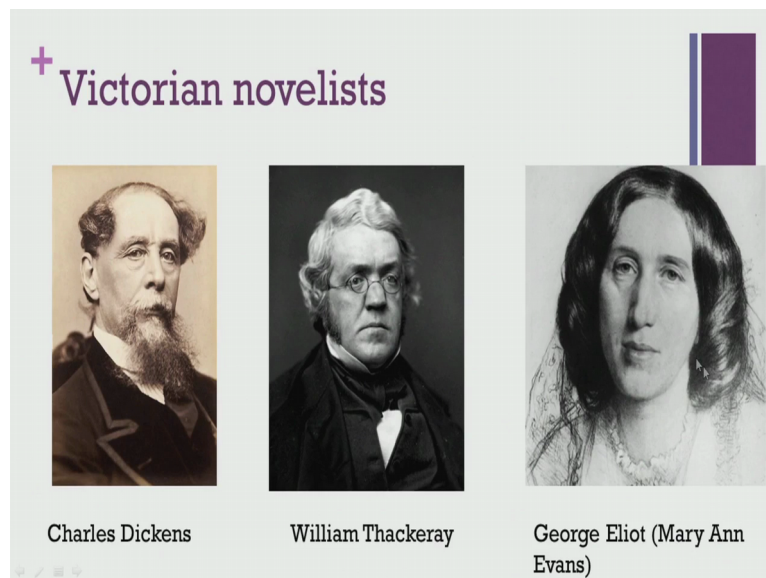


**History of English Language and Literature**  
**Dr. Merin Simi Raj**  
**Department of Humanities and Social Sciences**  
**Indian Institute of Technology, Madras**  
**Lecture – 21**  
**Victorian Novel and the Late Victorian Period**

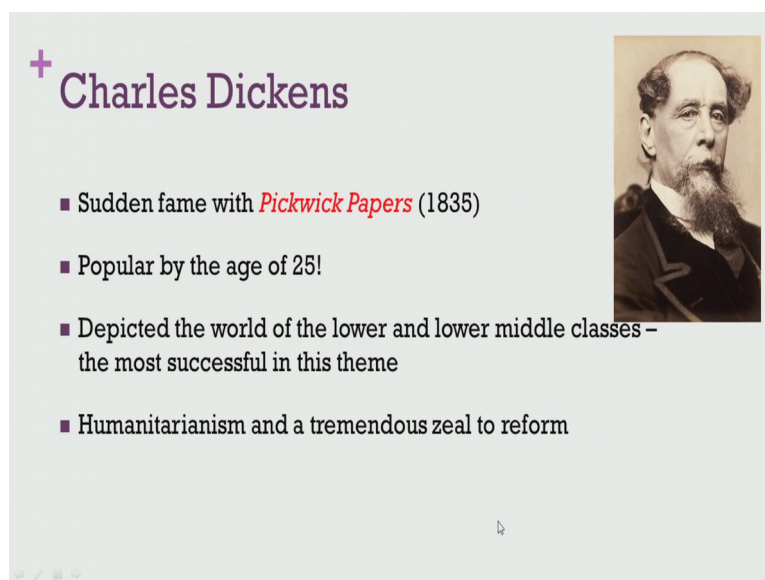
Hello and welcome again to the NPTEL course the history of English Language and Literature, today's lecture title Victorian Novel and the Late Victorian Period we first take a (00:24) look at what constituted the fiction in the Victorian age and then move on to take a look at the constituent and the characteristic features of the late Victorian period.

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We begin by lecture by taking a look at the most important three novelist of the Victorian period significantly Charles Dickens, William Thackeray and Mary Ann Evans who wrote under the pen name George Eliot. When we talk about Victorian novel, apart from the fact that this was the age this was the 19th century which contributed much to the emergence and the evolution of novel in general. These three figures also come to our mind particularly because of the singular contributions and the foundational influence that they had on the age in general.

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## + Charles Dickens

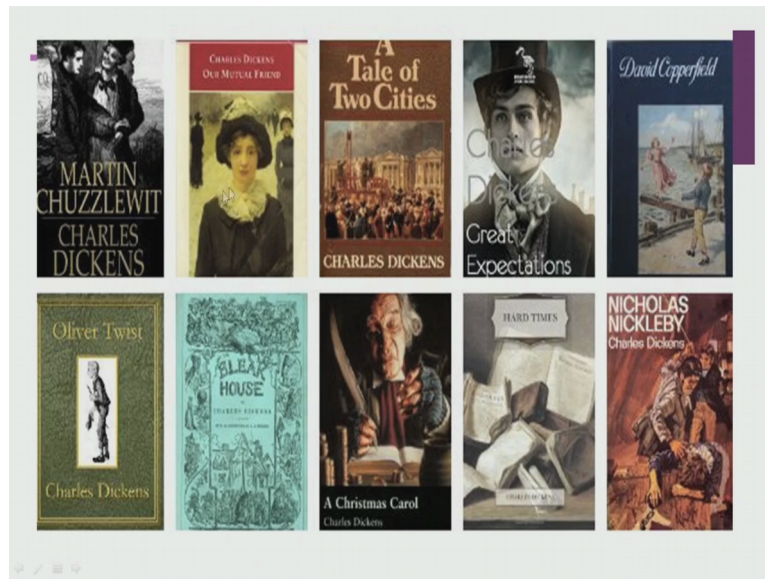
- Sudden fame with *Pickwick Papers* (1835)
- Popular by the age of 25!
- Depicted the world of the lower and lower middle classes – the most successful in this theme
- Humanitarianism and a tremendous zeal to reform

