibition* in the Crystal Palace in 1851.

This *industrial supremacy* was based on several factors, such as

- (1) the colonies that served both as sources of raw material and market for goods;
- (2) the railway system: the Manchester-Liverpool line was opened in 1830;
- (3) the establishment of communication systems in general (railway, telegraph);
- (4) urbanisation;
- (5) internal peace and
- (6) little foreign competition: Germany and the USA become rivals only in the 1870s.

Due to the improving health conditions, for instance to the establishment of sewage systems in towns, more and more children were born and could survive. As a result of this, the **cult of the decent, happy family developed**. The Queen was the best example of this, having nine children from Prince Albert, but famous authors also propagated the idea(l) of the large family (see for instance Dickens’s early writing, *Sketches of Young Couples*).



It followed from all this that the structure and the ideas governing the society also changed.

The need for *respectability* perhaps was above all. The idea in the 18th century meant moral excellence, at the beginning of the 19th century it was linked to outstanding social status (see Jane Austen), but by the mid-19th century it meant **honesty and decency**, irrespective of social status, but was mainly linked to the middle class.

The emblematic figure of the Victorian age is the respectable middle class (male!) professional, the lawyer, the merchant, the doctor or the priest. Social advancement was no more based exclusively on wealth but also on *good education*; **no wonder that the novel of education, the *Bildungsroman* becomes a leading genre**. Naturally, power was still in the hands of aristocratic families, and for the middle classes, no matter how wealthy they became, it was still difficult to enter these high circles.

Besides this, key ideas of the age were also *self-help, individualism and individual responsibility*. Let us not forget that at that time, no state-controlled welfare system existed, jobs with old-age pensions were rare, and in general, everyone was forced to rely on himself or herself. If someone's business failed, there was no one to help him or her, generally that person had to go a debtor's prison.

On the other hand, the state interfered into the freedom of investment very little. The trust vested in the individual, his or her perfectibility and liberty was extensive; Samuel Smiles, a Scottish author and reformer claimed, for instance, that *"the nation is only the aggregate of individual conditions and civilization itself is but a question of personal improvement."*

The ideology of the Victorian age was founded on the all-pervasive idea of *stability*. The central fear of the age was that the **contagion of revolution** from France would reach England, therefore, everything was done to secure a peaceful environment at home, backed by the evolving cultural myth of historical continuity.

Thomas Carlyle, one of the leading Victorian thinkers spoke against the French revolution, and Dickens, in *A Tale of Two Cities*, also presented the revolutionary crowd in Paris as repulsive. Walter Bagehot, a literary critic, in *The English Constitution* (1867) emphasized what was stable in Victorian life or rather what was efficient. He divided the constitution into two parts, its “Dignified” (symbolic) aspect and “the Efficient” part (the way things are actually get done). For him, stability did not mean rigidity; he condemned the American constitution for being rigid, based on fixed-terms, as he said, “*you can quicken nothing, you can retard nothing.*” By contrast, he considered England’s unwritten constitution as elastic, flexible and serving practical purposes better.

The Darker Side

It goes without saying that the **Victorian age was not as idyllic as described above**. As the age advanced, it had to struggle **hypocrisy** (perhaps the first word we remember here) and **complacency, anxieties, doubts, unsettling questions, uncertainty and contradictions**.

There were serious *economic tensions*: the situation of the working class living in slums was horrendous; there were huge class differences; some writers spoke about “**two nations,**” that of the rich and the poor, the expression coming from Benjamin Disraeli’s 1845 book *Sybil, or the Two Nations*.

The Babbage report of 1850 (“Report to the General Board of Health, on a Preliminary Inquiry into the Sewerage, Drainage, and Supply of Water and the Sanitary Condition of the Inhabitants of the Hamlet of Haworth, in the West Riding of the County of York”) revealed that more than 45% of children did not reach the age of seven; the average rate of mortality was 25 per 1,000 inhabitants, the average age of death was 26 years, the village lacked a sewage system, there was no public slaughterhouse, and epidemics and TBC decimated the population.

Besides these horrible conditions, *mechanization*, both meant as the introduction of machines and their effect on people’s attitude to work, led to alienation from work, the routine monotony of industrial life, the consequence of which was that neither pride nor joy in work was to be found. This meant a huge blow to Protestant work ethic.

Although it was supposed to be one of the “success stories” of the nation, the **British Empire also generated tensions** that could hardly be resolved by the end of the century. The Queen, retreating from public duties after the death of her husband, was proclaimed the Empress of India (in 1877). From the 1880s, a **real race (“scramble”) for Africa** began among the European nations, the outcome of which was the English occupation of Egypt in 1882, the subjugation of **Sudan, Nigeria, Kenya and Uganda** in the 1890s, the annexation of **Transvaal**

(South Africa) in 1877, and then the complete annexation of South Africa in 1902. Britain's aim was to build a huge colonial empire from Egypt to South Africa, while the French were spreading their rule in an East-West direction. This inevitably led to a clash between the two nations, peaking in the Fashoda incident of 1898, bringing the UK and France on the verge of war. No actual war broke out, but the conflict showed a dismal future for European nations.

The British colonisation naturally had its ideology at home. Most people firmly believed that it was a God-given task of the English to “**bring light**” to the “**Dark Continent**” and civilise the “primitive” nations there, whether they wanted it or not. Of course, economic reasons generated this expansion and later they were given ideological justification.

The best-known example of the advocate of British expansion in English literature was *Rudyard Kipling* (1865-1936). He preached the gospel of duty and an active service to the Law, conceived as an ordered arrangement of life which afford man to fully realize his possibilities. According to him, an Englishman had a duty to the Empire, namely the defence of “civilization” against “barbarism.” Kipling tried to explain to the average citizen who took the Empire for granted that the Empire had a transcendental reality requiring responsibility, obedience, and what was considered by him “**The White Man's Burden**” (the title of his 1899 poem).

But the “Empire” was not only built abroad. We can talk about solid **chauvinism at home** as well. It was forbidden for **Welsh** children to speak their language, England did not bother about the great famine in **Ireland**, and **Gypsies** were simply not treated as citizens. Every minority was subject to violent Anglicizing.

The *situation of women* was not something to be proud of, either. A decent middle-class woman was not expected to work. Therefore, it was absolutely crucial for women to get married; for most of them, it was an economic contract and a basic means of survival, since women **could not inherit property**, not even widows. They lost their husband's property if he died, and also the property they brought into the marriage; they became either poor widows or got married soon again. This inhuman regulation only ceased with the Married Women's Property Act in 1882. From 1891 on, widows could inherit their husband's property, and by 1893, they had a command over property brought into marriage.

According to the 1857 **divorce** legislation, a man could divorce his wife for adultery, but a woman could only do so if adultery was *accompanied by cruelty*. It was practically impossible for a woman to get divorced without a major scandal or a permanent emotional trauma. The ideal of the middle-class woman persisted, as it was described in Coventry Patmore's poem “The Angel in the House.”



There were two forms of existence important to avoid for middle-class women in general.

First, everyone was afraid of remaining a *spinster (a single woman)*. The phenomenon existed at that time not only because certain women were not willing or were unable to get married but it had a social cause: as a result of the Industrial Revolution, quick rise or quick fall in society were equally possible, and this uncertainty made social contact difficult. Secondly, to serve the Empire, many men were stationed abroad permanently, and if they returned, they did not necessarily intend to marry. It is also a fact that there were permanently 4% more women than men in the English society, there were half a million more women than men. Moreover, 30% of women, 25% of men never married.

Being a spinster became a social problem: in 1851, *Cranford*, a short novel by Elizabeth Gaskell, was published. The novel is about spinsters in a small town community. Spinsters were in a very dangerous position, because had to be very thrifty, there were hardly any chances of studying for them, and unless they came from the upper classes, they were doomed to rely on charity (see, for instance, Miss Bates in Jane Austen's *Emma*).

The other stigmatised form of existence was being a *prostitute* ("the great social evil"). In 1857, there were 8,600 prostitutes in London alone, and from a certain perspective, the phenomenon may be seen as the consequence of 4-5% surplus of women. In the Victorian era, however, the prostitute question became a socio-economic problem, instead of being a primarily religious or moral one. "**Reforming**" these "**fallen women**" became a chief concern of social

reformers. However ardent these reformers were, the solution of the woman problem in general was not possible until the infamous double standard of the Victorian age was not put away with.



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If we wanted to select a single idea that shows the best the changing intellectual climate of the Victorian age, it would be that of *determinism*.

Although the **conflict of determinism and free will** has a long history in philosophy, within the nineteenth century context, determinism basically means that from about the 1850s, growing doubts are raised concerning the validity of human action, or self-expression and in the second half of the century the determining feeling is that nearly every field of human (and animal) life is **constrained, constructed and shaped by the environment**. This leads to an emphatic presence of passive “heroes” in fiction, and the possibilities of free will seem to be increasingly limited. In short, the European revolutions had failed by about 1850; in more general terms, the Romantic period was over, and human action was more and more determined by the feeling of conformity.

In biology, the most well-known expression of the deterministic idea is *Darwin’s theory of evolution*. The theory of evolution was not new in itself: Carl Linné, who neatly classified all animals, speaks about it in the 18th century. Darwin, however, concentrated on the gaps between certain classes of animals. How is it possible that certain species have died out and disappeared? Darwin’s answer was *environmental determinism*, that is, in the struggle for life, certain species can adapt themselves better to the changes of the environment and thus survive,

while others die out. In Victorian literature, besides several notable examples, it is Thomas Hardy's fiction at the end of the century that expresses *fatalism*, the sense predestination and determinism the best. This determination by certain environmental factors is, in fact, the leading idea of the new type of novel emerging in the 1880s and 1890s, that is, the *Naturalist novel*.

Connected to the idea of determinism is the growing concern over the antithesis of evolution, namely, *degeneration*. The simple question was asked, if it is possible for a race or a species to develop, is it not equally possible to regress to an inferior state of existence? Taking examples from biology, several scientists and thinkers argued that within the human race the danger of degeneration was equally threatening, which was thought to come about with inheritance, the mixture of different races, a gradual loss of "purity" or as the effect of the environment.

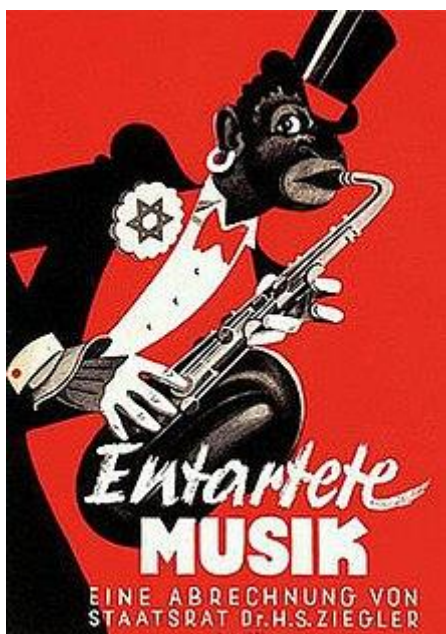
The idea was also raised that each generation becomes weaker, as a result of their inability to preserve "the purity" of their blood by intermingling with different people. **Social evils like alcoholism, drug abuse, or certain individuals' predisposition for crime was also often explained with the degeneration theory.** The first „scientific" proponent of the idea was the Italian **criminologist Cesare Lombroso (1835-1909)**, who argued that the very bodily structure, especially the shape of the skull, proved someone's criminal dispositions, implying that physical degeneration is a sign of **moral degeneration**. The fear of degeneration, **atavism**, distortion became widespread concerns from the 1880s on.



For instance, R. L. Stevenson's 1886 novella *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* perfectly illustrates in the figure of the abominable Hyde the way that the age imagined a distorted, "degenerated" individual: "*He is not easy to describe. There is something wrong with his appearance; something displeasing, something downright detestable. I never saw a man I so disliked, and yet I scarce know why. He must be deformed somewhere; he gives a strong feeling of deformity, although I couldn't specify the point,*" says Enfield (15).

On the one hand, the Victorians took some kind of strange pleasure in these manifestations of degeneration, as the popularity of the so-called “**freak shows**” demonstrate.

Furthermore, these ideas laid a very dangerous path of thinking for the coming generations, which would ultimately lead to the horrible ideas of Nazism about more developed and inferior nations and races, its eugenic practices and the stigmatisation of “degenerate (that is, Modernist) art,” which was called “**entartete Kunst**”.



Besides the spread of ideas of determinism, equally unsettling was the development of **geology** in the 1830s. The study of fossils of extinct animals showed that the Earth was after all much older as it had been thought to be: in the 17th century, James Ussher dated the Creation of the world to 4004 BC; even at the beginning of the 19th century the Earth was not thought to be older than 6,000 years. The study of fossils and palaeontology proved that we have to think in *millions* of years.

