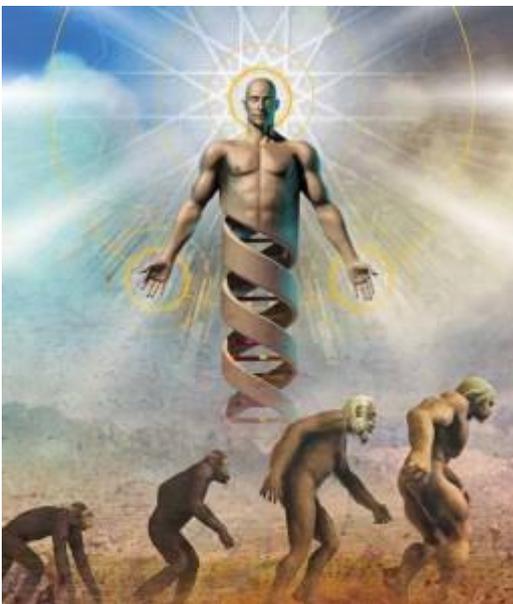


**LATE VICTORIANS:** The period during which Late Victorian Novelists wrote their novel was marked by a gradual **anti-Victorian reaction**. The early Victorians felt a social and moral responsibility to portray society in a realistic way denouncing its injustices but they also expressed faith in progress. In Late Victorians, instead, faith in progress and society begin to recede and the **novels deal with the growing crisis** in the moral and religious values. They did not identify themselves with their age as the early Victorians had done, and attacked the optimism of their previous predecessors. In literature all this resulted in a sort of realism which led the writers to reject any sentimental or romantic attitude and to focus above all in the **clash between man and his environment**, illusion and reality, dreams and their fulfilment. Individuals were **alienated from the world** and felt **powerless to alter their destiny**. In their new attitude, some of them were affected by **Naturalism** which had developed in France following the theories worked out by **Charles Darwin** which saw man only like a creature conditioned by heredity and environment.



On his ***On the Origin of Species by Natural selection***, studying similarities among different animals in different geographic areas, Darwin maintained that species are not immutable but they undergo a process of modification from ancestral species through evolution: the strongest individuals adapt to nature and survive determining a natural selection. This led him to think that man might descend from the animal world through different stages of evolution.

After Darwin's book, the traditional **Christian belief** found itself in open **conflict with modern science**. The truth of parts of the **Bible** had already been challenged by German scholars who had analyzed the Bible as a text of history rather than a sacred text. **D.E.Strauss** had claimed that the portrait of Christ in the gospels was based on a myth rather than on historical facts and **Feuerbach** had argued that Christianity was a myth created by man in order to satisfy a deep need to imagine human perfection. In the same period new discoveries in **geology and astronomy** cast doubts on the accuracy of the book of Genesis: the world, it seemed, had not been created a few thousand years before but millions of years before and not in six days. However it was Darwin's book that was the real cause of anxiety. The ideas about Natural Selection and the struggle to survive seemed to confirm man's worst fears that Nature was really a soulless and pitiless mechanism. Worse still was for some Christians the interpretation of Darwin in his work ***The Descendant of Man*** of the **Monkey Theory**: if God had created man to his own likeness, what was God's real image?

The most important late Victorian novelist was **Thomas Hardy**, whose novels show a **pessimistic tragic view** of the world. Many of his novels caused a scandal and one, *Jude the Obscure*, was even burned and banned.

In the Victorian Novel we have also to mention the **Colonial Novels** which are set in Britain's colonies and consist mainly of popular adventure novel for boys. They showed the colonizers as heroes who helped the natives. The most important representative was **Rudyard Kipling**.

**THE PRE RAPHAELITE BROTHERHOOD**: it was an association of painters and writers, founded in 1848, which advocated a return of art to the simplicity of medieval Italian painters before **Raffaello**. The birth of the movement was seen as an answer to the materialism of the Victorians and its conventions. It was an answer to the importance for the Victorians of success and wealth with very little concern in the arts which appeal to the heart and soul: poetry, painting, good writing and so on. Similar movements had already been founded in the first part of the century in Germany, France and Belgium. In 1850 the Pre-Raphaelites published a literary magazine, *The Germ: thoughts towards nature in Poetry and Art*. They believed that Art must be faithful to nature and have a moral purpose. Stressing the supremacy of Art over all other intellectual activities, the Pre-Raphaelites paved the way to the Aesthetic Movement.