We begin by taking a look at Charles Dickens and his work. He was one writer who rose to sudden fame at the age of 25 with the success of his novel *Pickwick Papers* which was published in 1835. He became extremely popular by the age of 25 and in fact he is one of the very rare writers who enjoyed much popularity during his own lifetime and also continued to be considered as one of the most important and a classic writer of the century.

In his novels in general we find depiction of the world of the lower and lower middle classes and we find that Dickens is most successful when he is engaging with this particular theme and he is genius does not excel when he ventures into other kinds of themes which he is not very familiar with.

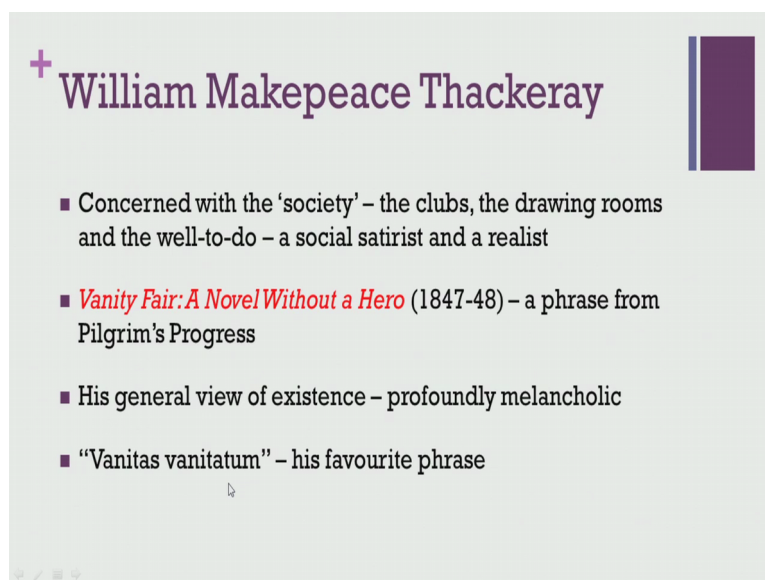
We also find in his work a tremendous zeal to reform and also an underlying humanitarian sense and in that sense it is also imperative to remember that in most of the novels he tried to respond to the evils of the society particularly keeping in mind the fact that this was the time when England was moving towards a fast paced industrial reform. In most of his novels we find him talking about the major difficulties that were faced by the lower classes when England was taking massive strides towards major economic and sociopolitical reforms.

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Most of his novels published in the 19th century they are now considered as a classics, they are also much widely read and also taught all over the world and some his significant works include Martin Chuzzlewit, A Tale of Two Cities, Great Expectations, David Copperfield, Nicholas Nickleby, Hard Times, A Christmas Carol, a Bleak House and Oliver Twist and many of his works were also been adapted into various other media including the cinema and we also find that these novels continued to capture the imaginal fancy of the reading public all over the world because of their universal appeal and also what the simplicity with which he treated his themes and his characters.

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## + William Makepeace Thackeray

- Concerned with the 'society' – the clubs, the drawing rooms and the well-to-do – a social satirist and a realist
- *Vanity Fair: A Novel Without a Hero* (1847-48) – a phrase from Pilgrim's Progress
- His general view of existence – profoundly melancholic
- "Vanitas vanitatum" – his favourite phrase

Talking about William Makepeace Thackeray, he was more concerned with the society, so in his fictional world we find an engagement with the clubs, the drawing rooms and the well-to-do. This could be considered as giving a contrasting picture to that of Dickens fictional world.

He was a social satirist and a realist and we do find this getting manifested in most of his works as well, his most successful novel is perhaps the one titled *Vanity Fair, a Novel Without a Hero* published in 1847-48 and this is in fact a phrase that he borrowed from the work *Pilgrim's Progress* which also had a profound influence on his writing career.

His general view of existence was a profoundly a melancholic and we do find him engaging in a satirical mood and launching most of his fictional works from that particular mood. His favorite catch phrase was *Vanitas Vanitatum* which also formed the bases of most of his works because he was profoundly satirical of the value system that the higher class was promoting in England in the 19th century.

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His successful works were mostly satirical, they were also directed against a very scathing attack against the upper class value system and it also included a lot of exposition about the vanity and the echo that this upper class manifested.