The consequence of the development of geology was that things became less “solid”; set against time, **the scale infinitely increased**: after all, a hill or a lake had not always been there, which must have been a frightening thought.

Moreover, it increased man’s sense of **loneliness in the Universe** and undermined the generally accepted slogan of stability and permanence of the Victorian age. As Edmund Gosse, an English author and critic reports in his book on his relationship with his Victorian father in 1907:

“Here was a dilemma! Geology certainly seemed to be true, but the Bible, which was God’s word, was true. If the Bible said that all things in Heaven and Earth were created in six days, created in six days they were – in six literal days of twenty-four hours each. The evidences of spontaneous variation of form, acting, over an immense space of time, upon ever-modifying organic structures, seemed overwhelming, but they must either be brought into line with the six-day labour of creation, or they must be rejected. To a mind so acute and at the same time so narrow as that of my Father – a mind which is all logical and positive without breadth,

without suppleness and without imagination – to be subjected to a check of this kind is agony. [...] My Father, although half suffocated by the emotion of being lifted, as it were, on the great biological wave, never dreamed of letting go his clutch of the ancient tradition, but hung there, strained and buffeted.” (75-6)

The dilemma of Gosse’s father was more or less typical in the Victorian age: people saw the world changing around them, yet could not deny the traditions they were brought up in.

The Victorian Novel

Some Preliminary Remarks

According to Lord David Cecil, “*Apart from anything else, [the early Victorian novelists] tell the story so well. And though this may not be the highest merit of the novelist, it is, in some sort the first. [...] Mankind, like a child, wanted to be told a story.*” (Wright, ed. 45).

The general expectation of the early Victorian period (1837-1860) was that the task of the novelist should be to **entertain** the audience with works merging social topics with a good deal of *sentimentalism*. The author heavily depended on the audience: novels were generally **published in magazines**, in *instalments*, which meant that a chapter, or part of a chapter was published at regular intervals. This quickly made the novel popular, since buying the issues of these magazines was affordable for the average middle-class readership.

The main artistic consequence, however, of this kind of new method of publication was that the novelist had to **work at an enormous speed**, with no real artistic concept of the work and a lack of artistic unity. Also, each chapter had to end with a punch-line or some mystery so that the next volume of the magazine should be bought by the readers. The writer depended on the reading public so much that, for instance, Dickens had to change the pessimistic ending of *Great Expectations* to satisfy his readers.

A further task of the novelist was constructing stories in which the reading public might “feel at home,” activating the “how true!” experience. The requirement was writing in a **transparent, realistic language**.

The author often had to face the conflict between **criticism and sentimentalism**: most novelists wanted to deal with social problems in a critical way but at the same time entertain the readers who bought their books. Writers often chose the second option; as Dickens put it, “*If you had seen Macready last night, undisguisedly sobbing and crying on the sofa as I read, you would have felt, as I did, what a thing it is to have power.*” (cited by Pollard 79). Wilkie Collins, a minor Victorian writer, one of the first practitioners of the detective story, famously formulated the basic task of any Victorian novelist: “**Make ‘em laugh, make ‘em cry, make ‘em wait.**”

Late Victorian novels (roughly between 1860 and 1901) **represented a more serious tone**; the task of the author was no more only entertainment but dealing with great issues of human existence in a sophisticated way. For example, in Dickens's later novels (*Great Expectations*, *Bleak House*) some moral dilemma is always involved, see also George Eliot's novels, or Thomas Hardy's existentialism.

There was a strong feeling that no privileged aspect of truth could be advocated, many truths may exist side by side, truth is relativised, which is perhaps best illustrated by the practice of dramatic monologues in Victorian poetry, "*truth broken into prismatic hues*," as Robert Browning put it.

Something that is true of the whole Victorian age is that it was characterised by a complete taboo of „improper themes“. Special “family editions” of Shakespeare were published from which the passages dealing with the body and bodily love were simply deleted: “*Nothing is added to the original text, but those words and expressions are omitted which cannot with propriety be read aloud in the family.*” (from the “Introduction” to *Family Shakespeare*, 1818, cited by Allan 143).

Charles Dickens (1812-1870)

The last paragraph of Dickens's *A Child's History of England* (1854) runs as follows: “*Queen Victoria, came to the throne on the twentieth of June, one thousand eight hundred and thirty seven. She was married to Prince Albert of Saxe Gotha on the tenth of February, one thousand eight hundred and forty. She is very good, and much beloved. So I end, like the crier, with ‘God save the Queen!’*” (416).

Dickens is perhaps **the Victorian novelist** who unites the traces of the age best in his career spanning over thirty years, at once representing the main ideals of middle-class Victorian existence and criticising some dark aspects of the age, but never turning against its fundamental values.

Most of his novels are based on **certain experiences of his own life** and nearly all characters represent one real figure from his life.

The father figures in his novels were largely modelled on his own father. Although Dickens came from the middle class, he experienced poverty firsthand, because his father was imprisoned for debts. Therefore, his father figures are generally hard working, decent, but can hardly make a living, whenever they earn some money, they spend it. They are mostly **weak but lovely figures**. The paradigmatic father figure for Dickens is the ever-optimistic Wilkins Micawber in *David Copperfield*, with his famous saying: “*Annual income twenty pounds, annual expenditure nineteen pounds nineteen and six, result happiness. Annual income twenty pounds, annual expenditure twenty pounds ought and six, result misery.*”



The woman figures in his novels are somewhat more **contradictory** and are based on several mixed experiences. Once Dickens's father was put in the prison of debtors, the mother sent young Dickens to work in a blacking factory. However, he had to continue to work there after the father came out of prison. This was a traumatic experience for the young Dickens, **he could never forget and forgive this**. As a middle-class child, he felt especially awkward among working-class children. All women characters reflect this uneasiness towards women: either they are idealistically portrayed, angelic, or they are **cruel**, such as Mrs Joe in *Great Expectations*, or downright dead, like Pip's parents. When he fell in love with a daughter of a banker, which love, was, of course, hopeless because of social barriers. It is also a recurrent motif in his works: the **unreachable, cold, rich girl** whom the protagonist cannot approach (like Estella in *Great Expectations*).

Dickens read a lot, **educated himself** and was very critical of public schooling. All the schools depicted in the novels are very ineffective, teach useless subjects (Greek and Latin), and schoolmasters are cruel or incompetent. It is interesting however, that he sent his own children to public schools, not really because he wanted them to learn and develop but because it was his firm conviction that **there was nothing wrong with the system itself**, and that it was only the people managing and participating in the system who made it bad. Dickens always concentrates on personal matters and does not seem to see the problem as a whole. Basically, he maintained that if classical subjects were taught by competent and humanistic teachers, everything would be all right.

As regards his *style*, its elements also go back to his early adulthood. At the age of fifteen, he became an apprentice at a lawyer's office, so he learnt the language of jurisdiction very well, he learnt to write *precisely*, and he gained intimate knowledge in the world of law and, as a consequence, prisons and lawyers frequently appear in his writings. Later he became a journalist and reporter in the Parliament, so he had to learn to write with *speed and accuracy*.

The Middle-Class Writer

Dickens, like so many authors before him, came from the middle class and wrote for a middle class audience, thus strongly depended on them, and had to conform to their tastes. It is false to see him a Realist or radical writer, he was neither: **he was truly middle class**, also in the sense that he took a middle road.

He recognized the horrors of poverty and the outrageousness of slums, but the reaction he gave to this recognition was truly Victorian: he wished to cure these social evils but wished to turn away from them at the same time, because “the cure” would have meant a full realistic exposure of social evils, which he could not afford. Dickens, in fact, never escaped from this vicious circle. According to Angus Wilson, “*the young Dickens aspired to a respectable middle-class radicalist attacking particular social evils and ended as a middle-aged revolutionary with a peculiar hostility to the middle classes*” (85).

As a consequence, Dickens spectacularly **ignores certain topics**.

Sexuality is completely missing from his novels. For him, the middle class ideal is sexual purity, there is never illegal love in his works, or at best only some hints at it, or the appearance of it, the bodily features of women are completely missing.

He also leaves out the depiction of the working **proletariat**; as George Orwell points out, his poor youthful heroes speak King’s English. All in all, we see middle-class characters and higher class ones, but we never get to know what these middle-class heroes actually *do* and how they earn their money. According to Mario Praz, “*His heroes once they have made money and settled down not merely no longer work, but do not even occupy their leisure with the energetic pastimes.*”

Furthermore, Dickens does not deal with so important and determining topics of his age as **religion**, in spite of the smaller religious revolution going on in the Victorian times, including the appearance of the Evangelical movement, the Oxford movement and the Catholic emancipation.

Neither does he really deal with **sciences**; the most important innovations do not even appear in his novels.

He does not speak about **politics**, either, which is, of course not surprising, for as it has been pointed out above, he was no radical, and he thought that violence was no solution for problems.

George Santayana wrote that “*Perhaps, properly speaking, [Dickens] had no ideas on any subject, what he had was a vast, sympathetic participation in the daily life of mankind*” (186).

What, then, does he include in his works?

Dickens’s ideal was a kind of “**bourgeois paradise**,” at least up to the 1850s, with the Pickwick-type of benevolent, good characters. Orwell wittily remarks that “*The ideal to be striven after, then, appears to be something like this: a hundred thousand pounds, a quaint old*

house with plenty of ivy on it, a sweetly, womanly wife, a horde of children, and no work. Everything is safe, soft, peaceful, and, above all, domestic. [...] Nothing ever happens except the yearly childbirth.” His works have a fairy-tale atmosphere, no subtle psychology is involved in his novels written at the beginning of his career, for instance Scrooge in *A Christmas Carol* turns a good man just overnight.

His is a naive reaction to contemporary ideas on birth-control, discipline and restriction of the poor, represented by Thomas Malthus and Jeremy Bentham’s utilitarian systems. As opposed to them, Dickens believes some sort of **essential human goodness, benevolence and humanism**. According to Hyppolite Taine, “*at the basis, Dickens’s novels can be reduced to one sentence – be good and love, there is no genuine happiness except in the emotions of the heart.*”

His style in general

The first characteristic feature to be highlighted in connection with Dickens’s works is their *sensationalism*. Its appearance goes back to the very conditions of publishing in the Victorian times. At the beginning of the century, in the vein of Walter Scott, a novel had to be long and contain at least *three volumes* – this was the so-called “three-decker”. This kind of novel was sold at a very high price (1 and ½ guineas) and could only be bought by the rich or be borrowed from circulating libraries.

After 1820, serialized publications, weekly or monthly serials appeared, which were cheaper, costing one shilling per issue that could be acquired by the middle-class readers as well. The three-volume novel had a classical, unified structure, including pauses for reflection and essayistic chapters devoted to abstract ideas. In contrast, the serialized novel had a loose, episodic structure, and the interest of the reader was maintained by *suspense and sensational incident*. Sensationalism goes back to the 18th-century Gothic “tales of terror,” but in the Victorian age, the supernatural element is taken away and is substituted for *crime* (the detective novel is often called “a middle-class fairy tale”).

The consequences of this sort of desire for sensationalism in Dickens were the basically *melodramatic plot*, mechanical, artificial structure, where **happy ending** is compulsory. This kind of plot is full of commonplace effects, surprises, especially the rediscovery of long-lost relations, artificial coincidences, chance retributions, that is, the sudden death of a villain, tricks, recognition scenes, **stage effects**, such as hiding behind a curtain and overhearing a conversation, and grotesque and violent death.



Sensationalism, however, might also be given a more positive meaning in this context. Dickens was excellent in “sensation,” that is, creating effects through which a particular character can be easily “felt,” remembered and appreciated. He was great at producing humorous characters, writing brilliant dialogues, with an exquisite use of language. As a result, we generally remember characters but not really the plot.

Instead of realism, Dickens took delight in the *picturesque*: he had an excellent eye for detail, in fact, he was said to have *photographic memory*, and he could describe with stunning defamiliarising effects certain inanimate objects, thus “animating” them: for him, a watch is an “oracular oyster”; a bed is a “four-legged despotic monster”; a post office box is like a huge mouth; a fog is like a cake that can be cut, and so on. This picturesque quality often turns into **absurd, fantastic scenes** or situations.

Dickens’s keen interest in the grotesque and the sensational easily leads to the much-discussed relationship between **Dickens and childhood**. It can be said that Dickens was *childlike and childish* at the same time. According to Angus Wilson, “*His emotional life, in fact, for all his many children, was, by most standards, immature*” (85). J. B. Priestley maintains that Dickens was “*a man who never escaped or never was exiled from his childhood.*” It is remarkable that children are always taken seriously by him, and it is adults who seem absurd when they conceal their childishness, and his most popular **adult characters are childish**. The grown-ups who try to hide this inherent infantile trait in themselves are playing a kind of absurd game for him. Dickens’s portrayal is curiously inverted: we see most characters like children see the adults, in a distorted way, capturing the **odd, the arbitrary and the absurd**.

