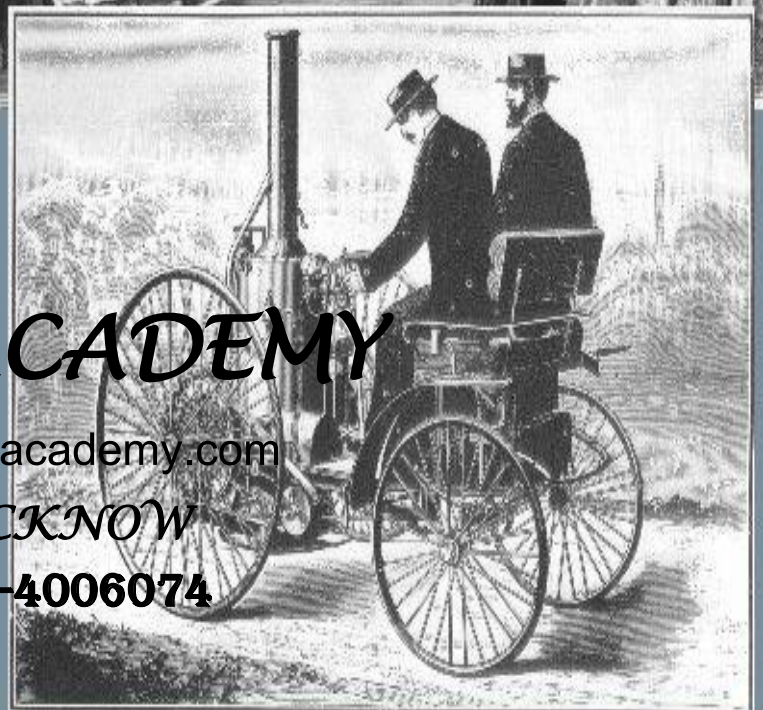


THE VICTORIAN AGE

(1837-1900)
(Authors in Detail)



OSN ACADEMY

www.osnacademy.com

LUCKNOW

0522-4006074

ENGLISH LITERATURE

SUBJECT CODE – 30



📞 9935977317 

☎️ 0522-4006074

CONTENTS

Britain under Queen Victoria
Scientific and Material Progress:-
The Victorian Spirit
Protests Against Victorian Optimism
Anti Victorian literature:-

Major Writers of the Age

Poets

- Elizabeth Barrett Browning (1806-1861)
- Alfred Lord Tennyson (1809-1892)
- Robert Browning (1812-1889)
- Matthew Arnold (1822-1888)
- Algernon Charles Swinburne (1837-1909)
- Rossetti Gabriel Charles Dante (1828-1882)
- Christina Georgina Rossetti (1830-1894)
- Gerald Manley Hopkins (1844-1889)

Novelist

- Benjamin Disraeli (1804-1881)
- Charles Dickens (1812-1871)
- Thomas Hardy (1840-1928)
- Charlotte Bronte (1816-1855)
- Emily Bronte (1818-1848)
- Anne Bronte (1820-1849)
- George Eliot (1819-1880)
- Oscar Wilde (1854-1900)
- Samuel Butler (1835-1902)

Essayists

- Thomas Carlyle (1795-1881)
- Thomas Babington Macaulay (1800-1859)
- John Henry Newman (1801-1890)
- John Ruskin (1819-1900)

THE VICTORIAN AGE (1837-1900)

Victoria, daughter of the duke of Kent, one of the sons of **George III**, succeeded her uncle **William IV** in 1837 when she was a girl of eighteen. She died in 1901 a fabulous old lady, having celebrated her Jubilee in 1887 and her Diamond Jubilee in 1897. These two Jubilees, marking Victoria's fiftieth and sixtieth anniversaries on the throne were celebrated with enormous pomp and ceremony and represented the British Empire at its height.