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## + George Eliot

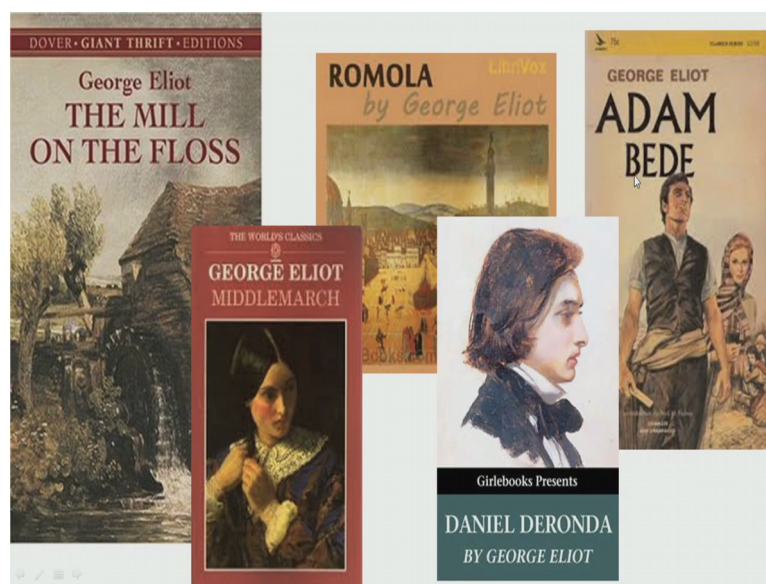
- "The novel, then, was humanitarian in the hands of Dickens and satiric in the hands of Thackeray. In the hands of George Eliot it became moral and philosophical"
- Original name – Mary Ann or Mary Evans
- Took a male name to rise above the 'silly novels' syndrome

George Eliot (04:16) was a pen name of Mary Ann Evans and this (04:19) also the time to remember that this was the time, 19th century was the time in which even women writers were beginning to be included into the canonical important mainstream figures and it is said about George Eliot's novel, the novel then was a humanitarian in the hands of Dickens

and satiric in the hands of Thackeray, in the hands of George Eliot it become moral and philosophical.

So it is important to know that these three important figures which dominated the 19th century also wrote in radically different ways thereby giving a lot of flavor to the novel which was flourishing in the 19th century. George Eliot's original name was Mary Ann or Mary Evans and it is said that she took a male name to rise above the silly novels syndrome which we shall be taking a look at shortly.

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Some of her important works include The Mill on the Floss, Romola, Middlemarch, Daniel Deronda, and Adam Bede. She was considered as one of the most successful women writers of that period and many even thought that she was indeed a male writer and we do not find her gender coming in the way of her popularity throughout her lifetime and in fact incidentally she also distanced herself from most of the women writers of those times and also an analysis of her novels would also reveal to us that it is very difficult to delineate a different kind of a theme in accordance with her gender.

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The other contemporaries of this three prominent novelist of the 19th century include Frederick Marryat, Edward Lytton, Benjamin Disraeli, George Borrow, Charles Lever, Charles Reade, Anthony Trollope, Elizabeth Gaskell, Charlotte Bronte, Emily Bronte, Anne Bronte, Charles Kingsley, Henry Kingsley, Wilkie Collins, Doddridge Blackmore, Sir Walter Besant, George Meredith, Robert Louis Stevenson.

Though all of these writers wrote quite prolifically in the 19th century, it will be difficult to take a look at the individual writers and also the contributions that all of them made to the 19th century but what is important to note and highlight at this point is that the 19th century was quite prolific in this sense and also it laid the foundation to the novel in a way that it may almost become the most important and the most dominant genre by the 20th century.

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Let us take a look at some of these writers in closer detail, the Brontë Sisters were very popular it was Emily Brontë, Charlotte Brontë and Ann Brontë together so from a single family they are said to have contributed immensely to the growth of English Literature and their important works were quite popular during their own lifetime and also they continued to be adapted into stage and as well as into the lot of other forms of visual media including the cinema and it is said that their novels also made it possible for a new kind of genre to emerge from the 19th century onwards which also focused on a lot of private and domestic drama.

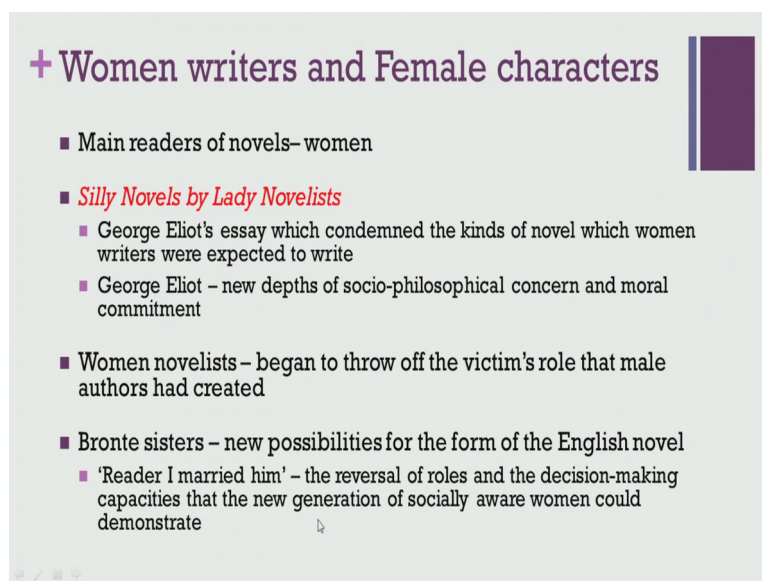




foundational works of feminist scholarship is also a way in which some theorist try to depart from the dominant view which was perpetrated by these novelist of the 19th century.