Further techniques concerning this infantile point of view in Dickens are the delight in the **externals; caricature; exaggeration**; quaint habits of speech and the repetition of favourite words or phrases. The exceptions are novels that are somewhat autobiographical, like *David Copperfield* or *Great Expectations*: here we have an adult’s view on childhood. Dickens’s excellence then, lies in the **details**. According to Mario Praz, “*His novels are often like towns whose centres are dull and conventional and tedious but which have picturesque suburbs, and a few little streets and blind alleys and out-of-the-way lanes that have survived from the original nucleus of the town.*”



Dickens was also an *amateur actor*, he loved to perform to audiences, and read out his novels loud. In fact his early novels are all imbued with a strong sense of **theatricality**, both in their style and in their characters. For instance, *The Pickwick Papers* presents characters who regularly hold meetings of the Pickwick Club, and who take themselves very seriously but we laugh at them because they are outrageously funny, much like the ones in Sterne's *Tristram Shandy*. Some novels even include characters who are actors, for instance Wopsle, a bad amateur actor in *Great Expectations*. According to Dickens, “*Every good actor plays direct to every good author and every writer of fiction, though he may not adopt the dramatic form, writes in effect for the stage.*”

On the other hand, he also had a perfect sense of theatricality and could reach the highest pitch of **melodrama** in his novels. The death of Little Nell in *The Old Curiosity Shop* was such a famous scene that members of the audience to whom Dickens read out that section during his tours were reported to have fits of crying, and mass hysteria often broke out among the listeners. Decades later, Oscar Wilde remarked sarcastically that “*One must have a heart of stone to read the death of Little Nell without laughing.*”

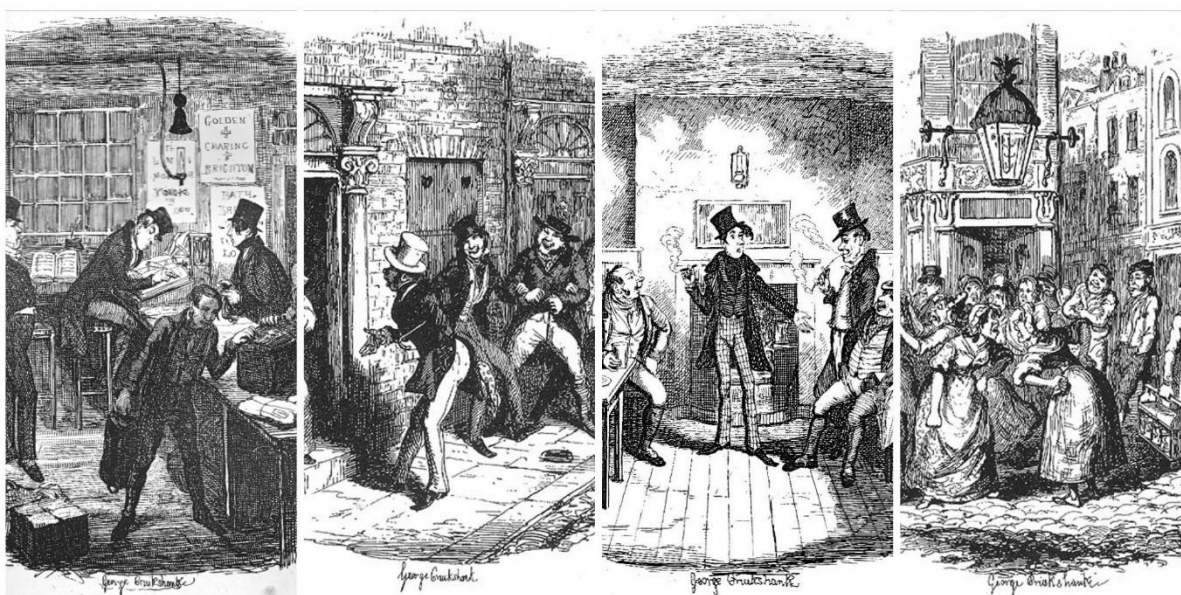
Dickens's Career

We might conveniently divide his oeuvre into two major periods.

In the first period, lasting from 1836 until about 1850, he is the **writer of popular, comical or sentimental and entertaining pieces**. This is the period of the formation of Dickens as the great **storyteller**. At the beginning of his career, Dickens had a good deal of difficulty in deciding what he wanted to do, whether he should be a journalist, an editor, a playwright (he

had an excellent ear for dialogue) or a novelist. Dickens began to publish short writings, “sketches” in literary magazines.

Sketches by Boz (his pen name) was his first published work in 1836. It includes pictures of contemporary London, including the dark side as well; it is basically a journalistic work. Here Dickens always looks for some peculiarity, some stunning fact in London life. For instance, in “Gin-Shops,” he contrasts the shiny externals of shops with the poor inhabitants of slums. The collection also includes “sketches” of certain types of people (for instance “Sketches of Young Couples”), also proving Dickens’s sense of humour and the fact that he had an excellent eye for detail.



The same year, Dickens published *The Posthumous Papers of the Pickwick Club*. A London publishing house planned to issue a series of “sporting plates,” which today we would call **comics**, with funny characters, the **members of an eccentric club going on fishing and hunting** expeditions in the country. The young Dickens, still writing under the pseudonym “Boz” was asked to write passages that would connect the pictures. Slowly, however, Dickens took control over the publication, and later Dickens’s texts were illustrated. *The Pickwick Club* proved to be an enormous success: 40,000 copies were sold and it was often read out in pubs and its scenes were acted out in theatres.

In 1838, *Oliver Twist* was published, Dickens’s first attempt to make his subject more serious. The novel features one of the favourite types of heroes, the forlorn orphan. Meanwhile, Dickens also exposes one of the nagging themes of contemporary English life, **child poverty and slums**. The immediate reason that motivated Dickens to write the novel was the Poor Laws Amendment Act of 1834. The aim of this act was to relieve the burdens of the taxpayers and thereby win the votes of those middle-class men who were enfranchised the year before. The Act stated that no able-bodied person was to receive money or other help from the Poor Law authorities except in a **workhouse**. Conditions were deliberately harsh to discourage people from begging. In a workhouse, men and women, boys and girls were separated, and they had to

work under horrible conditions. The most memorable scene from the novel is when Oliver advances the master after a meal and says, “*Please sir, I want some more.*”



The years between 1839 and 1846 may be regarded as a period when Dickens attempted to find a proper way for himself as a novelist. He experimented with the combination of the realist novel and fairy tales in *The Old Curiosity Shop*, introduced the idea of human goodness through a ghost tale in *A Christmas Carol* – adding a good deal of sentimental idealism.

In *Barnaby Rudge*, he tried something like Walter Scott, devising a historical novel about the Gordon riots of 1780, but he seemed to fail; the responses were mixed and the audience felt Dickens betrayed them. In *Martin Chuzzlewit*, he tried to “correct” this mistake with introducing the adventures of a young hero, and paying more attention to plot coherence, character development and finding a leading idea (selfishness) but the reviews were only slightly more favourable.

The second period and **more mature period** of Dickens’s oeuvre lasts from about 1848 until his death in 1870. His novels from about the middle of the century on are characterised by a **gloomier tone, they are more pessimistic works**, although they still include happy ending.

Many critics assume that *Dombey and Son* (1846-48) is Dickens’s first mature work. Dickens basically continued the method established in the previous novel: greater focus on the coherence of plot and a selection of a **dominant theme**, which, in this case, is the hostility between Paul Dombey, a wealthy London merchant and his son, whose mother died in childbirth and who was brought up by a stepmother.

David Copperfield (1849-50) is a rewriting of the *Oliver Twist* story, the adventures of a young hero with a happy end, that is, marriage with Dora, and after her death, the faithful Agnes.

It was in *Bleak House* (1852-53) that Dickens introduced two new elements in his fiction. First, the employment of a **symbol** was totally new at this point of his career. In *Bleak House*, he employs the symbol of **London fog** to express the **futility**, the inscrutability and the chaos of London life, particularly of the legal case, *Jarndyce v. Jarndyce*, that has been going on for months at the Chancery. The **rain**, in turn, symbolises the torments of Lady Dedlock. The story revolves around a young heir, Esther Summerson and Lady Dedlock, a respectable aristocrat, who finally turns out to be Esther's mother, who gave birth to her outside wedlock, which nicely rhymes with her name.

The novel also includes mystery, suspense and detection (in a sense, it could be conceived of as a detective story), coupled with a good deal of **pessimism concerning capitalism and human morals**.

The second new feature of the novel is the inclusion of **multiple narration**: the third-person narrator relates the events at the Chancery, while Esther herself talks about the events of her life.



This pessimism is carried on in *Hard Times* (1854), a “single-idea” novel, also called a “**state-of-the-nation novel**.” The target of this piece of fiction is Jeremy Bentham's **utilitarianism**, the economic idea which judges everything according to whether it is useful or not. The locale is **Coketown**, an imagined industrialised settlement and one of the central figures is Dr. Grandgrind, with his gritty insistence on “facts.”

The very opening of the novel presents this distorted view of utilitarianism: “*Now, what I want is, Facts. Teach these boys and girls nothing but Facts. Facts alone are wanted in life. Plant nothing else, and root out everything else. You can only form the minds of reasoning animals upon Facts: nothing else will ever be of any service to them. This is the principle on which I bring up my own children, and this is the principle on which I bring up these children. Stick to Facts, sir!*”

Great Expectations (1860-61) is generally considered to be one of Dickens's masterpieces. Here Dickens also introduces a technical novelty, **the double point of view**: old Pip looks back on his infancy and young days; there is an ironic contrast between how he perceived the world then and now. This is a basic element of any **Bildungsroman**. *Great*

Expectations, however, is an *ironic* Bildungsroman, a story of snobbery, the story of how a poor child becomes a snob. The central theme is the contrast between illusion and reality. There are characters who cannot live without illusions, such as Miss Havisham, Estella, Herbert and Pip himself, and those who look at life realistically, like Joe and Bidley. No wonder that the amateur actor Wopsle plays in Hamlet, whose task was also to make a difference between illusions and reality.

Serious moral issues are touched upon: **sin, guilt, coping with the past, snobbery, denying and accepting friends**, and so on. The main character, Pip has to go through a series of disappointments till he realises how false a life he lived. The end is famously ambiguous. First Dickens wanted to suggest that Pip and his ideal, Estella would never come together, because this is what the logic of the story would suggest, but on public demand, he implied a possible reunion in the revised edition.

Dickens's subsequent novels, such as *Little Dorrit* (1855-57), *A Tale of Two Cities* (1859) and *Our Mutual Friend* (1864-65) all convey the gloomy, pessimistic mode that the former novels do, exhibiting Dickens's fixation with filth and corruption. His last novel was *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*, an unfinished **detective story** (1870).

Critical Assessment

Dickens was able to create *unforgettable characters*. The main method of this was that he selected some characteristic features, mostly a sentence or a gesture that the character kept repeating throughout the story. These memorable characters, however, never become shallow or flat. E. M. Forster wrote the following: "*We may divide characters into flat and round. [...] In their purest form, [flat characters] are constructed around a single idea or quality; when there is more than one factor in them, we get the beginning of the curve towards the round. [...] The case of Dickens is significant. Dickens's people are nearly all flat [...]. Nearly every one can be summed up in one sentence, yet there is a wonderful feeling of human depth. Probably the immense vitality causes them to vibrate a little, so that they borrow his life and appear to lead one of their own. [...] Part of the genius of Dickens is that he does use types and caricatures, people whom we recognise the instant they re-enter, and yet he achieves effects that are not mechanical and a vision of humanity that is not shallow.*" (67, 71)

On the other hand, he **never offers a systematic solution** for social or political problems. According to Dickens, the real cause of these problems is that **people are "bad,"** corrupt, callous and so on. For instance, his message seems to be that child labour, the fact that children are employed in mines is a problem because the masters are cruel, not because of the fact that it exists. He also has rather controversial views on education. In his essay on Dickens, George Orwell states that

"Except for the universities and the big public schools, every kind of education gets a mauling at Dickens's hands. [...] But, as usual, Dickens's criticism is neither creative nor destructive. He sees the idiocy of an educational system founded on the Greek lexicon and the wax-ended cane; on the other hand, he has no use for the new kind of school that is coming up

*in the 'fifties and 'sixties, the "modern" school, with its gritty insistence on "facts." What, then, does he want? As always, what he appears to want is a **moralised version of the existing thing** – the old type of school, but with no caning, bullying or underfeeding, and not quite so much Greek. [...] One can see Dickens's utter lack of educational theory. He can imagine the moral atmosphere of a good school but nothing further."*

Dickens never offers radical, revolutionary solutions, he despised the revolutionary mob, for example, in *A Tale of Two Cities*, he depicts the French rebelling mob as disgusting. So, he often falls back on the sentimental or moral discussion of problems. It has to be mentioned, however, that Dickens seemed no exception in this. **The French type of critical realism was never widespread in England**, and was represented by a few not too popular authors as George Gissing or George Moore.