Britain under Queen Victoria:-

Queen Victoria was extremely popular in the opening years of her reign and during her marriage to the **Prince Consort, Albert of Saxe-Coburg**, a minor German prince. He launched **The Great Exhibition** in 1851. Prince Albert was very earnest, conscientious, and industrious, but perhaps too German in manner and outlook to please all the British of his day. After the early death of her adored Albert, in 1861, Victoria remained in mourning for years and virtually retired from public life. This led to some unpopularity, and several prominent radicals during the next twenty years. But her return to public life, and the great courage of the little old lady (who insisted upon visiting Ireland although there was danger of her assassination by Irish republicans) brought Victoria's reign to a close in a realm of popularity. She was not a clever woman like the great **Elizabeth I** and was limited in her tastes and outlook, but she had character and a great sense of public duty and responsibility, and was perhaps the best possible monarch for nineteenth century Britain.

The saying that "the sun never sets on the British Empire" was not just a flamboyant boast; it was literal truth. Britain, the center of a vast empire which includes Canada, Australia, New Zealand, India, South Africa, and many other parts of Africa and Asia, was in those years the wealthiest, the most industrialized, and the most powerful country in the world. Her military power did not rest on her army, which was much smaller than the armies of France, Germany, and Russia, but on her navy, which was so much stronger than any other that it acted as a kind of police force throughout the world.

Scientific and Material Progress:-

The great wealth and unequalled productiveness of Victorian Britain were due to the fact that she was still ahead of the Industrial Revolution and had a world market for Lancashire cotton goods, Yorkshire woolens, and the metal products of Birmingham and Sheffield. London was the financial capital of the world, the center of banking, insurance, shipping, and so on. Most of the railroads that were being built outside Western Europe and the United States were financed by British capital and organized by British engineers. *The Great Exhibition of 1851* held at the glass and steel Crystal Palace in London was the first great world's fair and represented British commerce and industry at its height.

During these years industrial cities and towns grew like mushrooms and the country was covered by an intricate network of railroads. The steam press made newspapers cheap and easily available. With factories being built everywhere, the number of jobs increasing, and public health finally gaining attention, population figures went leaping upward. Science and invention also progressed. The Victorian age is abundant with the names of great inventors and innovators: from **Michael Faraday** (1791-1867), the blacksmith's son who invented electromagnetic machinery, to **Charles Darwin**, whose exposition of the theory of evolution in *The Origin of Species* (1859) turned the western world into two camps—one scientific, the other religious.

Britain's massive contribution to modern civilization belongs mainly to this Victorian period. This is not surprising. The Victorians were astoundingly self-confident, and with this confidence came tremendous energy. They were ready to sweep aside all obstacles and to undertake anything anywhere, the Victorian was convinced beyond doubt that he was the representative figure of progress and civilization and that wherever he went benefits must follow him. The typical Victorian Englishman and the typical modern American have much in common. There is, however, one important difference. The American, coming from a social democracy with a tradition of friendly neighborliness, expects to be liked wherever he goes in the world and is disappointed when he is not. The Victorian

Englishman, generally a member of a ruling class is cool and reserved in its manner, did not expect to be liked, did not care whether he was or not liked or disliked.

The Victorian Spirit:-

The typical Victorian outlook is well expressed in the essays of **Thomas Babington Macaulay (1800-1859)**, the most popular historian of the mid-Victorian period, and in the verse of **Alfred Lord Tennyson (1809-1892)** and in **Mary Shelley's Frankenstein: The Modern Prometheus** wrote in his official capacity as Victoria's Poet Laureate. Macaulay was a Whig who believed that the "*Glorious Revolution*" of 1688, which created a constitutional monarchy, and the *Reform Bill of 1832*, which increased the number of voters, were the greatest political triumphs of humanity. Macaulay's influence was enormous and, in spite of all the catastrophes of the present century, there are still people who believe more or less that Macaulay was right. This period saw the 'art for art sake' movement by the aesthetes.