This is also perhaps the most opportune time to talk about women writers and female characters in the 19th century. It is important to highlight that the main readers of novels in the 19th century were women and this also had led to a lot of controversies during that time because many also thought that the novel could be a form which would deteriorate the moral framework of women.

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The slide features a title '+ Women writers and Female characters' in purple text at the top left. To the right of the title is a vertical purple bar. Below the title is a list of bullet points, each preceded by a small purple square. The first bullet point is 'Main readers of novels- women'. The second is '*Silly Novels by Lady Novelists*', which is followed by two sub-bullets: 'George Eliot's essay which condemned the kinds of novel which women writers were expected to write' and 'George Eliot - new depths of socio-philosophical concern and moral commitment'. The third bullet point is 'Women novelists - began to throw off the victim's role that male authors had created'. The fourth is 'Bronte sisters - new possibilities for the form of the English novel', followed by a sub-bullet: ''Reader I married him' - the reversal of roles and the decision-making capacities that the new generation of socially aware women could demonstrate'. At the bottom left of the slide, there are small navigation icons.

- Main readers of novels- women
- *Silly Novels by Lady Novelists*
  - George Eliot's essay which condemned the kinds of novel which women writers were expected to write
  - George Eliot - new depths of socio-philosophical concern and moral commitment
- Women novelists - began to throw off the victim's role that male authors had created
- Bronte sisters - new possibilities for the form of the English novel
  - 'Reader I married him' - the reversal of roles and the decision-making capacities that the new generation of socially aware women could demonstrate

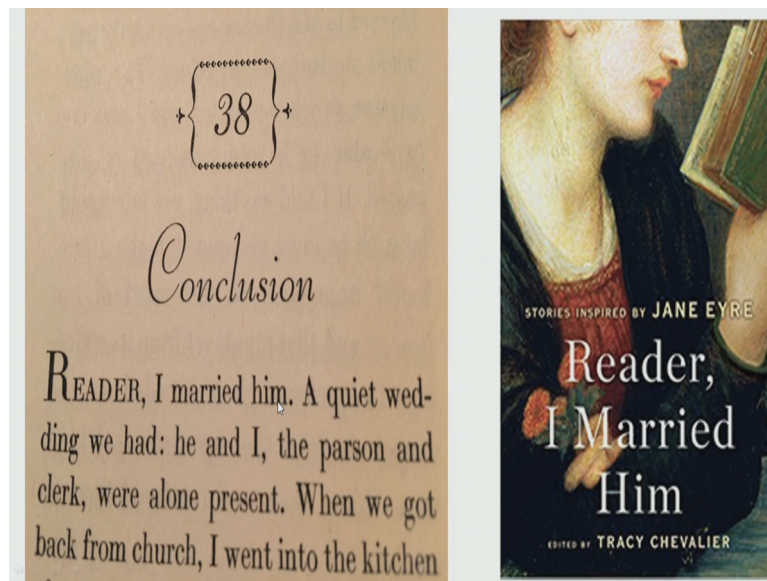
And there was also particular form of novel which was getting popularized by women and for women and George Elliot's essay titled *Silly Novels by Lady Novelist*, she attacked just that and condemned the kinds of novels which women writers were expected to write. George Eliot or Mary Ann Evans was one writer who wanted to explore new depths of sociopolitical concern and moral commitment and she did not want to limit herself to the writing of a certain private or domestic drama and we do find that many of the writers had already began to challenge certain convection of novel writing and also certain convections of characterizations.

For example we find some of the women writers were beginning to throw of the victims role that male authors have created and that since they had began to create more independent women characters and their works. For example, Bronte Sisters could again be remembered for having opened up new possibilities in the form of a English novels, for example there is one episode from the novel *Jane Eyre* where this particular protagonist Jane talks to the

reader about a decision that she made and there is a chapter which begins with the statement Reader I married him.

And in this single statement many critics at later point and also the readers of the contemporary and the posterity they have noticed that this statement was a reversal of roles and decision making capacity that the new generation of socially aware women were able to demonstrate.