The Brontë Sisters

The significance of the Brontë sisters lies in the fact that they **introduced true Romanticism into the English novel**, painfully missing up until that time, the 1840s. This was largely due to the fact that they wrote as characteristically female novelists.

Obviously, numerous woman writers had been writing fiction from the 18th century on, but they never or hardly gave voice to their thoughts and feelings *as women*. Aphra Behn, Ann Radcliffe, Maria Edgeworth and Jane Austen all wrote in voices and genres conforming to the expectations of the male society, although Jane Austen may be seen as the first voice that makes an attempt to make herself independent of that masculine society.

The Brontës introduce themes and characters that reflect a complete turn from these ideas. Their woman characters are **autonomous, determined, passionate** and wholly distinct from other woman characters in the former history of the novel. Moll Flanders, Clarissa or Pamela mostly appeared as victims of a masculine society – Jane Eyre or Catherine Earnshaw are infinitely **more passionate** and complex. The Brontës' male characters are not the sentimental or comic types of Fielding or Dickens, they are tormented Romantic, *Byronic heroes* with an intense inner life.



The Family Background

The family was of Irish origin, the family name used to be spelt “Brunty.” The father was a reverend and wrote sermons, which is reflected in the imagery of the novels, especially in that of *Wuthering Heights*.

They lived an **isolated life**, therefore one often thinks of them (especially Emily) as solitary geniuses. The family settled in **Haworth**, a small town in Yorkshire. The parents had six children, two died very early, four survived: **Charlotte** (1816-55), **Emily** (1818-48), Patrick Branwell (1817-48) and **Anne** (1820-49). Their mother died very early and the girls grew up in a male-dominated environment. To comfort themselves, the sisters began to write stories, scenes and their genius showed very early: they enacted their own plays and tales, creating an imaginary universe including two kingdoms called “Angria” and “Gondal.”



The Yorkshire moors

Charlotte felt a strong urge to educate herself and her sisters (as it is reflected in *Jane Eyre*), later set up a school of her own and went to Brussels (which she incorporated in *Villette*).

Emily never felt the need to leave Haworth, her attempts to secure a job for herself failed, and she returned to the moors.

Patrick went to London as a painter, but her aunt and father spoiled him and he became addicted to drugs. He probably served as the model of Heathcliff in *Wuthering Heights*.

The year 1846 proved to be a turning point – Patrick fell ill, and three sisters' poems were published at their own expense, entitled *May Poems by Currer, Ellis and Acton Bell*. As one can see, they adopted male names in order to draw the attention from the fact that they were women. The volume enjoyed limited success, but in the next few years they produced an astonishing output of remarkable novels. Charlotte wrote *The Professor*, *Villette*, *Shirley* and *Jane Eyre*, Emily produced *Wuthering Heights* and Anne composed *Agnes Grey* and *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*.

Jane Eyre (1847)

Jane Eyre is a **strongly autobiographical** novel, reflecting many themes and concerns from Charlotte's life. Charlotte never wanted to let the audience know the identity of the real

author, therefore the title page read *Jane Eyre. An Autobiography. Edited by Currer Bell*. This was necessary, because upon its publication, the novel **shocked** many readers. It had a powerful heroine, making individual decisions, rejecting male dominance, and her voice being almost masculine.

The novel is a *Bildungsroman*, in which one can follow **Jane's progress in moral, spiritual and intellectual terms**. The story features the education of a not-too-attractive, but plain, decent and straightforward young orphan heroine, Jane Eyre. She is first raised up by her aunt, Mrs. Reed, in whose house she experiences cruelty or indifference so she escapes to books. Then she is sent to Lowood school, where she also has to undergo torments and has to learn to control herself. After graduation, she is employed as a governess by Edward Rochester, the Byronic hero of the novel. The two suffering souls slowly fall in love with each other, but it turns out that Rochester is already married and keeps her mad wife, Bertha, in the attic. Jane escapes, is offered marriage by St. John Rivers, but she also rejects a relationship in which she would have to deny herself as a mere companion of the husband. She returns to Rochester, who has become blind and crippled in a fire in which Bertha dies. Now Jane may look after the broken hero and join him in marriage. By the time their child is born, Rochester regains his eyesight.

The novel's heroine is **basically different from the characters we have seen so far**. She has nothing to do with the idealised or negatively depicted woman characters of Dickens; perhaps her closest parallel is Elizabeth Bennett, but she lacks her irony and detachment. Although the end point in both *Pride and Prejudice* and *Jane Eyre* is the same (marrying a well-to-do man), but the latter novel presents the heroine's progress in much more convincing ways and puts it in a rather different context.

Jane practically says, "I have a right to my feelings, I will not be treated as second class, though I know I am not rich or pretty. I can't accept Helen Burns (total submission) and St. John Rivers (sacrificing herself again) as ideals, but I can accept the morally edifying, 'charity' marriage with the blind Rochester – after I have gone through all these hardships."

As J. B. Priestley puts it, "*If Jane Austen stands for the cool, detached feminine point of view, that of the woman who asks nothing, but is contented to look on and smile, Charlotte represents the passionate feminine point of view, that of the woman who demands from life the full satisfaction of her desires and dreams.*"

The Victorian moral, besides, **required the elimination of any irrational element from the narrative**, and that is why the mad **Bertha**, Rochester's wife has to be locked, "repressed" into the attic, then killed by the fire. Only then can Jane and Rochester be a couple.

Jane Eyre, however, is an example of *subjective realism*: the figure of Jane Eyre is absolutely credible, believable, not exaggerated, depicted realistically and based on the author's personal experiences. It is chiefly the representation of Jane and other characters that makes the novel credible. That is, reduced to the plot, *Jane Eyre* would be ridiculous or melodramatic, like many 18th-century Gothic novels, like the *Castle of Otranto*. The novelty of *Jane Eyre* is that it leads to *psychological realism* (George Eliot, Thomas Hardy).

Wuthering Heights (1847)

Wuthering Heights is totally different from *Jane Eyre*, for it seems to contain no “moral” message. We cannot say that Heathcliff is a “bad” or “good” character, we can admire his passion and elemental feelings.

If anything like a Romantic novel exists, *Wuthering Heights* is one. It suggests **universality and totality**, it could take place at any time, any place, it is like a great lyric poem that cannot be broken down into fragments and is difficult to “analyse.” Since it defied almost all conventions of novel writing at the time, it was not an immediate success and won recognition only in the 1870s.

The novel represents a universal aspect of human nature: two opposed principles, **irrationality and civilisation, nature and culture, love and hate** seeking to devour, eat each other up totally, which is represented by the two houses, Wuthering Heights and Thrushcross Grange. The idea of binarity floods the whole novel: there are two families, two houses, two opposing principles and two generations.

The novel’s underlying assumption is that however much we would like to separate these – reason and emotion, nature and culture, or the two lovers –, any attempt at such separation leads to tragedy.



Evil is brought in from outside, Heathcliff is taken home by Mr Earnshaw from Liverpool. He is a foundling-orphan, a recurrent character in English fiction, he has no real

roots, dark-skinned; he is something alien, not definable, turns everything upside down. In fact, without him the story would be a meaningless or at least conventional: Catherine would marry Edgar sooner or later, and perhaps the same would happen to Isabella and Hindley. Heathcliff upsets the whole balance of the two houses and hopelessly falls in love with Catherine Earnshaw.

After scenes of corruption, human folly, cruelty and blind emotions, the **second generation** seems to signify an entry into culture, civilisation. Cathy is teaching Hareton to read and the progress of the generations comes full circle (if you draw the family tree, the circular structure becomes obvious).

Emily uses techniques that were totally new in the 19th century. For instance, a character is depicted from **many points of view**, in many situations, does not seem to be a “given” entity. Furthermore, **chronology is fragmented**, the narration jumps back and forth in time. Finally, **narration is multiple**: there are three main narrators and six minor ones. This is a typical feature of the later Modernist novels of Faulkner, Joyce, Woolf and André Gide. Somehow it is difficult to get beyond the storyline, to get to a core meaning, as it is greatly represented by the technique of multiple narration (narrator – Lockwood – Nelly). It only goes to show that Evil or Passion is very difficult to represent, and is also a means to emphasise the inscrutable, indescribable nature of Heathcliff’s and Catherine’s passion. This method also foreshadows Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* from 1902.

The greatest merit of the Brontës is that *passion* enters the English novel, since before that passion and sexuality could only be imagined between (would-be) wife and husband or amorally. The blending of the spiritual and the material, physical world shows the influence of Romantic poetry.

George Eliot (Mary Ann Evans) (1819-1880)

The Victorian Novel after 1860

Henry James, the famous American-English author pointed out in 1884, in his “The Art of Fiction”:

“Only a short time ago it might have been supposed that the English novel was not what the French call discutible. It had no air of having a theory, a conviction, a consciousness of itself behind it – of being the expression of an artistic faith, the result of choice and comparison. I do not say it was necessarily the worse for that; it would take much more courage than I possess to intimate that the form of the novel, as Dickens and Thackeray (for instance) saw it had any taint of incompleteness. It was, however, naïf (if I may help myself out with another

French word); and, evidently, if it is destined to suffer in any way for having lost its naïveté it has now an idea of making sure of the corresponding advantages. During the period I have alluded to there was a comfortable, good-humoured feeling abroad that a novel is a novel, as a pudding is a pudding, and that this was the end of it. But within a year or two, for some reason or other, there have been signs of returning animation – the era of discussion would appear to have been to a certain extent opened.”

The Modernist writer Virginia Woolf famously declared that Eliot’s *Middlemarch* was “**one of the few English novels written for grown-up people.**” This statement immediately places the post-middle-of-century English novel on a different scale and suggests that by the second half of the Victorian age, it somehow became “adult,” having done away with its childhood diseases that characterised it during the time of Dickens.

This entering adulthood in this context also means that the novel, which up to the time of Eliot seemed to be a rather insular, peculiar, specially English product, became “more European” and started to follow the main trends of **Realism** by examining the way the environment shapes the characters and **Naturalism** by a careful study of the environment and social relationships, exposing the darker side of life.

In general, it may be asserted that after about 1860, the novel becomes **more “serious.”** The symbolic date to which this turn might be linked to is the publication of Charles **Darwin’s** milestone study, *On the Origin of Species* in 1859. In itself, it was a pioneering work of biology, denying the principle of divine creation and stating that man is the end-product of an unbroken line of progress and evolution. He was actually compelled to pronounce this because he discovered “gaps” in the history of the living world, so he assumed that some species must have had to die out while others survived. The reason why species could survive, Darwin emphasised, was that they were fitter than others (“the survival of the fittest”). To make it more precise, it was not that they were actually bigger or stronger than others but that they were able to **adapt** to the environment more than others. (*See the previous chapter on the Victorian era.*)

Adaptation, determination by the environment and “the struggle for life” became the leading ideas not only in biology, but also in social sciences and literature as well. The question obviously came up whether man as a social being or societies, nations, countries or other communities are also determined by the surroundings and if yes, in what ways.

As it has been pointed out above, the systematic approach to this question was also called **Positivism**. Positivists rejected any metaphysical speculation in modern sciences and wanted to base research on “hard” (“positive”) facts. Taine approached literature scientifically and said that a literary work was largely the product of a well-defined social and historical environment, implying therefore that the analysis of this milieu brings us closer to the meaning of the literary work. He specified three factors through which an understanding of a literary product can be carried out: *race* (nation), *milieu* (environment) and *moment* (time).