The thought expressed in Tennyson's official verse (actually his weakest verse, though it rarely fails in craftsmanship) follows the same pattern as Macaulay's. The world, it implied, with Britain serving as a shining example, is surely, if slowly, getting better and better. In this official verse Tennyson, apparently forcing himself to be almost as insensitively and blindly optimistic as Macaulay, tends to override his own deep worry about the conflict between religion and science. But the real Tennyson, a magnificent poet, breaks through in finer works—those of a belated Romantic. This poetry is steeped in longing and regret and dreamy melancholy, often expressed in lines of the most exquisite and haunting beauty. It is not when he is celebrating Victoria as Queen-Empress or offering Britain's "broadening freedom" as an example to the world that Tennyson is a magical poet. His magical appeal shines through when he is writing about the aging Ulysses or the lotus-eaters or the dark sorrows of Guinevere and Lancelot.

Thomas Hardy

The pessimistic element of Victorian sensibility reached its fullest voice in the work of Thomas Hardy. Hardy's was a timeless pessimism, which did not stem directly from the difficulties of the age. He agreed with Sophocles that "not to have been born is best". Surprisingly, this "last of the great Victorians" lived a long and seemingly happy life. He was trained to be a church architect, but his heart was always in his writing. His last novel was **Jude the Obscure** after which he turned a poet. He was trained to be a church architect, but his heart was always in his writing. Much of his early work was poetry, but he had no success in selling his verse. Gradually he turned to the writing of fiction. He produced novels at a steady rate, almost one a year, and each was a solid improvement over the last. Among his distinguished work are **The Return of the Native, The Mayor of Casterbridge: A Man of character, Far from the madding Crowd, Tess of the d'Urbervilles: A Pure Woman, and Jude the Obscure**. This work continued until 1895, when he returned to his first love, poetry, disregarding the achievement of his fiction.

Major Writers Of The Age:-

The chief Victorian novelists were also social critics and did not hesitate to show much of contemporary society in a very unfavorable light. **Charles Dickens**, the master of the social novelists, is increasingly critical—and indeed almost despairing—as his fiction comes closer and closer to reality. **William Makepeace Thackeray** (1811-1863) launches attack after attack upon the snobbery and bad social values of the time. **George Eliot** (1819-1880), herself a radical, is essentially a social critic. And later, **George Meredith** (1828-1909), in a spirit of sharp mockery, and **Thomas Hardy** (1840-1928), in his slow, brooding, ironic and tragic fashion, turn fiction into an instrument of philosophical social criticism. Even the easy-going **Anthony Trollope** (1815-1882) can show us society, whether parsons or politicians are in the foreground, in terms of unsavory intrigues and power plots. And lesser novelists such as **Charles Reade, Charles Kingsley, and Benjamin Disraeli** almost turn their novels into what we would now call "social propaganda."

The poets reacted against this central complacent Victorianism in another fashion. Tennyson, as we have seen, turned out official verse in the prevailing mood of optimism, but when he was writing to please himself he became a wistful, melancholy Romantic. Robert Browning (1812-1889) and Elizabeth Barrett (1806-1861) Browning did not even live in England, and Browning, though capable of writing very sharply about his own time, preferred on the whole to escape into Renaissance Italy. Algernon Charles Swinburne (1837-1909) in his productive and successful earlier years was an out-and-out rebel who scandalized everybody. **George Meredith and Thomas Hardy**, who condensed into their poetry the interpretations of life that also shaped their fiction, were also alien to most Victorian thought and feeling. **William Morris and Dante Gabriel Rossetti** (1828-1882), a painter and one of the founders of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, were defiant Romantics who paid no tribute to their age.

Like Morris, Rossetti was obviously glad to use his art to escape from his age. Indeed, this was the reason behind his founding of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood in 1849. This association of painters and writers was, in essence, a protest movement, a reaction against the unsettling influences which the Industrial Revolution had had on England socially, economically, and artistically. The Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood consisted originally of seven young painters and sculptors who wished to revive the purity of color, exactness of form, and simplicity of subject that they felt existed in painting before the time of the Italian Renaissance painter Raphael. From the Brotherhood's primary concern with art developed a parallel concern with literature. Although it existed as a closely knit group for only a few years, the influence of the Brotherhood and its short-lived periodical, *The Germ*, was considerable, strengthening the whole protest movement. (There is some irony in the fact that perhaps the best-known Pre-Raphaelite pictures, with their legendary subjects and medieval backgrounds, were bought by wealthy manufacturers in Birmingham and Manchester.) The group was dominated and its influence extended by Rossetti, its most gifted member and strongest personality. In addition to Rossetti and his sister Christina, William Morris, John Ruskin, and Swinburne were each, at one time or another, with the Brotherhood.