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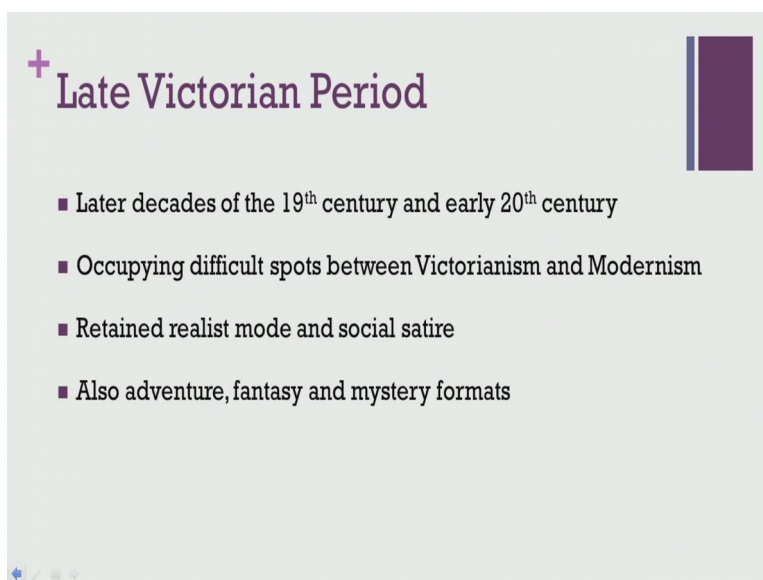
Opening statement of chapter 38 of the novel Jane Eyre which says Reader I married him, it was a hugely influential in the 19th century, it also had given rise to a lot of historical and lot of literary interest later point we also find that Tracy Chevalier has edited a series known as Reader I married him which was a compilation of stories inspired by Jane Eyre.

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The other important women writers of this period include Frances Trollope who is also the mother of Anthony Trollope, Mrs. Craik also known as Dinah Maria Mulock, Mrs. Margaret Oliphant who wrote prolifically and had published over a 100 novels, Mrs. Henry Wood, Mrs. Eliza Lynn Linton and Mrs. Humphry.

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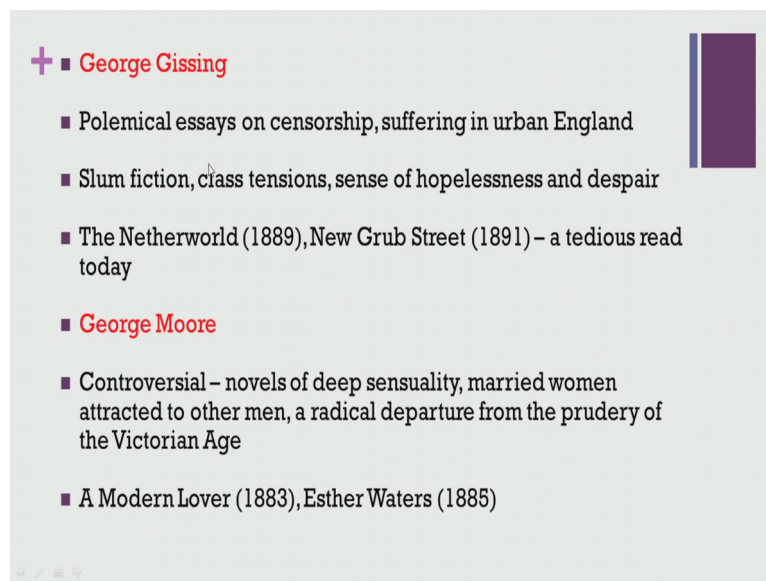


Moving on to the Late Victorian Period this period comprises of the later decades of the 19th century and early 20th century and it is also said to have occupied difficult spots between Victorianism and Modernism. This could also be seen as a transition re-phase but it was quite significant in terms of its literary output that it is generally designate as a late Victorian

Period and during this period we find the artist and the writers retaining their realist mode and social satire.

But at the same time they were also lot of experiments going on and we find the writers writing about adventure, fantasy and mystery formats as well. Let us take a very quick look it some of the writers which dominated this sea in the later Victorian period or even the transition towards the period.

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George Gissing wrote mostly polemical essays on censorship and also about the suffering in urban England and in that sense he could also be considered as one of the writers as who identified a lot of (( ))(11:33) associated with the industrialization which was happening rapidly in England.

His work was mostly within the themes of slum fiction, he wrote about class tensions and also about a sense of hopelessness and despair, his important works of those times include The Netherworld and the New Grub Street however they are considered as a tedious compositions taking a look at them from the contemporary point of view.

George Moore was a controversial writer of the 19th century, his novels mostly were of deep sensuality, he also wrote about a lot of taboo and controversial subjects such as married women getting attracted to other men about radical departures from the prudery of the Victorian Age as well. So we do find him challenging the moral conventions of that day and since also throwing seeds of rebellion in terms of departing from the Victorian sensibilities

and from the Victorian temperament. Two of his important works are *A Modern Lover* published in 1883 and *Eshter Waters* in 1885.

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- + ■ **Robert Louis Stevenson**
  - *Treasure Island, Kidnapped* (1866)
  - The most famous Scottish writer since Walter Scott
  - Entertaining travelogues, serialised in children's magazines
  - Polemical pieces deriding English colonialism
  - *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1886)
  - Sharp departures from the irregular multi-volume Victorian tales – linear and straightforward – fewer subplots
- **Rider Haggard**
  - *King Solomon's Mines* (1885)
  - Adventure for children – inspired them to think of a career in the colonies

Robert Louis Stevenson is perhaps the best known writer after the important writers of the 19th century his works *Treasure Island* and *Kidnapped* they continued to be best sellers and a classic writings for children and he is also considered as a most famous writers since Walter Scott and many of his works are entertaining travelogues, they were also utilized in children's magazines.