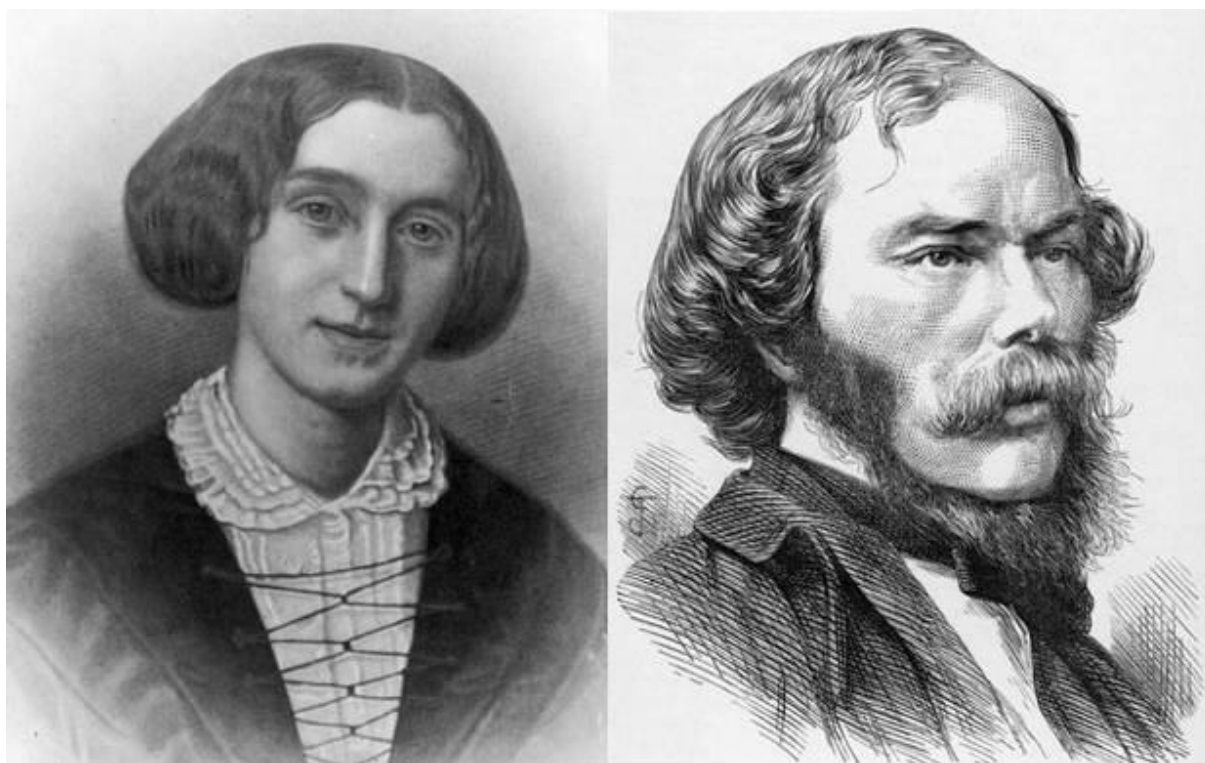
Summarising the above, we can see that key concepts such as *determinism, social Darwinism and the search for origins* as explanatory principles permeated the literature after 1860.

George Eliot's Style and Main Ideas

George Eliot (the pseudonym of Mary Ann Evans) is the one of the first *intellectual* writers in the history of the English novel, that is, she was absolutely conscious of what she was doing, and was not an “amateur” author anymore.

The first intellectual effect or influence that reached her was, of course, *religion*; more specifically, the Evangelical movement, Calvinism and Methodism that all emphasise sin, denial of enjoyment, and possess a strong sense of self-accusation. Although she turned her back on religion later, Puritanism had a great effect on her. *She decided never to go to church again*, which was an enormous step at that time and generally shocked everyone around her. It cannot be said that she became an atheist (she was not an 18th-century rationalist); she respected religion, but **rejected dogmas or normative teachings**. It could be claimed that she rejected the teachings *on* Jesus, but she was attached *to* Jesus's teachings.

Another radical step for Eliot in breaking with the contemporary and commonly accepted ideas was her decision to *live together with George Henry Lewes*, who could not get divorced, which, needless to say, was also scandalous amid the Victorian circumstances.



The work of Eliot is generally a combination of **realist representation**, a kind of image of the age and her society and a subjective approach to the characters' psychic reality. So this kind of novel is no more just an interesting and melodramatic rendering of a romantic story, mingled with some sort of observation of reality (just as Dickens had done) but a “spiritual

autobiography and a description of the emotions and morals of an age.” This kind of investigation always raises *moral problems*.

Although there is a general feeling of pessimism to be detected in the European novel of the second half of the 19th century, which gives rise to unbalanced, passive or weak-willed heroes, Eliot does not fully accept this kind of pessimism. While in France it was possible to talk about certain subjects, such as sin, bodily love, ugliness, psychic illnesses in a more or less objective way, **in England this kind of Realism/Naturalism never fully found its place.**

Eliot generally refrains from naturalistic description, her novels are not fully pessimistic. She saw her age and society disappointing and evil but she firmly believed in the **sense of duty of people** towards themselves and towards each other and that if they are mature enough to face their own self, they marriage to build up a better society or community. As a result of this conviction of hers, she remained closely attached to Victorian values. Although she felt that Darwin’s theory influenced Victorian morals but somehow she wanted to make a compromise between the two.

As far as her **artistic views** are concerned, as opposed to previous novelists, Eliot was very conscious as far as structures, the use of language, characterization and use of symbols are concerned. She **carefully planned her novels** and broke with the instalment (serialised) publication so characteristic of Dickens. She rejected the audience’s influence and resisted any attempt that could influence her drawing of characters. Her careful planning of her novels is also demonstrated by her introduction of the **multi-plot or polyphonic novel**. This is especially apparent in *Middlemarch*, where there are several threads of plot running parallel with each other. Of course, this idea was by no means new in the novel, Austen or Dickens also had used it, but whereas Austen’s theme was considerably limited and Dickens complicated the different threads mainly to generate an exciting story, in Eliot the multi-plot solution serves to shed light on the **different moral dilemmas concerning the characters**, considerably widening scope of the novel. In *Middlemarch*, the love affairs of Dorothea, Lydgate and Fred Vincy, who are idealists in various ways, complement and explain each other.

Main Themes in Her Novels

1

A central question in Eliot is always the *problem of innovation or adaptation*. Shall we violently change the circumstances around us and break with the realities generated by a family, a local community, a small town or the nation – or shall we try to adapt to the changing circumstances and make the best of the situation? One of her main themes, then, is *adaptation*: the way the characters adapt to a rapidly changing society that is being transformed by the Industrial Revolution, and also how the English countryside transforms, becoming modern. There are several visible aspects of modernisation in her novels, such as the railway, gas lighting, high school, library, sewage system, health care, hospital, better life conditions and homes for poor workers.

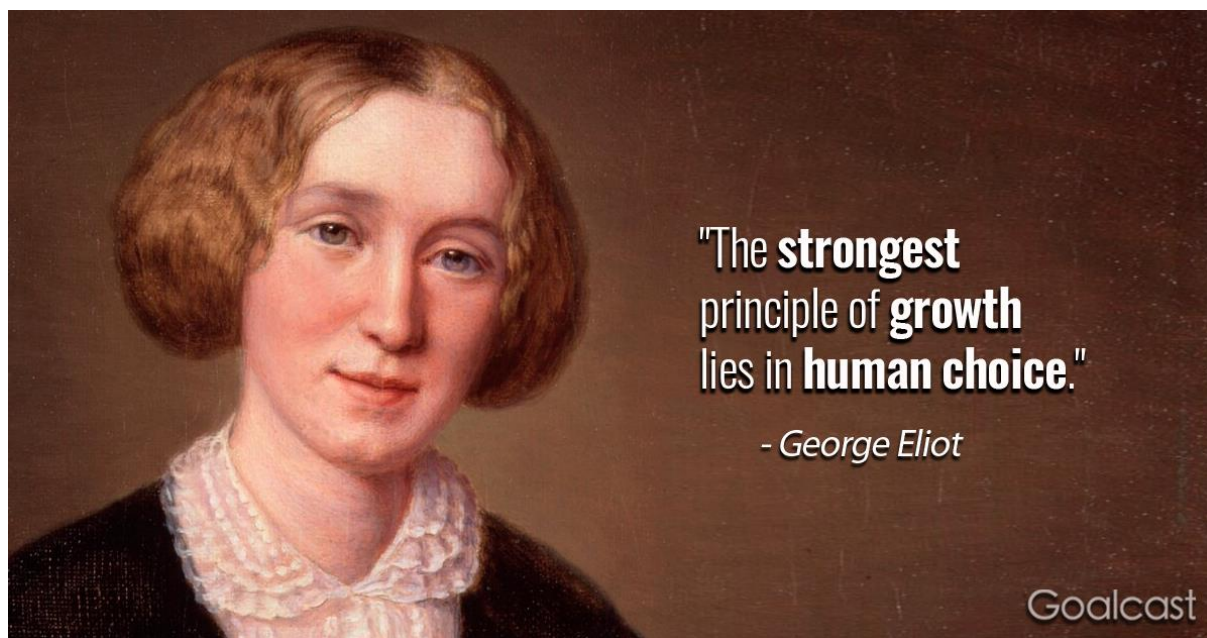
All these **transform a local community's life** and elicit different reactions from people there. The railway becomes the chief symbol of modernity, the most characteristic feeling of the second half of 19th century being speed, which had been unknown for people living between before 1830; one might recall that Dickens's characters practically never travel by train.

2

Secondly, Eliot's concern with the chances of adaptation also raises the problem of *free will and determinism*. She was especially interested a *natural sciences* and did zoological research together with Lewes. Two works had a great influence on her in particular, Herbert Spencer's *A Theory of Population* (1852) and Darwin's *The Origin of Species* (1859). The characteristics of this kind of scientific interest are the basic belief in progress as opposed to the static nature of the created world, the desire for the discovery of objective scientific laws and a belief in the intelligibility of the world.

Her works show some orientation towards deterministic ideas: the characters are determined by the age and the society they are born into and nothing happens by chance, everything is necessary, **each decision has a logical consequence**. Although her thinking was formed by these scientific ideas that, through the idea of mechanistic determinism could have lead to Naturalism, *Eliot still rejected rigid determinism*.

Her characters **can choose and can make decisions**: Dorothea decides to marry the elderly and sour Casaubon, because she is naively idealistic and is dazed by science in general. Lydgate decides to accept money from Bulstrode and gets entangled in the web of corruption in Middlemarch, and besides decides to marry a superficial woman with whom he is not happy and who does not appreciate his aspirations.



3

Furthermore, Eliot exposes her *criticism of the middle class* in her novels, revealing the inherent **contradiction between capitalism and Puritanism** existing since the time of Defoe. According to Puritanism, the result of work is a gift given by God, success in hard work means being chosen by God. By the 19th century, however, money became an end in itself, for it provided greater social prestige that satisfied the Victorian desire for “*respectability*.” The rapidly emerging bourgeoisie felt insecure and therefore clung to behavioural conventions – simply they felt inferior to the upper classes.

Social status was more important than individual tastes and desires; most members of the middle class always asked the question “What is appropriate in my social position?” instead of “What is good for me personally?” The typical figures of this class are the **self-made man** (e.g., Bulstrode in *Middlemarch*) and the poor or bankrupt person, carrying the stigma of social shame.

Eliot herself believed in social progress but she did not criticize the existing social order directly but *expected social change as coming from the change of people*. This is not the Dickensian melodramatic idea that says the system is acceptable, only people are bad who manage the system. Eliot is not emotional on this subject, she maintains that **change can only come from the field of intellect or science**: in *Middlemarch*, for instance, the most advanced person is Dr Lydgate, who studied in Paris, and so automatically becomes suspicious in *Middlemarch*. In all her works Eliot examines the spiritual, mental, ethical or scientific development, stagnation or regression. The way out, according to her, from the alienating effect of social advancement is *self-perfection*, a very much Victorian idea.

4

The next important theme she deals with in her works is *the situation of women*. While John Stuart Mill wanted to reach the political emancipation of women, Eliot advocated their *intellectual emancipation*. We have some sort of double thinking or compromise here as well that we detected concerning the previous themes: she supports a Tennyson-like woman ideal, which says that women are not inferior but different, that men and women have different roles in the society, men representing the “brain,” the rational thinking and women the “heart,” the warm, emotional aspect of life.

On the other hand, it is for the first time in the English novel that she presents women characters **who have a will of their own**, who are able to make decisions, who want an active life and are interested in sciences.

Secondly, she examines *the problem of the Victorian marriage*. Of course, this need for examination partly goes back to Eliot’s own life; she lived with G.H. Lewes without marrying him, not because she was for free love or simply did not consider marriage important, they simply protested against rigid Victorian laws controlling **divorce**.

There were two determining aspects of Victorian marriage at that time. On the one hand, the home was a shelter for man from the world that the woman should make comfortable for the husband, fulfilling the role of the “angel in the house,” as exemplified by Mary Garth in

Middlemarch. On the other hand, marriage was seen as a business contract, securing mere survival for the woman.

