

# THE VICTORIAN AGE

1837 – 1901



## THE AGE OF EMPIRE

- the reign of **QUEEN VICTORIA** (1837-1901) is the longest in the history of Britain
- Britain is now the **most powerful** nation in the world
- people come to city to work in the new factories, so they are forced to live in overcrowded slums → spread of **deadly diseases**
- the **First Reform Bill** of 1832 deprives the workers of their right to stand up for their causes → the working class establishes the **Chartist movement**



## ALTERNATION OF POWER BETWEEN THE TWO MAIN POLITICAL PARTIES

### THE CONSERVATIVES

- evolved from the **Tories**, support the aristocracy and the middle-classes
- want the maintenance of **existing institutions**
- are represented by **Sir Robert Peel** and **Benjamin Disraeli**

### THE LIBERALS

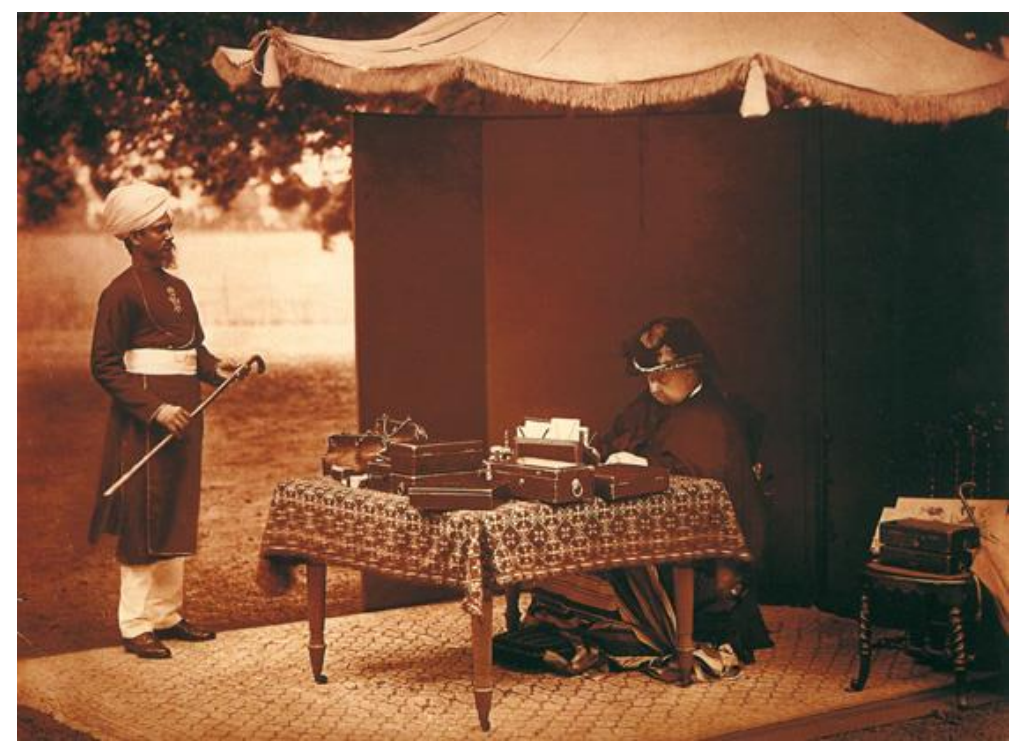
- evolved from the **Whigs**
- want **free trade**
- are represented by **Lord Palmerston** and **William Gladstone**

## A TIME OF REFORMS

- the **Corn Laws** (1815) maintain the price of corn in Britain at an exaggerated level → widespread starvation → **abolished** in 1846 by Robert Peel
- **Ten-Hour Act** 1847 limits the working day of women and children
- several **Mines Acts** forbid the employment underground of women and children
- **Elementary Education Act** 1870 gives all children the right to a basic education
- **Trade Union Act** 1871 makes unions legal

### THE EMPIRE

- the Victorian Empire stretches from **Canada** in the west to **New Zealand** in the east
- in 1876 Queen Victoria is declared **Empress of India**
- to avoid rebellion several colonies are granted **self-governments** or are turned into **dominions**



## VICTORIAN NOVEL

- the **novel** has become the art most capable of **reflecting the complexity** of the modern world
- **main source of entertainment** for the educated middle-classes
- idea of the **linearity** in the novel → given by the publications in instalments in magazines
- several of the most important Victorian writers are **women**
- during the Victorian Age, **the American prose** tries to find its independence from English Victorian prose