His interest was not limited to fiction he also wrote polemical thesis deriving English colonialism. (( ))(12:58) is also useful and important to remember that this was the time when colonialism had reached its peak but at the same time the critics against it was also growing steadily and heavily in England and in other parts of the world.

Another successful work by Robert Louis Stevenson is the strange case of *Doctor Jekyll and Mister Hyde* published in 1886 and we in general find a lot of significance in Stevenson's work primarily because he had departed very sharply from the irregular multi-volume Victorian Tales and he had moved towards linear and straightforward plotlines with fewer subplots, it also made it more interesting to children and it also ensured that the popularity lasted beyond the age in which it was written.

Rider Haggard is also considered as a favorite children's author, his work *King Solomon's Mines* published in 1885, it continued to be a popular children's classic, mostly he wrote

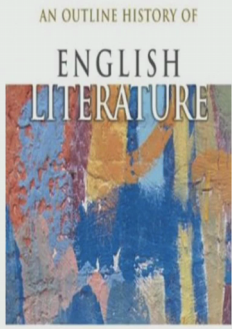
adventures for children and inspired them to think of a career in the colonies. So he did play an important role in locating the significance of a colonialism in the minds of young English children.

At this juncture it is useful to also remember that one of the foundational text of English literary history authored by a William Henry Hudson it comes to an end with the discussion of the Victorian Novelist and let us also take a look at the concluding statement that Hudson makes in order to try and evaluate the age and the impact that it had on English history in general.

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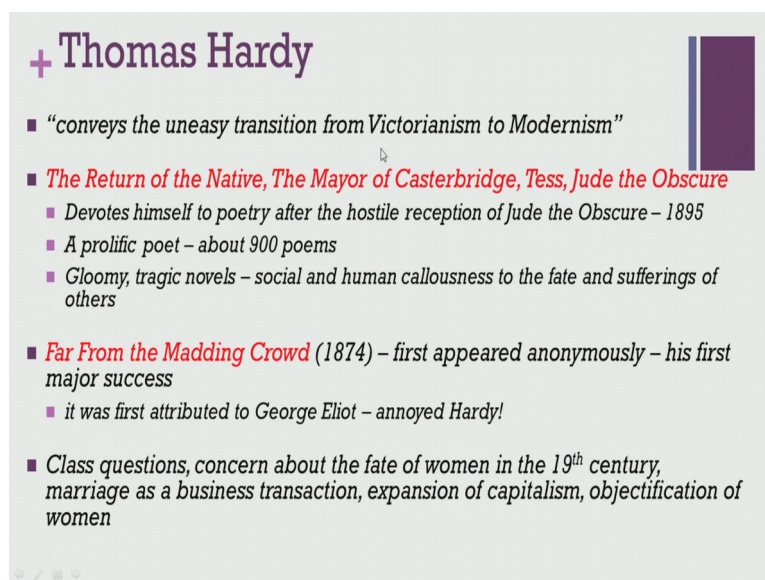
■ “Stevenson and Meredith together carried on the finest traditions of fiction till well on towards the end of a long period of extraordinary and many-sided activity. They thus testify that the forces of our English genius are not yet by any means exhausted; and so we are able to conclude our short history of English literature not only with gratitude for the past, but also with hope for the future”

(Hudson's concluding statement)



Stevenson and Meredith together carried on the finest tradition of fiction till well on towards the end of a long period of extraordinary and many-sided activity. They thus testify that the forces of our English genius are not yet by any means exhausted; and so we are able to conclude our short history of English Literature not only with gratitude for the past but also with hope for the future.

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## + Thomas Hardy

- “conveys the uneasy transition from Victorianism to Modernism”
- *The Return of the Native, The Mayor of Casterbridge, Tess, Jude the Obscure*
  - Devotes himself to poetry after the hostile reception of *Jude the Obscure* – 1895
  - A prolific poet – about 900 poems
  - Gloomy, tragic novels – social and human callousness to the fate and sufferings of others
- *Far From the Madding Crowd* (1874) – first appeared anonymously – his first major success
  - it was first attributed to George Eliot – annoyed Hardy!
- Class questions, concern about the fate of women in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, marriage as a business transaction, expansion of capitalism, objectification of women

So with this understanding we move on to take a look at Thomas Hardy who again occupies a very difficult and uneasy spot in English literary history because it is in about Hardy's work that he conveys the uneasy transition from Victorianism to Modernism. Some of his important works are *The Return of the Native*, *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, *Tess* and *Jude the Obscure*.

His shift across genre is considered quite interesting because he was one writer who devoted himself to poetry after the hostile reception of his novel *Jude the Obscure* in 1895 but however though he started writing poetry only at a later stage in life he was a prolific poet he wrote about 900 poems but his novels and his poetry in general were mostly gloomy and melancholy.

