

Victorian Literature



Victorian era

- Refers to the time during the reign of Queen Victoria 1837-1901



Victorian era

- The Victorian era is characterized by English imperialism. England was rapidly expanding. Queen Victoria was named Empress of India
- The Victorian era is also thought to be a time of rigid morals and repressed sexuality. Reading became a new past time because some theatre was regarded as “immoral”
- Homosexual behavior was regarded as a criminal offense and several writers like Oscar Wilde were sentenced to hard labor for engaging in “homosexual activities”

19th Century novel

- The novel became the leading form of literature in the Victorian age, and the 19th century is often regarded as the high point of British literature
- Famous Victorian writers include: the Bronte sisters, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, Charles Dickens, William Makepeace Thackeray, Oscar Wilde and Lewis Carroll

Charles Dickens



- Dickens wrote his first novel at the age of 25, *The Pickwick Papers*, which became very successful
- He wanted to write entertaining pieces but his real goal was to offer commentary on the social challenges of the era, including the plight of the poor and the oppressed
- Like many writers his work started as more lighthearted, but near the end of the century it took a turn toward darker themes

Victorian novel

- Victorian novels tend to focus on the difficult lives of characters, with the idealized notion that hard work, perseverance, love and luck win out in the end
- It follows the belief that virtue is rewarded and wrongdoers are punished
- There is usually a central moral lesson

Children's Literature

- The Victorians are credited with starting literature for children
- Because several laws were enacted which ended child labor, and began required education, more children were able to read
- Several authors wrote for children, and had an adult following as well, including Lewis Carroll (Alice in Wonderland)

Gothic Literature

- Gothic literature is an example of “fantastic fiction”
- Often the characters were larger than life, like Sherlock Holmes, and had exotic enemies to defeat
- Other Gothic characters include Dracula and The Invisible Man
- Combines romance and horror in an attempt to thrill and terrify and the reader

Gothic Literature

- Features include: foreign monsters, ghosts, curses, hidden rooms and witch-craft
- Usually are set in castles, monasteries or cemeteries



Wuthering Heights

- Written by Emily Bronte, it is a classic example of Gothic Romanticism
- It features violence, passion, the supernatural and heightened emotion
- It was not immediately appreciated by Victorian readers, as women were “supposed” to write romances

The Gothic Novel

- Emphasis on the power of imagination and the supernatural
- Presents a taste for the mysterious and macabre
- Nature parallels action and experience
- Horror, death, and gruesome or supernatural events dominate
- Character motivations are often dark

Frankenstein

- Story opens on the ship of an English explorer, Robert Walton, in the Arctic Ocean
- Walton serves as a framing device for the real action of the story: the creation of a monster by Dr. Victor Frankenstein



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- Walton rescues a drowning Dr. Frankenstein who tells him the story
 - In the flashback, Victor tells of his obsession with creating a human being, but is horrified by the monstrous result
 - Victor abandons his monster and the monster sets out on his own.
 - Rejected by humanity, the monster becomes enraged and kills Victor's brother. The monster then demands that Victor make him a wife. Victor obeys, but then kills the female monster out of fear.
 - The monster kills Victor's friend and wife in retaliation.

The End...



- After Walton rescues Victor and hears his tale, the scientist dies.
- The monster comes to the ship to grieve for his fallen creator
- The book ends when the monster goes to the North Pole to destroy himself.
- Walton returns to England, and the reader is left feeling like the monster could be out there somewhere...

Gothic Elements in *Jane Eyre*

- As a girl, Jane's punishment is to be locked in a red room where a relative had previously died. She later sees the ghost.
- Some characters hold frightening and dark secrets, contributing to the atmosphere of mystery.
- Two terrible and destructive fires occur.
- We eventually discover the fact that a menacing and insane woman has been in the home of Jane's employer (and love interest) for most of the plot.
- One character, Rochester, receives disfiguring injuries.

Victorian Poetry

- Seen as a bridge between the earlier “Romantics” and the modernist poets of the 20th Century
- Several important poets include Elizabeth Barrett Browning and her husband, Robert Browning, Alfred Lord Tennyson, Matthew Arnold and Gerard Manley Hopkins
- Features a resurgence of Medieval interests blended with contemporary concerns (*Idylls of the King*)

Science in the Victorian era

- Important time for the development of science, tried to describe and classify the natural world
- Charles Darwin *On the Origin of the Species* about the theory of evolution. Although it took a long time to be accepted, it dramatically affected society and thought.