### EDGAR ALLAN POE 1809 – 1849

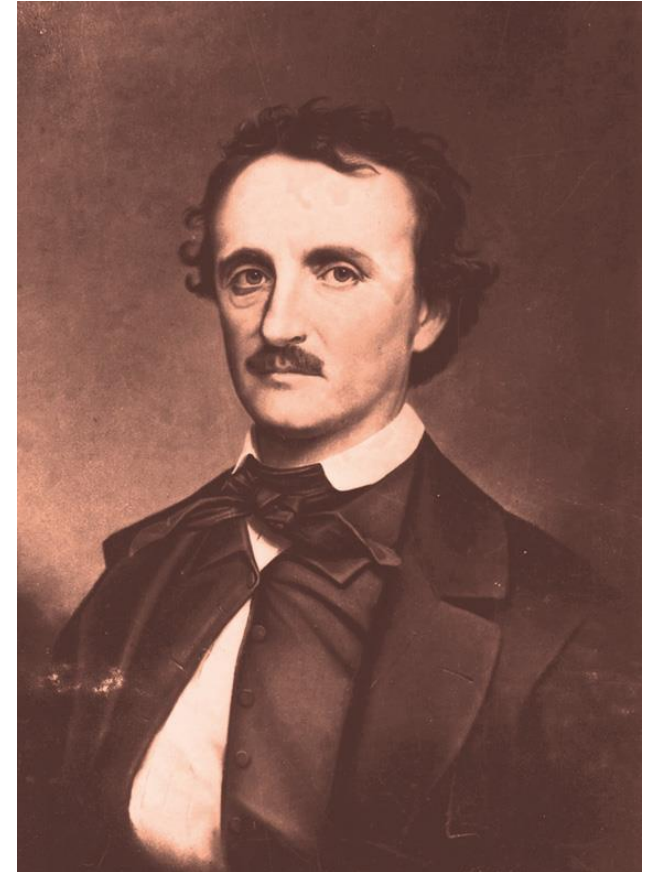
- considered the **creator of the detective story**
- **unity of effect, brevity** and appeal to the **emotions**
- writes two types of story: tales of **horror** and tales of **ratiocination**
- main themes of **the double**, the split personality and **madness**

### MAIN WORKS

1840 *Tale of Grotesque and Arabesque*

1841 *The Murders in the Rue Morgue*

1845 *The Raven*



## CHARLES DICKENS 1812 – 1870

- his novels, full of lively characters, humour and pathos are detailed pictures of **English life**
- writes his novels in **instalments**: the structure is episodic and creates **suspense**
- the **style** is **simple** and affects readers' emotions
- **social criticism**
- his characters tend to be **stereotypes** and **caricatures**
- **third person omniscient narrator**