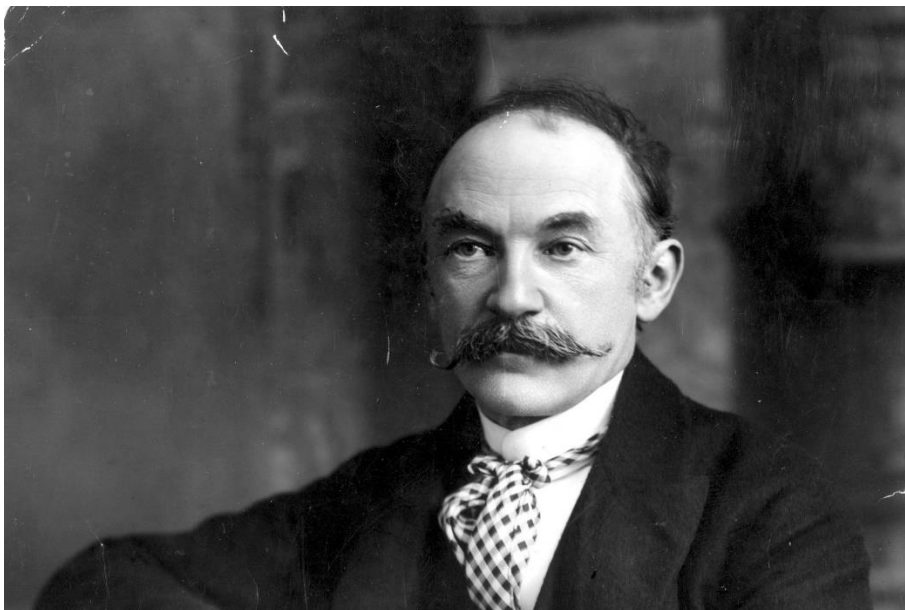
The ideal marriage for Eliot was **a bond in which wife and husband were intellectual companions**, not only lovers or partners in a business contract, as embodied by Felix Holt and Esther Lyon in *Felix Holt, the Radical* or Dorothea Brooke and Will Ladislaw in *Middlemarch*.



The question Eliot asks is whether the suppression of women or unhappiness in marriage is inevitable or can be eliminated from it.

In “Amos Barton,” the first story in the collection of *Scenes from Clerical Life*, she portrays about a couple who simply do not match. In *The Mill of the Floss*, **Maggie Tulliver should choose** between the soul and the body. She understands herself with the bodily and mentally handicapped Philip Wakem but is aroused sexually by the coarse and uneducated Stephen Guest; and this is an unsolvable moral dilemma for her. In *Middlemarch*, Dorothea Brooke marries a much older scholar, Casaubon, but it proves to be a **fatal decision**. Gwendolen Harleth in *Daniel Deronda* recognizes her mistake in marrying Henleigh Grancourt and in a storm, on the sea, she **hesitates** to help her drowning husband.

Thomas Hardy (1840-1928)



Hardy is generally considered to be the English counterpart of such famous European novelists as Gustave Flaubert, Émile Zola or Lev Tolstoy. What connects these writers is a common theme: **the social position of women at the end of the 19th century**, and also the embracement of such troubling questions as faithfulness, adultery and prostitution. Hardy is also a transition between the Victorian age and Modernism. Look at the dates: the 1840s, the age of Dickens's success, and 1920s, the age of High Modernism. By the 1920s, Hardy became a great old man of letters.

Hardy was an **outsider** in English literature for several reasons. He was born in the rural county of **Dorset**, which he re-created in his fiction as "Wessex." His father was a stonemason, not a labourer, but not a professional either. Hardy received a good education, but in spite of this, he became a local architect's apprentice. He became a novelist "by accident," because originally he **studied to be an architect** – in some ways that is reflected in his novels: they are carefully planned, often divided into "stages" or "phases."

He always liked writing **poetry**, indeed wrote highly unusual, experimental poems in the 1860s, but only published his first volume of poetry in 1898. After that, he only wrote poems. In 1896, he arrived at the top of his career by publishing *Jude the Obscure* for which he was harshly criticised. After that he stopped novel writing and devoted himself exclusively to poetry. Many thought he was hurt, but in reality he felt he had said all he wanted to say with his two masterpieces, *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* (1891) and *Jude the Obscure* (1895). He thought that if he had carried on novel writing that would inevitably have led to a fall of standards.

As a novelist, on the other hand, he tries to remain *impersonal*, a passive spectator of events, letting Fate work out its way. Many critics mention that he simply watches his heroes

and heroines suffer. In both his poetry and novels, **we can see pessimism, a melancholic temperament, an ironic vision of life**, sad wisdom, a combination of tenderness and compassion.

The determining ideas in his novels may be treated in three groups.

(1) **Determinism, fatalism.** Hardy thinks that one's fate is decided well before (s)he is born, Fate, like an eternal spirit hovers above us and we cannot do anything against it. Hardy's characters go through all kinds of hardships and incidents, but unlike Dickens's characters, for example, **they are passive and mainly suffer what Fate does to them.** This idea fits well into the general spirit of the age that can be described with the principle of (economic, social, biological, philosophical) determinism. The reader feels right at the beginning that the main character is doomed to fail: "Once a victim, always a victim – that's the law!" In fact, this may be viewed as a special application of Darwinism and the rejection of Romanticism. In Hardy's novels, **nature and the environment** in general may be seen as violent, cruel, but it is more apt to say they are *indifferent*. Human creatures are left alone in a godless world and there is no hope of salvation or redemption here.

(2) **Agnosticism (scepticism)**, a word coined by Thomas Henry Huxley, a biologist in 1869, means a lack of knowledge, in this case concerning God's existence. It is a special form of religious scepticism, whose main question is basically "where is God?," "Has he disappeared from our world?". It is not atheism, but rather heavy **scepticism**. (See Hardy's poem "The Oxen" below.)

Thomas Hardy: "The Oxen"

Christmas Eve, and twelve of the clock.

"Now they are all on their knees,"

An elder said as we sat in a flock

By the embers in hearthside case.

We pictured the meek mild creatures
where

They dwelt in their strawy pen,

Nor did it occur to one of us there

To doubt they were kneeling then.

So fair a fancy few would weave

In these years! Yet, I feel,

If someone said on Christmas Eve,

"Come; see my oxen kneel

"In the lonely barton by yonder coomb

Our childhood used to know",

I should go with them in the gloom,

Hoping it might be so.

(1915)

(3) *Pessimism about the transformation of English rural life.* Hardy saw the region of Dorset, which he called “**Wessex**,” transform dramatically due to the introduction of machinery. As a result of the appearance of machines, fewer labourers were needed, a great migration of workers began from one region to another. The result was the disruption of the age-old natural rhythm of the countryside, where machines could work endlessly, with **folk customs, beliefs, traditions disappearing**. The huge difference between the ideal community, the Talbothays Dairy where Tess meets Angel Clare and the empty, soulless, rough Flintcomb Ash farm is a case in point. Hardy’s ideal was a kind of nostalgic, “pagan,” English agricultural community whose typical figure was the *dairymaid* (like Tess). It is worth here quoting the beginning of Chapter 51 in *Tess*:



“These annual migrations from farm to farm were on the increase here. When Tess's mother was a child the majority of the field-folk about Marlott had remained all their lives on one farm, which had been the home also of their fathers and grandfathers; but latterly the desire for yearly removal had risen to a high pitch. With the younger families it was a pleasant excitement which might possibly be an advantage. The Egypt of one family was the Land of Promise to the family who saw it from a distance, till by residence there it became in turn their Egypt also; and so they changed and changed. [...] The families who had formed the backbone of the village life in the past, who were the depositories of village traditions, had to seek refuge in large centres; the process, humorously designated by the statisticians as 'the tendency of the rural population towards the large towns,' being really the tendency of water to flow uphill when forced by machinery.” (449-50)

The significance of Hardy lies in the fact that he breaks with pleasant, Dickens-like storytelling, the compulsory happy end and the courtship-and-marriage plot and concentrates on “serious” issues, attempting critical realism. Largely due to the **effect of French Realist and Naturalist writers** (Flaubert, Maupassant, Zola), he voiced his opinion against the hypocritical and suffocating atmosphere of the late-Victorian age, i.e., that it was silent or repressive on issues like female sexuality or prostitution.

In his essay “Candour in English Fiction,” he protested against the practice that magazines published and libraries stored books only that were supposed to be suitable for the entire family. He also called attention to the **hypocrisy of the Victorian society**. Angel Clare admits to Tess that he used to have an affair with an older London woman, Tess forgives him, but when she confesses that she had been **raped** by Alec and had a child born of him, Angel throws her out – this is the infamous “double standard”.

However, as a novelist, he also shows some **weak points**. His imagination is *keenly visual*, due to the fact that he was a poet at the same time. Hardy unevenly mingles poetic and narrative elements, often brings in **images, symbols and similes that have little or no function in the text or underline an obvious thing**. For instance in Tess, the emphasis on colour red is somewhat too obvious. It appears in the red ribbon in Tess’s hair, in the strawberry, in the horse’s blood, in the sunset, and so on. The simile in the following sentence is either awkward or too obviously symbolic: “*She had not heard him enter, and hardly realised his presence there. She was yawning, and he saw the red interior of her mouth as if it had been a snake’s.*” Thus, his style is often somewhat archaic and clumsy.

Moreover, Hardy always has a **grand design in mind** right at the beginning, and wants to push through the message at any price. He often comments what is going on, calls the reader’s attention to the **fatalistic** end, often speaks about the inevitable: “*Thus the thing began. Had he perceived this meeting’s import she might have asked why he doomed to be seen and coveted that day by the wrong man, and not by some other man, the right and desired one in all respects.*” The reader has the feeling that everything has been decided at the beginning and the characters have no or little freedom of choice, thus, they often become mere **puppets of the writer’s imagination**: “*The laughter that followed this sally was supplemented only by a sorry smile, for form’s sake, from Tess. What was comedy to them, was tragedy to her; and she could hardly bear their mirth.*” E. M. Forster asserts in connection with this treatment of the plot that in Hardy,

“*sometimes the plot triumphs completely. The characters have to suspend their natures at every turn or else they are so swept away by the course of fate that our sense of their reality is weakened. [...] Hardy seems to me essentially a poet, who conceives his novels from an enormous height. They are to be tragedies or tragi-comedies; they are to give out the hammer-strokes as they proceed; in other words Hardy arranges events with emphasis on causality, the ground plan is the plot, and the characters are ordered to acquiesce in its requirements. [...] We never see the action as a living thing [...]. The fate above us, not working through us – that is what is eminent and memorable in the Wessex novels.*” (93)

Finally, although Hardy wishes to rehabilitate the woman figure wanting to understand her better – exposing her victimisation, rape, double standards – sometimes he cannot help being a Victorian and using serious **stereotypes** depicting Tess. She appears as a wounded animal, a victim, the symbol of essential womanhood, *the woman*, the biblical Eve, a temptress, a naïve child and the uncorrupted daughter of Nature. Thus, although the writer feels great sympathy towards her, it is clearly a man’s point of view.

Victorian Poetry (1837-1901)

Secondary Romanticism

After about 1830, the vigour and metaphysical quality of Romantic poetry seems to be fading, and a more melancholic, languid and sentimental tone begins to appear in poetry. The period after 1830 can be labelled as “**post-Romanticism**” or “secondary Romanticism”.

There were several reasons for this:

1) the great masters of Romantic poetry either had died by that time (Blake, Keats, Shelley, Byron, Coleridge) or do not show significant output after about 1820, like Wordsworth.

2) while in the Romantic period, there were few significant novel writers (Austen, Scott), the Victorian age is undoubtedly the golden age of the novel. This was the genre that fitted most the middle classes and the general spirit of the Victorian age – of which the basis was the sense of compromise, moderation and reforms – did not favour exuberant or revolutionary poetry.

3) the failure of the anti-feudal democratic revolutions of 1830 (in Paris) and especially in 1848-49 (all over Europe) showed that the Romantic revolutionary spirit was bound to give place to something more consolidated and less ambitious. The Victorian years (unaffected by the Continental revolutions) favoured a less passionate tone. Illusions had been lost.

General features

1) as opposed to Romantic poetry, Victorian poetry is **less metaphysical and less abstract**. The speakers in the poems do not aim to work out great systems beyond the perceptible world or escape to Nature, fantasy, the abstract idea of beauty, travel to exotic lands or support a revolution. It is mainly the superficial features of Romanticism that still linger on, but without great depth. The medieval times, for example, are still idealized, but with more emphasis on the chivalric, “gentlemanly” ideals of the Middle Ages rather than its “dark” qualities.

2) Victorian poetry often deals with the loss of energy, **demotivation, disillusionment**, failure, melancholy or death. In general, it is less fervent and features passivity as a major motif.

3) the main aim of poets is **not self-expression** or when it is, it is not for its own sake but is immediately connected to some greater moral truth or lesson to be taught. (See “In Memoriam” by Tennyson.) The focus shifts from the poet’s own self to topics that the audience can share. The sign of the depersonalisation of poetry is the appearance of new genres like mask lyrics and dramatic monologues.