Apart from this common protest against Victorian smugness and hypocrisy, the major writers of the age have little in common. We have seen how the eighteenth-century writers, especially during the early years of the century, formed a compact group which shared the same outlook and held the same values. Later, the Romantics, though by no means a compact group, were at least members of the same general literary movement. But now, in the Victorian age, writers do not seem to be moving together in any particular direction. Not only is it impossible to say that there is a Victorian movement, but it is also difficult to agree that there is a definitely Victorian manner or style. The major Victorian writers cannot be criticized as a literary group; they are individualistic almost to the point of eccentricity.

THOMAS CARLYLE (1795-1881)

Carlyle was a gloomy and austere man, perhaps with good reason. As a youngster he struggled against severe poverty, and for most of his life he was plagued by illness difficulties which undoubtedly contributed to his sharp temper and harsh disposition. Carlyle's contemporaries often found his forbidding as a personality, and modern readers may feel the same way about his prose style, which can be characterized as explosive, jagged and restless, marked by fits and starts, but in total effect extremely powerful.

Carlyle's father, a stonemason and farmer with nine children was determined that, despite the family's lack of means, his brilliant son should study for the ministry, young Thomas, then fourteen years old, walked the hundred miles from his home to enroll at Edinburgh University. He read widely, came to know French and German literature, and was strongly influenced in his thinking by the German poet Goethe and the German philosopher **Kant**. From his Calvinist upbringing and his broad reading, Carlyle fashioned his own system of thought, which included beliefs in a cyclical theory of history, in a supernatural force brooding over and commanding the universe, and in personal conduct determined by self denial. A reformer, he was much concerned with the political economic, and social problems of his time and advocated solutions which were denounced as radical.

In London in 1826 Carlyle married Jane Welsh, who reluctantly agreed to live on her isolated farm in the Scottish countryside. There Carlyle finished work on his spiritual autobiography, *Sartor Resartus*, which he had begun some years turned to London and established a home in Cheyne Row, which became a center for the most important literary and intellectual figures of the time. This house has been preserved as a national shrine.

After completing *Sartor Resartus*, Carlyle spent some three years working on his history of the French Revolution, generally considered his most important work. It is not now highly regarded as an impartial and accurate history, but it endures because of the strength of the writing, which powerfully conveys the thought and emotions of that turbulent period. As Carlyle said, this work came flamingly from the heart. It was a great success and encouraged Carlyle to go on to further exposition of history, philosophy and commentary on current problems. In *Heroes and Hero Worship* he developed in detail his idea that history should be seen as a process furthered by the actions of great men who embody divine revelations. His Tory, for Carlyle, is always the essence of innumerable biographies. He amplified this concept in two significant biographies. One on Oliver Cromwell the Puritan dictator, did much to rehabilitate the character and achievements of the lord protector. The other important biography, *the History of Frederick the Great of Prussia*, was Carlyle's last major work. Although it has passages of great power and was considered a masterpiece in its time. It is now largely neglected.

In spite of his gruff and thorny exterior, Carlyle had the power to make warm friends among those who recognized this sincerity and genius. Dickens, Thackeray, Tennyson, and John Stuart Mill greatly admired him, and when Ralph Waldo Emerson first went to Europe, his most earnest desire was to meet Carlyle. They became close friends and their association helped to win for each a reading public and enduring reputation in the other country.

The Fall of the Bastill

The near tragic circumstance connected with Carlyle's writing of The French Revolution is one of the most famous anecdotes in English literature. Carlyle had given the nearly completed manuscript to his friend, the economist and philosopher John Stuart Mill. A servant in Mill's household accidentally used the sheets to start a fire one morning. Carlyle had kept no copy and at first could not recall any of his writing. After spending a week reading novels to calm his mind, he laboriously rewrote the work. When Mill offered Carlyle £ 200 as compensation only £ 100 just to tide him over the period spent rewriting what had been burned.

