

First Lecture

Warm-up

The 19th Century: Life and Literature

A Brief History of England in the 19th Century

The 19th Century: Life and Literature

- First of all, what is meant by Modern?
- According to scholars, the modern era began approximately in the 16th century.
- It means the start of the modern ages in Europe. We have to distinguish between literature written in the dark ages and literature written from the Renaissance onwards.
- It means also novels written with the start of the modern ages. In this way, we can consider Robinson Crusoe to be a modern novel.

The 19th Century: Life and Literature

The Modern Novel :

The novel in the 18th century

- We already studied this period in our course The Rise of the Novel.
- It is a period of beginnings. Lots of demerits and some merits.
- The novel suffered from repetition, complex language, coincidence, contradiction, weak plots, digression, and weak character portrayal.
- But the novel also broke fresh grounds in form and content.
- It at least opened up people's eyes to the problems of society that were long unspoken of in poetry and drama.

Questions:

- Robinson Crusoe is (a modern- a medieval- an Anglo-Saxon) novel.
- The novel in the 18th century had (lots of merits- lots of demerits- no merits)
- The Modern novel means (only novels written in the 20th century- novels written only in the 19th century- all novels written with the start of the modern age.)**
- According to scholars, the modern era began approximately in the (16th- 17th- 20th) century.

The novel in the 19th century

- Another famous name for the novel in this period is the Victorian novel (1837 – 1901)
- Why is that? The age has been given its name from Queen Victoria (1819-1901) whose reign of England continued from 1837 to 1901.
- She became queen at the age of 18; she was graceful and self-assured. She also had a gift for drawing and painting.
- Her interest in the arts coincided with the emergence of the greatest age of the English novel.

Questions

- The Victorian novel takes its name from: (Queen Elizabeth- Queen Victoria- King George).
- Queen Victoria ruled England for (over 60 years- 25 years- ten years)
- The greatest age of the English novel is the (Elizabethan- Victorian- Georgian) age.

- Queen Victoria ruled England when she was (60- 18- 40) years of age.
- Queen Victoria had an interest in (cooking- arts and painting- writing)

Four factors can help us understand The novel in the 19th century:

- Enormous changes occurred in political and social life in England and the rest of the world.
- The scientific and technical innovations of the Industrial Revolution, the emergence of modern nationalism, and the European colonization of much of Africa, the Middle East, and the Far East changed most of Europe.
- Far-reaching new ideas created the greatest outpouring of literary production the world has ever seen.

To understand those factors:

It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of Light, it was the season of Darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair, we had everything before us, we had nothing before us, we were all going direct to Heaven, we were all going direct the other way—in short, the period was so far like the present period, that some of its noisiest authorities insisted on its being received, for good or for evil, in the superlative degree of comparison only.

Which means

the Victorian age was an age of contradiction:

- Some people were very rich, some very poor
 - Some people felt quite happy, some quite miserable
 - Some people enjoyed freedom and luxury, some lived in prisons and suffered from instability
 - Some people travelled and explored the world, some were stuck at factories and small institutions
 - Some people had strong faith in the future, some were lost and pessimistic
 - Some people were full of confidence in themselves and in their powers as individuals, some lost confidence in everything
- Faith and doubt

Which means : Lord Alfred Tennyson

- There lives more faith in honest doubt, believe me, than in half the creeds.
Self-reverence, self-knowledge, self-control; these three alone lead one to sovereign power.
Behold, we know not anything;
I can but trust that good shall fall
At last — far off — at last, to all,
And every winter change to spring.
- So runs my dream: but what am I?
An infant crying in the night:
An infant crying for the light:
And with no language but a cry.

Also of interest to most Victorian Novelists:

- Education
- Poverty
- Hunger
- Diseases
- Death
- Pollution
- Social injustice and class distinction
- Clash between science and religion
- The place of England as a super colonial power

As for form:

- The novel had a firmer structure
- The form was suitable to the content
- Plots and characters became less in number
- Plots and characters were more tightly and strongly built
- Language got easier and sentences shorter
- Coincidences were less and less used in novels
- More verisimilitude
- More irony and symbolism

The Situation of the Novel

- The novel became the most popular form of literature and also the main form of entertainment since they were read aloud within the family.
- Novelists felt they had a moral and social responsibility to fulfil: they depicted society as they saw it (realism) and denounced its evils (criticism). They aimed at making readers realise social injustices.
- A great example here is Charles Dickens who devoted all his novels to the criticism of society especially to the problems of poverty and education.

The Victorian Novel

- Victorian novels seek to represent a large and comprehensive social world, with a variety of classes.
- Victorian novels are realistic, their major theme is the place of the individual in society, the aspiration of the hero or heroine for love or social position.
- The protagonist's search for fulfillment is emblematic of the human condition.
- For the first time, women were major writers: the Brontës, Elizabeth Gaskell, George Eliot.
- The Victorian novel was a principal form of entertainment.

The Victorian Novel

- On Dickens's grave, we read these very important phrases:
- **Dickens' epitaph:**
 - *"He was a sympathizer to the poor, the suffering, and the oppressed; and by his death, one of England's greatest writers is lost to the world."*
- Many Victorian novelists joined him in this mission of criticizing society to improve it.

To sum up

- The Victorian novel was quite interested in dealing with the problems of society.

- It was full of realism.
- Lots of novels were written in this age in celebration of the greatness of the British empire: the greatest nation and the greatest novel.
- The form of the Victorian novel was stronger and much more improved than that of the 18th century.

Questions

- One famous Victorian novelist who worked for the improvement of society through criticizing it is (Forster- Woolf- Dickens).
- The greatest age of the English novel was (romantic- classic- realistic).
 - The form of the Victorian novel is (the same as- stronger than- worse than) that of the novel in the 18th century.
- Many women novelists appeared in English literature in the (17th- 18th- 19th) century.