4) It often relies on **secondary material instead of the expression of private, subjective emotions**. This material can be mythological (Greek epics, the Arthurian legend), historical, literary, or even from the sphere of fine arts. The link between Victorian poetry and the paintings of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood is especially strong. These painters also borrowed their themes from poems.

5) Victorian poetry is often **technically more disciplined** than Romantic poetry.

Lord Alfred Tennyson (1809-1892)

Tennyson was the most popular poet of the Victorian times, the **personal favourite of the Queen**, and Poet Laureate after Wordsworth’s death until 1892.

His early volumes show the influence of Romantics, especially Keats, but from the publication of his *Poems* (1833 and 1842) he begins to find his own melancholy, fading, dreamy tone and subject matter. He relies on legends, myths and sometimes topical subjects like the bravery of British soldiers in battles. Tennyson shares the ideals, moral convictions and prejudices of his own times but speaks in a beautifully poetic language that often pushes the “message” into the background.

The genre most often associated with him is MASK LYRICS: the poet puts on the mask of either a historical figure or an imagined person and speaks in their voice.

Famous poems and volumes:

“The Lotos-Eaters”, “Ulysses” > ancient Greek material

“The Lady of Shalott”, “Morte d’Arthur” > medieval legends

In Memoriam (1850) – written in memory of the death of his friend, Arthur Hallam

Idylls of the King (1859-72) > the Arthurian legend



John Williams Waterhouse's painting

Ulysses

It little profits that an idle king,
 By this still hearth, among these barren crags,
 Match'd with an aged wife, I mete and dole
 Unequal laws unto a savage race,
 That hoard, and sleep, and feed, and know not me.

I cannot rest from travel: I will drink
 Life to the lees: all times I have enjoyed
 Greatly, have suffered greatly, both with those
 That loved me, and alone; on shore, and when
 Through scudding drifts the rainy Hyades
 Vexed the dim sea: I am become a name;
 For always roaming with a hungry heart

Much have I seen and known; cities of men
 And manners, climates, councils, governments,
 Myself not least, but honoured of them all;
 And drunk delight of battle with my peers;
 Far on the ringing plains of windy Troy.
 I am a part of all that I have met;
 Yet all experience is an arch wherethrough
 Gleams that untravelled world, whose margin fades
 For ever and for ever when I move.
 How dull it is to pause, to make an end,
 To rust unburnished, not to shine in use!
 As though to breathe were life. Life piled on life
 Were all too little, and of one to me
 Little remains: but every hour is saved
 From that eternal silence, something more,
 A bringer of new things; and vile it were
 For some three suns to store and hoard myself,
 And this grey spirit yearning in desire
 To follow knowledge like a sinking star,
 Beyond the utmost bound of human thought.

This is my son, mine own Telemachus,
 To whom I leave the sceptre and the isle —
 Well-loved of me, discerning to fulfil
 This labour, by slow prudence to make mild
 A rugged people, and through soft degrees
 Subdue them to the useful and the good.
 Most blameless is he, centred in the sphere
 Of common duties, decent not to fail
 In offices of tenderness, and pay
 Meet adoration to my household gods,
 When I am gone. He works his work, I mine.

There lies the port; the vessel puffs her sail:
 There gloom the dark broad seas. My mariners,
 Souls that have toil'd, and wrought, and thought with me —
 That ever with a frolic welcome took
 The thunder and the sunshine, and opposed
 Free hearts, free foreheads — you and I are old;
 Old age hath yet his honour and his toil;
 Death closes all: but something ere the end,
 Some work of noble note, may yet be done,
 Not unbecoming men that strove with Gods.

The lights begin to twinkle from the rocks:
 The long day wanes: the slow moon climbs: the deep
 Moans round with many voices. Come, my friends,
 'Tis not too late to seek a newer world.
 Push off, and sitting well in order smite
 The sounding furrows; for my purpose holds
 To sail beyond the sunset, and the baths
 Of all the western stars, until I die.
 It may be that the gulfs will wash us down:
 It may be we shall touch the Happy Isles,
 And see the great Achilles, whom we knew

Tho' much is taken, much abides; and though
 We are not now that strength which in old days
 Moved earth and heaven; that which we are, we are;
 One equal temper of heroic hearts,
 Made weak by time and fate, but strong in will
 To strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield.

Robert Browning (1812-1889)

“You speak out, *you* – I only make men and women speak, give you truth broken in prismatic hues, and fear the pure white light, even if it is in me, *but I am going to try.*”

As it is seen from the quotation above, Browning created a wholly different kind of poetry from that of Tennyson. The latter opted for a melancholy, rueful tone with great technical accomplishment; Browning specialised in an exploration of intellectual and psychological curiosity and different states of mind by “making men and women speak” through his dramatic monologues.

What distinguished these monologues from mask lyrics is that in the latter’s case, the speaker’s identity is clear or at least we know what happened to them, so it is suitable to create a mood, since the reader does not concentrate on the speaker’s person.

In a dramatic monologue, nothing is known about the speaker, and the reader has to reconstruct every detail. It begins in medias res and the speaker addresses someone. Slowly, the speaker’s personality is revealed.

What is more important is the remark “truth broken in prismatic hues”, a remarkably modern idea. Browning does away with the concept of a single, unquestionable truth and believes in relativity depending on individual perception. Therefore, no unified or absolute truth exists.

This is executed most radically in his *The Ring and the Book* (1868), a “verse-novel” about a murder trial set in Rome in 1698. During the trial we can hear 12 witnesses reporting about the case, each telling their own version.

A dramatic monologue (and mask lyric) are symptoms of a changing idea of poetry: post-Romantic poets are more comfortable putting on a mask or “making men and women speak” and refrain from expressing their private, personal emotions in a direct way. It is this indirectness and impersonality that will be continued by Modernist poetry in more radical forms.

Browning was relatively unpopular in his time; his wife, Elizabeth Barrett-Browning was considered a greater poet. The reason for this was that Browning expected readers to understand complex psychological states, elliptical thoughts and associations and to have a profound knowledge of classical and Renaissance culture. He was also deliberately non-poetic, and introduced *colloquial language* into poetry (really the way men and women speak).

His important volumes:

- Dramatic Lyrics (1842)
- Dramatic Romances and Lyrics (1845)
- Men and Women (1855)
- Dramatis Personae (1864)
- The Ring and the Book (1868)

My Last Duchess (Ferrara)

That's my last Duchess painted on the wall,
 Looking as if she were alive. I call
 That piece a wonder, now: Frà Pandolf's hands
 Worked busily a day, and there she stands.
 Will't please you sit and look at her? I said
 "Frà Pandolf" by design, for never read
 Strangers like you that pictured countenance,
 The depth and passion of its earnest glance,
 But to myself they turned (since none puts by
 The curtain I have drawn for you, but I) 10
 And seemed as they would ask me, if they durst,
 How such a glance came there; so, not the first
 Are you to turn and ask thus. Sir, 'twas not
 Her husband's presence only, called that spot
 Of joy into the Duchess' cheek: perhaps
 Frà Pandolf chanced to say "Her mantle laps
 Over my Lady's wrist too much," or "Paint
 Must never hope to reproduce the faint
 Half-flush that dies along her throat": such stuff
 Was courtesy, she thought, and cause enough 20
 For calling up that spot of joy. She had
 A heart — how shall I say? — too soon made glad,
 Too easily impressed; she liked whate'er
 She looked on, and her looks went everywhere.
 Sir, 'twas all one! My favour at her breast,
 The dropping of the daylight in the West,
 The bough of cherries some officious fool
 Broke in the orchard for her, the white mule
 She rode with round the terrace — all and each
 Would draw from her alike the approving speech, 30
 Or blush, at least. She thanked men, — good! but thanked
 Somehow — I know not how — as if she ranked
 My gift of a nine-hundred-years-old name
 With anybody's gift. Who'd stoop to blame
 This sort of trifling? Even had you skill
 In speech — (which I have not) — to make your will
 Quite clear to such an one, and say, "Just this
 Or that in you disgusts me; here you miss,
 Or there exceed the mark" — and if she let
 Herself be lessoned so, nor plainly set 40

Drama in the 19th Century, G. B. Shaw

General features

This age from the aspect of drama is also a rather shallow period, due to dominance of the Victorian novel and Romantic poetry. The composition of the audience changed, including lower middle-class, even working classes. A general fall of standards could be seen with no serious criticism of society, or reflection on contemporaneous events. The situation changed towards the end of the century by effect of **Ibsenism** (Thomas William Robertson, Arthur Wing Pinero), later **George Bernard Shaw**; and aestheticism represented by Oscar Wilde.

The first half of the 19th century

Theatrical conditions

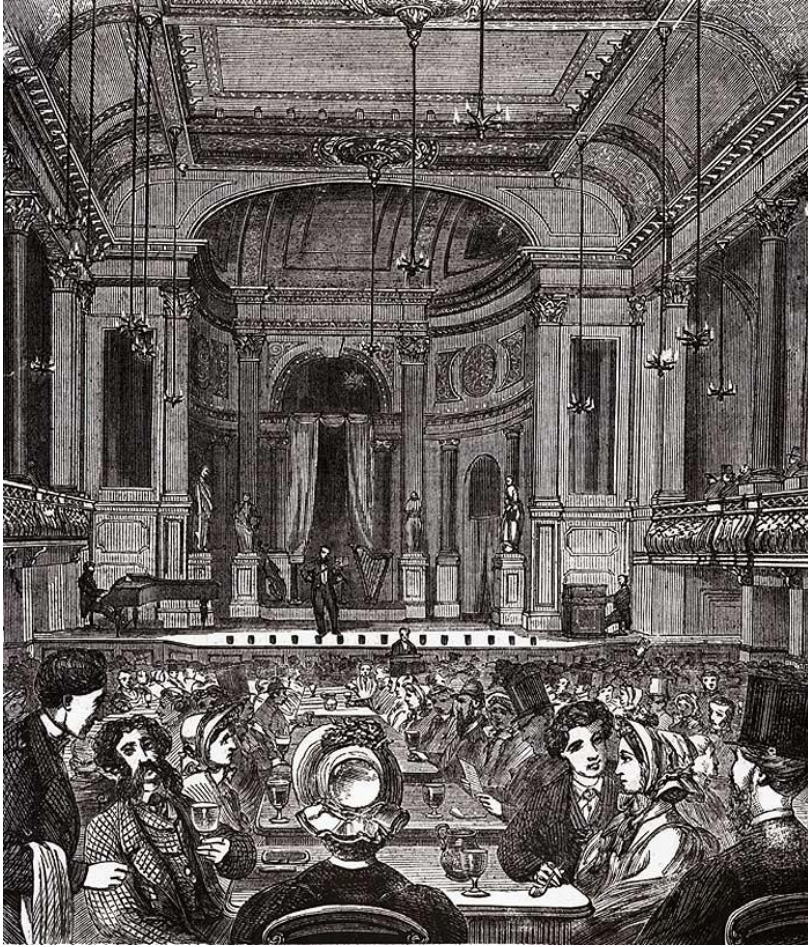
- In the first decade of the 19th century, the British occupied with the Napoleonic wars. Both patent theatres (*Drury Lane, Covent Garden*) burnt down and were rebuilt (1812, 1809) with huge capacity (over 3,000 spectators).
- A new invention was the introduction of **gas lighting** which was easier to control; calcium/limelight was invented in 1825, which gave an intense white light with greenish hue, and a circle could follow the actor - hence the expression 'to be in the **limelight**'.
- Famous actors were Mrs. Siddons, John Philip Kemble (retiring); and **Edmund Kean**, famous for his romantic, intense style of acting, mostly played villains. Tragedy and comedy degenerated into **melodrama** and **farce**.