THOMAS BABINGTON MACAULAY (1800-1859)

Carlyle and Macaulay are often paired as two of the greatest writers of prose in the Victorian Age. They were both men who had made up their minds on many issues of the day. But while Carlyle scolded and exhorted, Macaulay seemed to have such bland confidence that he never needed to raise his voice. Macaulay's assurance followed the almost instantaneous popular success of his writing and the public esteem earned by meritorious service to the realm. His best known sentence is studded with absolute and superlative. We hold that the most wonderful and splendid proof of genius is great poem produced in a civilized age; An acre in Middlesex is better than a principality in Utopia, We know no spectacle so ridiculous as the British public in one of its periodical fits of morality. Even when contradiction his own liking for axiomatic statements he is absolute. Nothing is so useless as a general maxim.

Appropriately enough, Macaulay was a child prodigy. Before he was eight years old he had composed a *compendium of universal history* and a verse romance in the style of Sir Walter Scott. Not long after, the boy finished a great work in blank verse; *Fingal a Poem in Twelve Books*. His public career as a writer began with a sensational success, an essay on John Milton published in 1825 in the *Edinburgh Review*. He continued to write for the *Review* and remained for many years the bulwark of that journal's popularity. On the strength of his essay on Milton, Macaulay was lionized by society. In 1830 he entered Parliament, where he spoke brilliantly in behalf of the Reform bill to extend suffrage and where he championed the cause of Negro slaves in the British colonies. A few years later, Macaulay was appointed to the council which administered British rule in India, and he served in that country for four years. He did much to liberalize British authority in India, to draft the Indian penal code, and to inaugurate a national education system.

On returning to England he again entered Parliament and was given a seat in the cabinet. In 1843 he published the *Lays of Ancient Rome*, among them the famous "Horatius," which remained a staple of schoolroom verse well into the twentieth century. A book of Macaulay's essays followed in 1843 and he gradually began to leave his active public involvements to concentrate on his writing, most notably the *History of England*.

Macaulay had planned his great history to cover the century and a half from the accession of James II (1685) to his own time. But his meticulous research and careful composition, and his occasional ventures into public affairs prevented his completing the project. In fifteen years of work he managed to recount little more than fifteen years of history. Despite its incompleteness, however, the *History* was a tremendous best seller. It was widely translated and brought the author more than \$150,000 in royalties, but twice the amount was lost to him by the inadequate copyright laws of the day, which prevented his receiving royalties from sales in America. Macaulay's enormous success can be attributed in part to his intimate knowledge of his audience, the steadily advancing middle class. They both believed that they were living in the best of all possible worlds, and that the history of their country was eminently the history of physical, moral, and of intellectual improvement.

In August 1857 the great historian and public servant was raised to the nobility and titled Baron Macaulay of Rothely. Two years later he died and was buried with many honors in Westminster Abbey.

JOHN HENRY NEWMAN (1801-1860)

In an age in which religious faith often seemed to be at odds with scientific learning, John Henry Newman was one of the many Victorians who experienced a religious crisis. In his case the crisis was largely personal as well as spiritual, but because of Newman's influence as a religious leader, his personal views shook the entire nation.

Newman was born into a well-to-do Anglican family. His spiritual nature was evident at an early age. When he was fifteen years old he underwent an inward conversion, believing that he had been elected to eternal glory. The effects of this conversion lasted throughout his life. It has an authenticity that overshadowed the real world as he later wrote in his autobiography; I still and more certain (of it) than that I have hands and feet. Newman proceeded along the set path of Anglican education, chiefly at Oxford University, and became a teacher and clergyman. When a difference of

opinion with a superior led to his resignation from his first important post, he went on a tour of the Mediterranean to consolidate his view. During this tour he wrote the famous hymn known as Lead Kindly Light. He was still strongly protestant in his thinking but uncertainties were stirring below the surface. Toward the end of his trip he fell ill of a fever in Sicily. As he related many years after ward "I sat down on my bed and began to sob bitterly. My servant, who had acted as my nurse, asked what ailed me. I could only answer, I have a work to do in England.