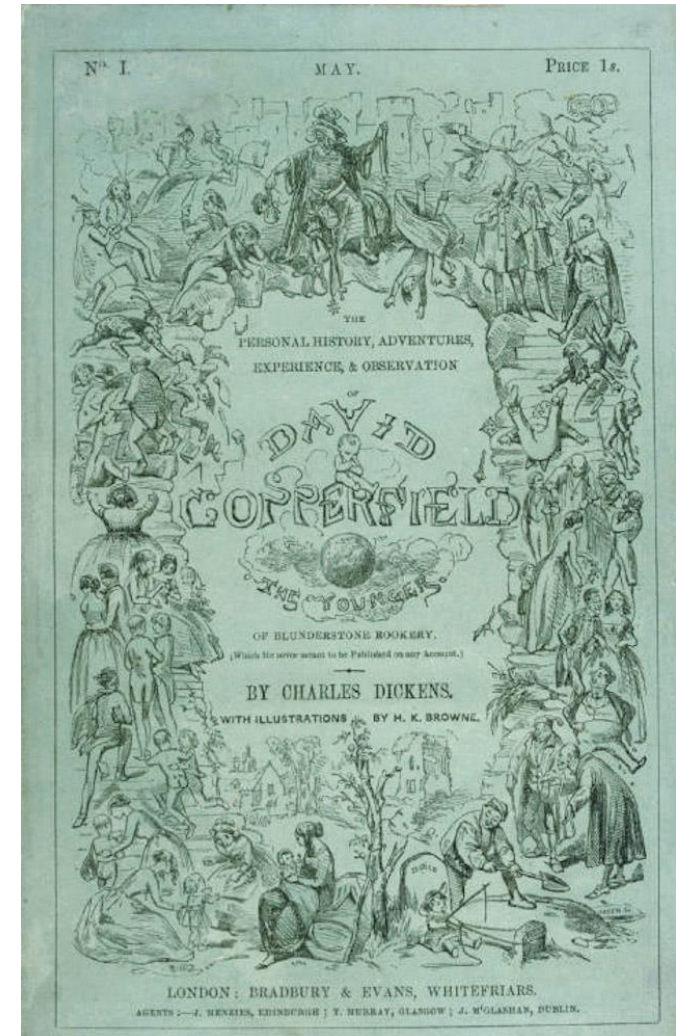




## CHARLES DICKENS

## MAIN WORKS

- 1836 *The Pickwick Papers*
- 1837 ***Oliver Twist***
- 1843 *A Christmas Carol*
- 1854 ***Hard Times***
- 1850 *David Copperfield*
- 1860 *Great Expectations*
- 1864 *Our Mutual Friend*



## *Oliver Twist* 1837

- the plot revolves around various **false identities** imposed upon Oliver
- the **city** is the place where all the injustices and misfortunes occur
- in Dickens' s **idealized countryside** the poor are free and happy
  - at the end of the novel Oliver settles with his new family in a small village



## *Hard Times* 1854

- **environment** is transformed into a **symbol** of the type of life it represents
- many scenes are presented in a vivid **theatrical way**
- the **style captures** the rhythms and vocabulary of **different types of speech**
- **sense of humour**

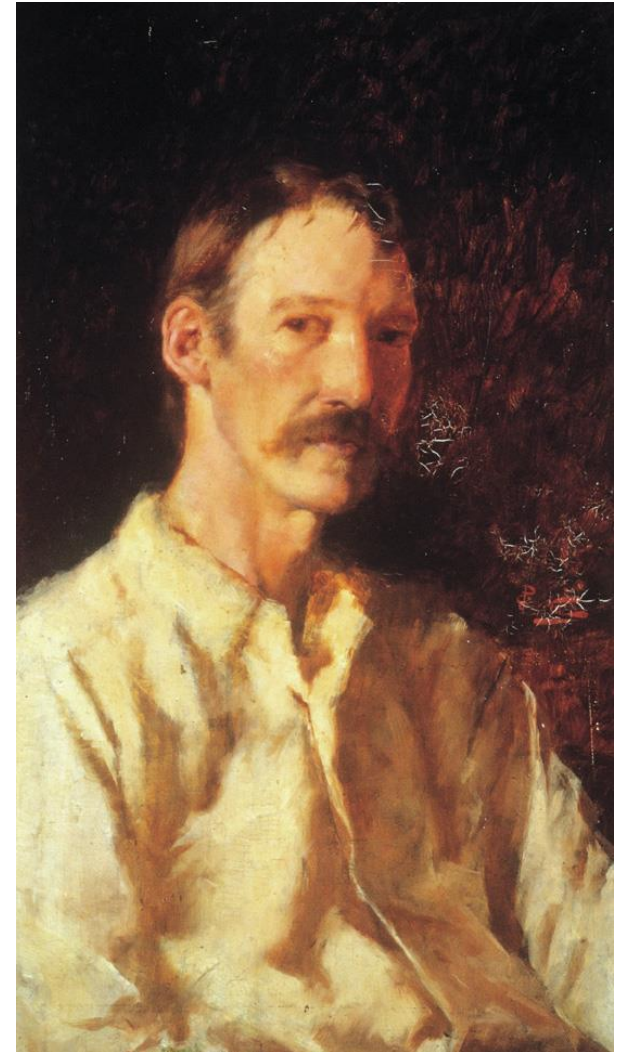


## EMILY BRONTË 1818 – 1848

- together with her sisters **Charlotte** and **Anne** shares her passion for writing
- **intellectual rigour** and **extreme sensitivity**
- writes her only novel, ***Wuthering Heights*** a year before dying
- *Wuthering Heights* contains elements of **Gothic fiction**, **Romanticism** and **Neo-Classicism**
- the **setting** is as important as the characters themselves, the primitive force of nature informs the whole narration
- **absence** of **moral condemnation**
- **multi-level narrative structure**
  - **external narrator**: Lockwood
  - **internal narrator**: the servant Nelly Dean

**ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON 1850 – 1901**

- highly concerned with literary style
- his most famous novels are *Treasure Island* (1883) and *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1886)
- the novel is a **flight into adventure**; great **attention to details**
- profound **doubleness of life**, constant conflict between good and evil
- **psychological analysis**
- point of view of **one character speaking** in the **first person**