**AESTHETIC MOVEMENT**: It was a literary movement developed through Europe. The leader of the English Aesthetic Movement was **Walter Pater**, but the most prominent figure was **Oscar Wilde**. In England it was the most typical aspect of the **reaction against Victorian materialism** and utilitarianism which thought that happiness could be secured by legislation, mass-production of goods and changes in the machinery and accessories of life.

The Aesthetes broke with the convention of the time. They were connected with a similar French movement, *The Parnassians*, and adopted **Theophile Gautier's** slogan *Art for Art's sake*, that is to say Art had no reference to life and couldn't have a moral purpose, a commercial value or be useful; it only needed to be beautiful to justify itself. The outstanding example of the aesthetes' withdrawal from life was **Huysman's A Rebours** in which the hero, *Des Essaints*, tried to create an entirely artificial life revealing the beauty of evil and decay.

The Aesthetes gave free rein to imagination and fantasy, imitating the Romantics. They reversed the idea that Art had to imitate life and stated that it was **life that had to imitate Art**. They took their theories and attitudes to the extremes and applied them to their lives, living an extravagant exciting disorderly and unconventional bohemian life.

Eventually Aestheticism was tinged with **Hedonism**, behaviour based on the belief that pleasure was the main aim in life, and degenerated into what was better known as Decadentism.

**Decadentism** was marked by a sort of extremism. Disregarding the simple genuine values of life and disdaining mediocrity, the Decadents cut themselves off from the masses. They avoided contact with reality and looked for an escape not in nature, but within themselves and with the help of artificial paradises created by drug, where illusions replaced reality. They studied the poems of **Charles Baudelaire**, above all *Les Fleures du Mal*, and Huysman’s novel *A Rebours* which was considered as their Manifesto.

**VICTORIAN POETRY:** Even if Victorian Age is identified with the Novel, it also produced poets of some standing. The most part of them still had, however, an essentially Romantic character as for tastes, tendencies towards fantasy, sensibility and style. As Victorian poets, they express their doubts and conflicts on Victorian society and criticize its emphasis on science, progress and materialism at the expense of spiritual sentiment. Among the Victorian poets the most important were **Alfred Tennyson, Robert Browning, Mathew Arnold** and **Gerard Manley Hopkins**.

**Tennyson** is considered a great poet of his time. In his poems he expressed the pessimistic mood of the time. He considered doubt as the root of his inspiration and was greatly concerned with the moral and social values of Victorian society.

**Browning** is remembered for having adapted the dramatic technique of the drama to his poems in the form of the *dramatic monologue*. Through it Browning succeeded in penetrating the depths of man’s unconscious and the working of the mind.

**Arnold’s** poems express a very deep melancholy and sadness. He did not like the social reality of his time and attacked the middle class materialism and narrow-mindedness. He called the period he lived in “*an age wanting in moral grandeur*”.

**Hopkins** was a man of his time and his poetry expresses the anxiety of the Victorian soul and the devotion to the beauties of the natural world. He is nowadays remembered because he was an *avant-garde* who broke away from the conventional use of the poetic language and was considered an innovator.

## THE ROMANTICS / THE VICTORIANS

THE ROMANTICS	THE VICTORIANS
Interested in man in nature and in the feelings of man in solitude – did not act to better man’s life.	Interested in man in society and in his troubles – very concerned with moral problems and questions of life because they were aware of living in an uncertain age which

	was preparing a new society-They tried to do something useful for man.
Escaped the great social problems of their time and looked at the private world of the imagination finding personal solutions.	Faced the world around them and took care of the weakest individuals trying to help them in their daily worries.
Rejected the neo-classical tradition and opposed and questioned everything of the previous age	Tried to unite both the neo-classical tradition and the romantic one.The former had, through the power of reason, freed man from ignorance; the latter, discovering the spiritual side of man, had given new importance to his feelings and aspirations
Liked country life and hated industrial towns-mostly lived in villages and worked on the land	There was a gradual migration towards towns because people wanted to find a work in the factories.When Queen Victoria died the 75% of the population lived in towns
Chose poetry as the main literary form because it was much linked to spirit and feelings	Chose the novel because,more than poetry,it could give voice to the claim of social justice and could analyze in details the inhuman standards of industrial society

Adapted from <<https://rosariomariocalbo.wordpress.com/2012/01/29/the-victorian-age/>>