Newman shortly became a priest, and his natural ability led him to important posts within the Roman Catholic Church. One of these was as rector of a newly established Catholic university in Dublin. Although his success in this position was limited by local opposition he thought deeply about the educational process. The result of his thinking were embodied in a series of lectures, later published as *The Idea of a University*, from which the following selections are taken.

Because of his conversion, Newman labored under a cloud and gradually fell into obscurity as far as the mass of Englishmen was concerned. This obscurity might have continued had not an Anglican churchman published slur on Newman's truthfulness. Newman seized the opportunity to explain his life and action and began to publish an autobiography *Apologia pro vita sua (A Defense of His Life)* which brought him much acclaim from all factions. It not only succeeded in turning the tide of adverse public opinion, but assured him a permanent position in the ranks of outstanding English writers. More than a valuable religious memoir the Apologia is one of the great revelations of one man's intellectual development.

John Henry Newman typified the personal earnestness of the Victorians. He found his answers through much soul searching and marked break with his own past a break that he believed was a reunion with the mainstream of religious history. Late in life new man was created a cardinal of the Roman Catholic Church. Since then the respect accorded him as a catholic intellectual has remained firm.

ALFRED LORD TENNYSON (1809-1892)

The modern poet T.S Eliot has said, Tennyson is a great poet for reasons that are perfectly clear. He has three qualities which are seldom found together except in the greatest poets: abundance variety, and complete competence. The six large volumes of his Collected Works testify to Tennyson's abundance, as does the fact that he continued to produce distinguished poetry for more than fifty years. His variety is evident in the diversity of both his poetic forms and his subject. He wrote lyrics, dramatic monologues, plays long narrative poems elegies, and allegories. He treated subjects drawn from classical myth and Arthurian legend from the history of the English Renaissance and from the life of his own times he wrote poems about politics war science religion and immortality. His complete competence is suggested by his mastery of many different kinds of meter and by the compelling music of much of his poetry. Tennyson once remarked that he knew the metrical weight of every English word except scissors. His skill in manipulating sounds in his poetry bears out his remark.

Although Tennyson fully felt the pull toward the subjective life, toward solitude and dreams, he also wanted to cast off his melancholy and irresolution and through rigorous discipline of his emotions, achieve a life of significant action for social good. Again and again the poetry of Tennyson moves from a dreamlike longing to an assertion of responsibility and self control. If we knew only the nostalgic side of Tennyson he might well seem like a caricature of the popular idea of a Romantic poet- always swooning in the moonlight. If we knew only the assertive, dutiful side, he might seem merely stuffy and self righteous. But the two sides of Tennyson exist together. Out of their conflict Tennyson created a poetry that depicts the struggle every man must undergo to reconcile the claims of his private and public self.

The fourth of twelve children Alfred Tennyson was born in the Lincolnshire village of Somersby, where his father was rector. As a boy, Tennyson had considerable liberty to browse among books, produce amateur theatricals, and above all take long walks at night time and roam among the large fields, gray hillsides, and noble towered churches of the Lincolnshire countryside. Tennyson's early love of the natural world endured throughout his life, and his skill in describing nature became one of his chief attractions for Victorian readers. Most of Tennyson's education took place at home under the supervision of his father, and by the age of fifteen he was already familiar with much of English and classical literature.