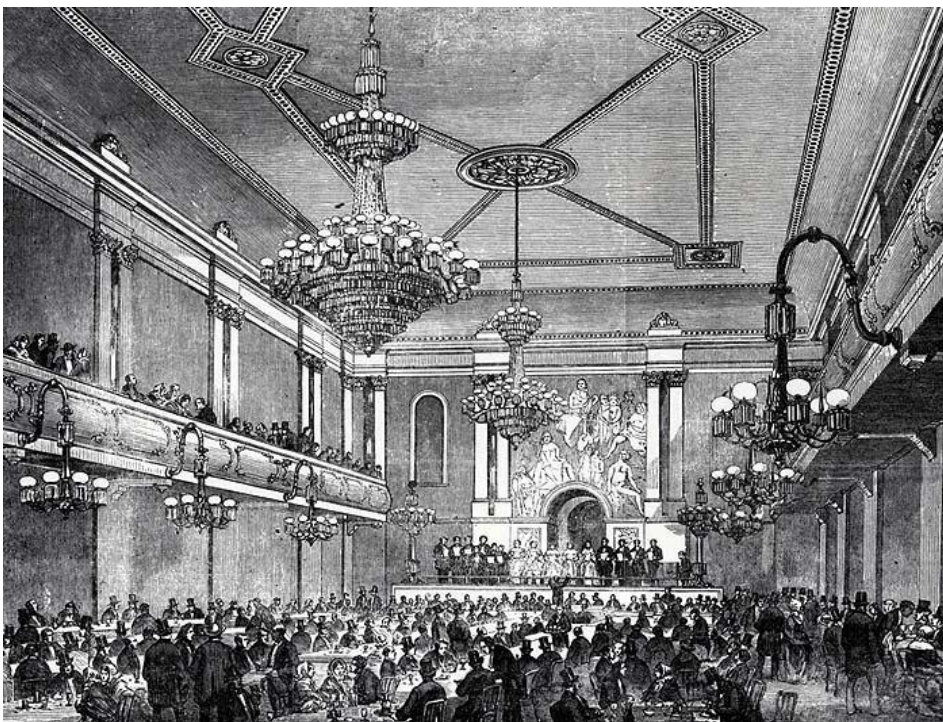
- An important step was Theatre Act in 1843, which destroyed the monopoly of the two patent theatres (goes back to 1737 Licencing Act when Walpole had all minor theatres closed due to their satirical performances, and the only two patent theatres were the Drury Lane and the Covent Garden). As a result, by 1851, there were 19 playhouses in London.

Genres

- The “**well-made play**” neglected important social or other questions, it just wanted to entertain. Melodramas (Louis-Sébastien Mercier, 1740-1814), and well-made comedies remained popular (Eugene Scribe, 1791-1861: A Glass of Water, 1820). Comic films today largely follow the patterns of the typically 5-act “well-made plays”.
- Romantic poets wrote “**book dramas**” or “**poetic dramas**”. These are not proper plays, they are poems in dialogue form. E.g. in Manfred by Byron, Manfred introduces himself, tells what he feels, etc. and has a static relations with the other characters. These works are not dramas and not even long poems, merely literary works written in dialogues. Nearly all important poets wrote poetic dramas, Coleridge, Wordsworth, Keats, Shelley (The Cenci [1819] – the best of these plays), Byron (Manfred [1817], Cain [1821]). (See the chapter on Romantic poetry above.)
- Two uniquely British forms of entertainment also evolved:
 - (1) **Christmas pantomime**
 - (2) **music hall**



Music hall





Advertisement for a “comic Christmas pantomime”

The second half of the 19th century

Ibsen’s Influence

The new trend was moving away from melodrama and farce and well-made plays to **critical/social realism and naturalism**.

Realism in the theatre had two principles:

- 1) the playwright has to depict a real world trustfully –
- 2) this can be achieved through the thorough observation of society (no “imaginary” stories).



Ibsenism: ‘problem-plays’:

- the Norwegian playwright Henrik Ibsen’s plays are about a **social problem**,
- there are **no artificial elements** as soliloquies and ‘asides’,
- they include long silences,
- with carefully worked-out exposition, the scenes causally related, and logically lead to the outcome.
- everything on stage serves to reveal a character and establish an atmosphere.

Three important followers of Ibsen in England:

○ *T. W. Robertson (1829-1871)*: dealt with the ironies of social advancement, which meant a real break with the Georgian theatre, introducing naturalistic playing, “cup-and-saucer-comedy”. He got rid of stock characters (villains, maiden in distress), concentrating on “refinement”; his plays: Society, Caste, Progress, School (1860s). “The whole secret of his success is – truth!”, a critic wrote after the premiere of Caste.

○ *H. A. Jones (1851-1929)*: also wrote social dramas and tragedies: Michael and His Lost Angel (1896), social comedies, like The Case of Rebellious Susan (1894).

○ *Sir A. W. Pinero (1855-1934)*: showed influence of Ibsenism, attacking Victorian morals and hypocrisy, asking what can a woman do who “has a past” (had a lover before marriage) – The Second Mrs. Tanqueray (1893) – the protagonist commits suicide.

George Bernard Shaw (1856-1950)

A Nobel Prize winner in 1925, Shaw was always an outsider (socially, ethnically, religiously). Being an outsider gave him the chance to think critically and laugh at anything he found ridiculous.

He curiously mingles two qualities in his plays:

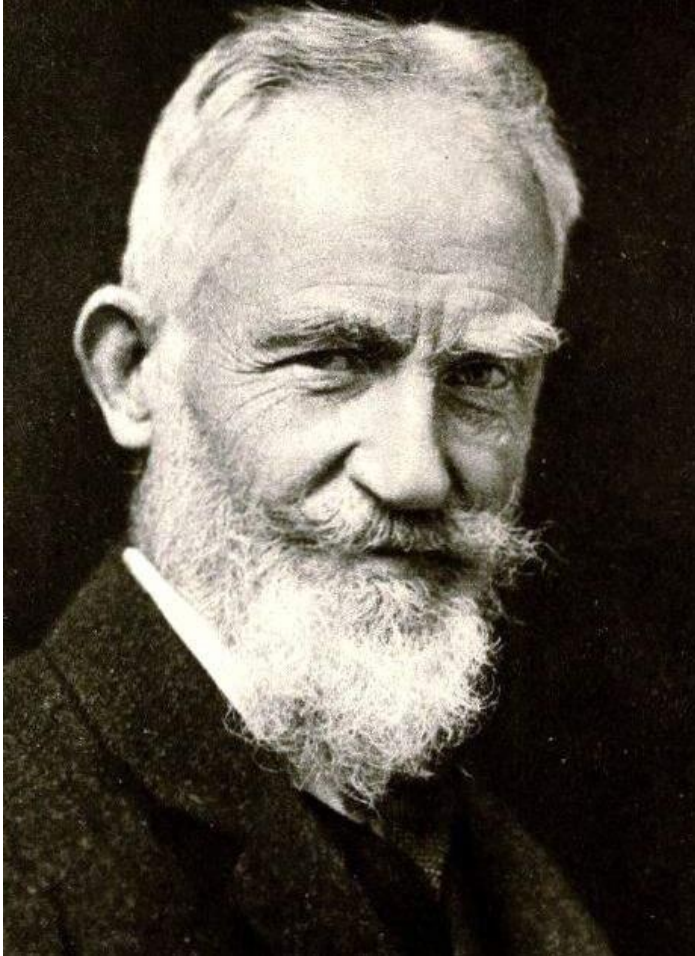
1. Rationalism

- The only criterion for him was common sense, (e.g. his pamphlet from 1914 is entitled “Commonsense about the War”); he is also sceptical, there is no judgement without his being sceptical about it.
- This was the principle he employed in his historical plays as well (The Man of Destiny, Anthony and Cleopatra, Saint Joan). He followed two features of historical plays: (1) under the guise of a historical event he told something about the present and the future as well; (2) also, he employed methods that were anachronistic, but the new element was that he mingled historical faithfulness and anachronism. For Shaw, history is an analogue that one can use to teach; what happened to St Joan may happen to someone else now.
- He calls things what they are, which leads to a kind of **absurdity**: Shaw’s logic and rationalism shows that people behave without reason. He is **against romantic and sentimental views**, he dares to show things as they are.
- e.g., he shows that “*white wine*” is actually yellow, that children do not love their parents as they are not adorable, that heroism in war is surviving it, that Victorian respectability is nothing but pretence based on privileges.

2. Irrationalism

- He shared some **irrational** ideas as well, for example the idea of “**Life Force**”, which goes back to Nietzsche, Bergson and Darwin. This is supposed to be some invisible force, motivating spirit combined with individual will that works itself out in human affairs and contributes to the advancement of the human race. In almost all his characters one can see this life force: John Tanner in Man and Superman, Candida, Major Barbara, Saint Joan.
- The **Superman** is a symbol of the superior race of men that will evolve in the future. **Superman**: Social progress can only be achieved by the systematic evolution of the whole human population into ‘supermen’. Shaw displays an argument: social structures reflect the nature of the people, so first people’s nature should be changed. The opposite of this is the Darwinian one, which says that environment determines personality, so political change is a precondition of changing human’s nature.

- Class war or radical social change is rejected by Shaw, he being a member of the Fabian Society.



3. The comedy of ideas: themes and the function of drama

The function of the drama according to Shaw is that it is a **vehicle for presenting in an entertaining form of his ideas on the hypocrisy of contemporary middle-class society**. The object is to **satirise**, not the characters, but the audience: he was **provocative** and **shocking** but entertaining at the same time.

His most important theme is the critique of capitalist society, bourgeois morals, hypocrisy, relation of man and woman.

“Disquisitory plays”

- There was one obstacle in the 19th-century context: well-made plays simply were afraid of moments without action on stage, something had to happen each moment.
- Also, it was not customary to present ideas on the stage, which could have evoked the dramatic forms of the Middle Ages (morality plays). Ibsen dared to show moments of

silence on the stage. Wilde dared to show moments when the characters simply **chat** on the stage; Shaw allowed **ideas** to clash on stage:

- He called his plays “comedy of ideas” or “disquisitory plays”:

*“My plays do not consist of occasional remarks to illustrate pictures but of **verbal fencing matches**, between protagonist and antagonist, whose thrusts and ripostes [. . .] follow one another much more closely than thunder follows lightning. The first rule for their producers is that **there must never be a moment of silence** from the rise of the curtain to its fall.”*

- The major innovation of Ibsen was to substitute the denouement part of the usual “exposition-complication-development-crisis-denouement” structure of a “well-made play” for discussion.
- Shaw extended it to the whole play, practically, Mrs Warren’s Profession is a huge discussion between mother and daughter.

4. How does Shaw criticise the capitalist society?

A selective use of Ibsen

- He turns to **Ibsen**. In his study “The Quintessence of Ibsenism”, he uses Ibsen rather to set a programme for himself, the early attempts to put these into practise were only half-successful. Ibsen was new because he mingled the tense rhythm of classical drama with some elements of “thesis-dramas” and symbolism, and he also wanted to expose the morals of bourgeois society.
- Shaw was a great admirer of Ibsen, but he did not think that the form of Ibsenite drama should be strictly followed. There is a sharp contrast between the “strict” form of Ibsen and the experiments of Shaw, for he constantly uses **alienating effects** (meeting in hell in Man and Superman, messenger from 1920 in Saint Joan).
- In fact Shaw’s perception of Ibsen’s work was rather **selective** since Ibsen turned to symbolic drama late in his career yet this symbolic strain only reached England perhaps with the Irish revival and later – what was selected from Ibsen was the realistic treatment of social questions.

Inversions and irony

- Shaw often uses **inversions or twists**, which enable the audience to see events from a different light.
- In Widowers’ Houses, which deals with the topic of slum landlords, Trench, a young man refuses Sartorius’ money and does not marry his daughter, when he discovers that Sartorius lives on revenue coming from slum houses. Later Trench is shown by Sartorius that his unearned land revenue also comes from the same source indirectly, from interest

from mortgaged tenements. Trench goes back to Sartorius's daughter, Blanche and reconciles with the situation.

- In Mrs Warren's Profession, Vivie finds out that her respectable mother was a prostitute and used to run a chain of brothels, which was the source of Vivie's elegant upbringing. As if this was not shocking enough, Vivie finds out that the network of brothels is still run by her mother. She quits her mother. It's another question that Vivie's present lifestyle was made possible by her mother's "profession". (The theme of the play was so shocking that it was not performed in England for 30 years.)

Didacticism

- Shaw wants to **explain**, to **teach**. His dramatic works in print are always richer than the theatrical text, his instructions are often page-long, he often wrote forewords and afterwords to his plays, sometimes as long as the play itself. He consciously takes the task to teach with the dramas, but he did that with a comic spirit, he often was regarded (and he regarded himself) as a clown, but he took that role seriously.
- He thought only with this comic element can you teach something to the audience and you are allowed to say **things otherwise unpleasant**; plays are often built on an anticlimax which results in a comic effect (e.g. in Saint Joan with the arrival of a messenger from 1920).
- The shortcoming is that sometimes his plays become too didactic, he describes rather than dramatises, making the **plays look like epics (novels)** with long conversations rather than plays.
- In 1905, he wrote in a letter: *"I have given you a series of first-rate music-hall comedies thinly disguised as plays, but really offering the public a unique string of turns by comics and serio-comics of every popular type."*

Plays

- Plays Unpleasant (1898): Widowers' Houses, The Philanderer, Mrs. Warren's Profession (1894),
- Plays Pleasant (1898): Arms and the Man, Candida, The Man of Destiny, You Can Never Tell.
- Three Plays for Puritans (1901): The Devil's Disciple; Caesar and Cleopatra ; Captain Brassbound's Conversion;
- Man and Superman (1903) John Bull's Other Island (1904) Major Barbara (1905) The Doctor's Dilemma (1906), Pygmalion (1912),
- Heartbreak House (1919); Back to Methuselah (1920); Saint Joan (1923)