**LEWIS CARROLL 1832 – 1898**

- writer, photographer and mathematician
- writes *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* in 1865 and *Through the Looking-Glass and What Alice Found There* in 1871
- his novels follow a surreal, **dream-like logic**
- **ironic imitation** of 19<sup>th</sup> century moral conventions
- the novels question the logic of linguistic structures → **grammar games, nonsense, portmanteau words**



## WHAT IS AESTHETICISM?

- in 1873 the Oxford professor **Walter Pater** states that art is only a source of deep moments of sensations
- this philosophy appeals to a group of British artists who **react against** the **Victorian ideals**
- main sources of inspiration are the **Romantic poets** (Keats, Shelley) and the **Pre-Raphaelite painters**
- the aesthetes affirm that **life must copy art** → ***art for art's sake***
- the Aesthetic Movement finds its expression also in **interior design** (furniture, ceramics, textiles)

**OSCAR WILDE 1854 – 1900**

- **eclectic artist**: poet, novelist and dramatist
- **eccentric dandy**, dresses exotically and has extravagant attitudes
- **the Preface** to *The Picture of Dorian Gray* can be considered the **manifesto of the Aesthetic movement**
- the **last years** of his life are sad and **squalid**; Wilde changes his name to Sebastian Melmoth



## OSCAR WILDE

## MAIN WORKS

- 1891 *Lord Arthur Savile's Crime and Other Stories*
- 1891 ***The Picture of Dorian Gray***
- 1892 *Lady Windermere's Fan*
- 1893 *A Woman of No Importance*
- 1895 *An Ideal Husband*
- 1895 *The Importance of Being Earnest*
- 1898 *The Ballad of Reading Gaol*



## *The Picture of Dorian Gray* 1891

- it can be read as a version of the **myth of Faust**
- **schizophrenic split** between the world of appearances and the inner world of mental and physical passions
- impossibility of a life pursuing intellectual delight with no **moral responsibility**
- motif of the **double**
- **triumph of art** over life



## VICTORIAN POETRY

- there is **not a collective vision** of poetry → Victorian Age is characterised by rapid change and various styles
- attempt to **reconcile** the ideas of **Romanticism** and **Classicism** to find a balance between individual freedom and social duty
- **Tennyson** and **Browning** are considered the major poets of the Victorian Age
- Algernon Charles **Swinburne** is a forerunner of Aestheticism , highly influenced by the French poets
- **The Pre-Raphaelites** want a return to the aesthetic values of the Italian painters of the 13<sup>th</sup> century. Fidelity to **nature**, enthusiasm for **mysticism**, key importance of **beauty**
- American poetry is represented by **Walt Whitman** and **Emily Dickinson**

**ALFRED TENNYSON 1809 – 1892**

- his work expresses the conflicts and the moral values of the Victorians
- art implies social commitment
- themes and characters often derived from Greek mythology and the Middle Ages

**MAIN WORKS**

1842        *Poems in two volumes*

1847        *The Princess*

1850        *In Memoriam*

1859-1885 *Idylls of the King*



**ROBERT BROWNING 1812 – 1889**

- **dramatic monologue** → effective tool to give voice to his gallery of characters
- his characters are extraordinary people caught in a moment when they have to face up to a crucial event
- he doesn't follow the trends of Victorian Poetry but draws on **Chaucer**, **Shakespeare** and **John Donne**

**MAIN WORKS**

1855 *Men and Women*

1861 *The Ring and the Book*

1889 *Asolando*

## EMILY DICKINSON 1830 – 1901

- lives a secluded and uneventful life and from her mid twenties she **withdraws into an inner world**
- writes about **love, nature, mortality** and **immortality**
- **original style**: she disregards traditional grammar rules, makes a personal use of capital letters, uses simple colloquial words
- **rhymes** and **rhythm** are irregular  
→ gaps and silences
- writes nearly **1,800 poems**, all published after her death



**VICTORIAN DRAMA**

- **melodrama** → sensational drama portraying heightened emotional states
- **farce** → comedy which entertains the audience by means of improbable situations
- **music hall** → variety entertainment with songs, jokes and ballet dancers
- **Oscar Wilde**'s social comedies have a huge success
- **George Bernard Show** → criticism of Victorian values, controversial themes, attempt to represent the lower classes in a more realistic way