Tennyson and several of his brothers and sister wrote verse while they were still children . in 1827 Tennyson and his brother Charles published anonymously *Poems by Two brothers*. Written mostly in imitation of Byron and Sir Walter Scott, these poems were received with mild praise. A year later both brothers went to Trinity College, Cambridge where Tennyson, rebelling particularly against having to study mathematics, gained little from formal academic instruction, his real education began when he was invited to join "The Apostles, a debating club devoted to problems of religion and political liberty. Tennyson formed the most intense emotional relationship of his life in his friendship with a college friend, **Arthur Henry Hallam**, who Tennyson later said was as near perfection as a mortal man could be. Himself awkward, rustic and shy, Tennyson was overwhelmed by Hallam's gaiety charm, and urbanity. In 1830 the two traveled together to the Continent to deliver money to Portuguese revolutionists, and Hallam became engaged to Tennyson's sister Emily. In the same year Tennyson published his *Poems, Chiefly Lyrical*, which reflects the Apostles idea that the poet should be a sage and prophet. His Cambridge friends were delighted, but the critical reception was not enthusiastic.

When he left Cambridge in 1831 without taking a degree, there began a dark period in Tennyson's life that was to last for more than a decade. After his father's death, he had to take on the burden of family affairs. Although his poems of 1832 included such fine works as "**The Lady of Shallot**" and "**The Lotus eaters**", the reviews were so violently abusive that he did not publish again for ten years. In 1833 he was shattered by the news of Hallam's sudden death in Vienna. Three years later, he became engaged to Emily Sellwood, but was too poor to marry her until fourteen years had elapsed. The Tennyson of these years was a man solitary and sad, carrying a bit of chaos about

him. In 1842 he lost all his money through speculation collapsed, and was for several months under the care of a physician.

But 1842 was also a turning point in Tennyson's life. That year his two volume Poems was published, and his popularity began to rise. In 1845 he was given a government pension, and two years later he published his long narrative poem *The Princess*, which contains some of his most memorable lyrics. The year 1850 was a decisive point in Tennyson's life he was made poet laureate, married Emily Sellwood and published his greatest work. *In Memoriam* a long elegy on the death of his friend Hallam. For the next forty two years he was without question the leading poet of his time popular with ordinary readers and highly respected in literary circles. He worked steadily at his art, producing a series of closet dramas, many fine short lyrics, and the elaborate narratives of King Arthur's Round Table that make up **Idylls of the King**. The crowning honor of his life came in 1883, when he was made a peer. Even as an old man he was a striking figure- a great black shaggy man- who looked the part of a poet.

The Lady of Shalott

In his boyhood Tennyson was fascinated by the stories of King Arthur's knights, and it was natural for him to turn to them later as subjects for poetry. The twelve metrical tales included in *Idylls of the King* were composed over a period of twenty six years (1859-85). But long before that time, in 1832 the poet had written this legend of the Lady of Shalott.

Ulysses

In this poem Tennyson draws his subject from ancient Greek sources. Ulysses, the famous hero of many adventures in the *Odyssey*. Is pictured years after the time described in that epic. To Tennyson's generation this poem symbolized the constant striving onward and upward of civilized man. It is said that Ulysses was the deciding factor in the government decision to give Tennyson a pension.

ROBERT BROWNING (1812-1889)

In his own time, as modern critic says of Browning, "his poetry and presence had become the very symbols of heartiness, courage, and faith" Today he is sometimes criticized for being a shallow optimist, a poet who refused to face up to the presence of evil and misery in the world. If optimism is accepted as a major characteristic of Browning poetry, then the world optimism must be given a deeper meaning than usual. As often as not, Browning's poems end with collapse of the will, defeat of good by evil forces, or the sweeping away of everything, good and bad, by death. Fascinated by abnormal states of mind, even by madness Browning did not always look on the bright side of things.

But it optimism can be seen as something more profound than the mere refusal to face evil, then this word can help to define Browning fundamental way of meeting experience. Browning approaches even the most grotesque characters and the most obscure regions of the mind with a confident openness. Assured of his own strong sanity and his powers of assimilating experience, Browning takes an athletic delight in grappling with the dark forces of human nature, not to destroy them, but to reveal them. He relishes even the failures, misfits, villains, and madmen who appear in this poem, because they exhibit the infinite variety of human experience. Everything in his poetry takes on a touch of vitality and splendor- even weeds and rocks and snails. If optimism can be taken to mean confidence in one own powers and delight in the variety and energy of the world, then Browning is an optimist. Much of his power as poet comes from his ability to submerge himself imaginatively in psychological darkness and then represent what he had discovered there in firmly controlled and coherent works of art.