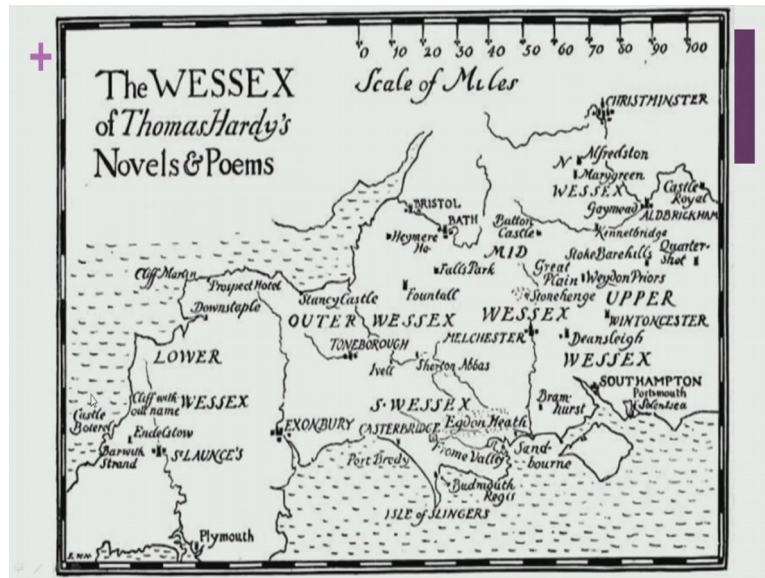
His novels also had a tragic ending generally and we also find him engaging with the social and human callousness to the fate and sufferings of others. There is one interesting element about one of his works *Far From the Madding Crowd* it had first appeared anonymously in 1874 and this was also his first major success as a novelist since it was published anonymously it was initially attributed to George Eliot who is already an established author then and this fact had annoyed Hardy to no end.

In Hardy's novels in general we find engagement with class questions, concerns about the fate of women in the 19th century. He also critiqued the institutionalization of marriage as a business transaction, he critiqued the expansion of capitalism and also the objectification of



women in the 19th century. Almost of his successful works of that period they also continue to be considered as classics and they are also widely read and much appreciated even in the contemporary.

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And Hardy plays most of his works within this fictional town of Wessex and he also had a very clear understanding of how to geographically position his works and he even had prepared a map to give a proper understanding to his readers and many historians and many critics have tried to explore through this fictional province of Wessex.

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- ✦ 'the clash of the modern'
- Hardy's Later work - Perspective shifts from ordinary simple events and feelings to a more cosmic awareness
- "The Darkling Thrush"
- Does not accept one single mood – neither the Romantic hope nor his own sense of historical doubt – 'the corpse of the previous century is prepared for burial'
- Looks back into the 19<sup>th</sup> century for security and forward to a 20<sup>th</sup> century in the gloom
- Considers the possibility of a beneficent God – but suggests no confidence in his existence
- Does not completely reject the poetic voice of the high Victorians

In Hardy's work we find the clash of the modern, in fact in Hardy's later work it is said that the perspective shifts from ordinary simple events and feelings to a more cosmic awareness (( ))(17:06) that since he does occupy the right spot during the transition from the Victorian period to the modernist period.

One of his poems The Darkling Thrush we do see a lot of evidence and lot of manifestation of this dilemma and this transition, in fact in his work there is do acceptance of his single mood, in fact in his work we find neither the romantic hope nor his sense of historical doubt, in fact to quote one his own forms, the corpse of the previous century is prepared for burial.

Also possible to say about his work which also perhaps will hold true for most of the writers who were writing during this transitional phase he was looking back into the 19th century for security and forward toward 20th century in the gloom. We do not find much of a hope or any sense of optimism coming through his works.

He also had a very shifting understanding of religion, God and beliefs, he does consider the possibility of a beneficent God but he does not suggests any confidence in his existence, so we do find him exemplifying the Victorian doubt to its full capacity and also moving to the modernist phase carrying all of this doubt, dilemma and confusion in his works and he also does not completely reject the poetic voice of the high Victorians but nevertheless we do find that he had moved away from the Victorians and if that since some of them also considered him as one of the early modernist poets.

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**+ Joseph Conrad**

- A Polish immigrant to England – learnt English through newspapers and the works of Carlyle
- *Heart of Darkness* (1899) – postcolonial studies, *Nostromo*, *Lord Jim*
- Chinua Achebe dismissed *Heart of Darkness* as 'bloody racist'



Moving to the Twentieth century from the late Victorian period we also noticed that there were many writers who were not entirely of English origin but they are considered as proper English writers who contributed immensely to the English literary history. Joseph Conrad was one such writer who was a Polish immigrant to England he had learnt English through newspapers and the works of Carlyle which also talks about the kind of genius that he possessed.

His most important work *Heart of Darkness* was published in 1899 this is a novel which is also said to have been very influential in the foundation of post-colonial studies in the 20th century, his other important works are *Nostromo* and *Lord Jim*, these novels also we find him exploring the various aspects of the colonial and post-colonial understanding. In fact there was a lot of criticism against Joseph Conrad works when Chinua Achebe another postcolonial writer, when he dismissed *Heart of Darkness* as for being bloody racist in its attitude.

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- John Galsworthy
- *The Forsyte Saga*
- Period-wise modern BUT Victorian themes and attitudes

THE MAN OF PROPERTY  
JOHN GALSWORTHY

LOYALTIES

THE SWAN SONG  
JOHN GALSWORTHY

THE FORSYTE SAGA

John Galsworthy was another significant late Victorian writer, the most important work of Galsworthy is *The Forsyte Saga*, period-wise Galsworthy is considered a modern but his themes and his attitudes could be classified as mostly Victorian, the other important works of Galsworthy include *The Man of Property*, *Loyalties* and *The Swan Song*. He was also one of those writers who occupy a difficult spot during this transition from the Victorian period to the modernist period.

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- **Arnold Bennet** – a regionalist like Hardy
- **Samuel Butler** – *Erewhon*, or *Over the Range* (resembles *Gulliver's Travels*) – 'nowhere' backwards
  - Defence of faith- influenced by Darwin but unwilling to let go of the Christian doctrine – tracts of biological theories and journalism
- **Oscar Wilde** – mostly plays – exploration of narcissicism, corruption of English bourgeois society, inability of art to capture the core of wickedness – *The Picture of Dorian Gray*
- **Bram Stoker** – *Dracula* (1897) – science, history, myth-legends, eroticism – ranked along *Frankenstein*
- **Francis Thomson** - Poetry marked by faith and self doubt – *The Hound of Heaven*

Arnold Bennet was a popular writer during the 19th century, he was also a regionalist like Hardy and just like Hardy had located all of his fictional work in this Province of Wessex, he

also had tried to do just the same and Samuel Butler, the author of *Erewhon*, or *Over the Range* his work resembles *Gulliver's Travels* and in fact *Erewhon* interestingly is nowhere spelled backwards and in most of Butler's works we find defense of a faith being employed, he was tremendously influenced by Darwin but he was unwilling to let go of the Christian doctrine. We also find in his writing tracts of biological theories and journalism.

Oscar Wilde, a writer whom we have already taken a look at he wrote mostly plays and we also find in his work an exploration of narcissism and the corruption of English bourgeois society, he also engaged with the inability of art to capture the core of wickedness and that since we also find moving closer towards a modernist tendencies and his most important novel was *The Picture of Dorian Gray*.

Bram Stoker is now most famous for his singular master piece *Dracula* published in 1897 as we all know it continues to be one of the most important works of the 19th century and one of the most popular horror stories ever written and in this work there is a combination of science, history, myth-legends and also eroticism and we also find that Bram Stoker's *Dracula* is ranked along *Frankenstein* in terms of its theme attitude and its general treatment.

In Francis Thomson's work mostly dominated by poetry we find a certain kind of a combination of faith and self doubt and this is specially manifested in his poetry *The Hound of Heaven* which could also be seen as one of the representative (( ))(21:43) which capture the essence of faith and dilemma in the 19th century.

Though the 19th century was very important in laying the foundations of literary history in England and also in other parts of the world, we do find that this period was markedly different because of the various other sociopolitical and cultural event which were taking place.

And as when we begin to wrap up today's session we should also take a look at some of these important events which were instrumental in shaping Britain's literary, social, political and cultural history and also how all of these together led England towards the modernist phase which it was to occupy the twentieth century.

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## + Other important events

- Karl Marx's *Das Kapital* (1867)
  - The development and influence of Communism
- The Great Exhibition of 1851
  - Exhibition of the works of industry of all nations – celebration of modern industrial technology and design
- The Crimean War
  - Russian empire lost to an alliance of the Ottoman Empire, France, Britain and Sardinia
  - The first modern mass media war

Karl Marx's *Das Kapital* published in 1867 was a very politically charged thesis which also laid the development and influence of communism in different parts of the world there was also this great exhibition of 1851 which was in fact an exhibition of the works of industry of all nations and this was also a celebration of modern industrial technology and design and this is also a phase when which we begin to see a combination of science and art occupying a more or less a more friendly relation and also coming closer to the everydayness of a human life.

The other significant event which was to alter the political history of Britain was a Crimean War this was a very important phase and this was an important struggle though this did not really take place in the British soil this was in fact a series of battles which led to the Russian empire losing to an alliance of the Ottoman Empire, France, Britain and Sardinia.

In fact more than the political significance that there is even had in Russia. It was also considered in modern times as the first modern mass media war so all of these events together, they did not directly perhaps contributed to the literary and political developments within Britain, they did shape the history of mankind in such a way that it was impossible to turn back to another face from the end of the 19th century onwards.

We also find all of these events as well as literary events of the 19th century living a very significant impact on the early 20th century and also on the way in which the 20th century was to shape up and its literature culture and all other important elements. So with this we

wrap up todays lecture we also look forward to see you in the next session, thank you for listening.