As a living influence on poetry, Browning is more important today for his contribution to the language. And craft of poetry than for his message. He was endlessly resourceful in the invention of new stanza patterns and in creating novel material combinations. He brought poetic language back into touch with the toughness, vigor, and has concreteness of speech, and showed anew the poetic use

of harsh, rough sounds and rhythms. His development of the dramatic life without giving up the immediacy and concreteness of dramatic form. And finally he brought back into English poetry something of the compression of thought, the pleasure in contradiction and sudden shifts that John Donne had introduced two centuries earlier.

Robert Browning was born in Camberwell, as comfortable, semirural suburb only three miles from central London and a half hour's green walk from Dulwich and its then famous art gallery, where he first encountered the Renaissance Italian paintings that were to become one of his lifelong enthusiasms.

Browning began his literary career early: he wrote and deposited under a sofa cushion his first poem "when I could not have been five years old. At twenty one, he published his first volume, *Pauline*, a thinly veiled autobiographical poem in which he unwittingly revealed himself as an arrogant and self-absorbed adolescent. The severe, accurate criticism that the philosopher John Stuart Mill leveled at the poem is thought to have pushed Browning toward the dramatic monologue and away from poems of self-revelation. During early manhood, Browning lived the life of a young literary man about town, moving in literary and theatrical circles and composing plays and poems. Between 1841 and 1846 he produced the remarkable series of poetic pamphlets *Bells and Pomegranates* (including the much anthologized **Pippa Passes**) but he had to wait for general recognition until 1868, when **The Ring and the Book** securely established him alongside Tennyson as the leading poet of the Victorian age.

When in January of 1845 Browning wrote an enthusiastic letter of appreciation to Elizabeth after reading her *Poems* he took the first step in the most famous of literary romances. Six years older than Browning and considerably more famous than he, Elizabeth Barrett was an invalid who lived in prisonlike seclusion under the domination of a maniacally patriarchal father. After much negotiating by letter, Browning finally met Elizabeth Barrett in May 1845. For the next sixteen months Browning courted Elizabeth Barrett with flowers, visits, and, above all, letters. Convinced that she was a dying woman and that her father would never sweep aside objection after objection and finally in the autumn of 1846 they were secretly married and eloped to Italy.

For the next sixteen years the Brownings lived in Italy, mostly in Florence, writing, reading, studying pictures, entertaining visiting Englishmen and Americans, and championing the cause of Italian independence. They were almost ideally happy. Browning accepted without bitterness the fact that his wife's *Aurora Leigh* went through edition after edition while his own *Men and Women* was coldly received excepted by a few scattered young men mostly in the universities. This sunny period in Browning's life ended with the death of his wife in June 1861 soon after which he returned to London. There he set to work producing *Dramatis Personae* and his dinner jacket. Browning Societies were organized throughout England to praise the poet and to explain his more obscure works. Despite occasional literary squabbles Browning's later life was full of satisfaction—fame, money, friendship and the sense of an achieved career. He even had the pleasure of seeing a final collected edition of his work in sixteen volumes before he died at the age of seventy-two.

My Last Duchess

This poem is perhaps the most popular of Browning's dramatic monologues. The scene is in the castle of the Duke of Ferrara, an arrogant Italian nobleman of the Renaissance period. The duke is showing a painting of his first wife to an envoy who has been sent to arrange details of a second marriage.

SAMPLE QUESTIONS

1. "Art for arts sake" became a rallying cry for
(A) The Aesthetes (B) The Symbolists
(C) The imagists (D) The Art Nouveau School
Ans. A
(June 2012, Paper-II)
2. The period of Queen Victoria's reign is
(A) 1830 – 1900 (B) 1837 – 1901 (C) 1930 – 1901 (D) 1837 – 1900
Ans. D
(Dec. 2012, Paper-II)
3. Thomas Hardy's last major novel was
(a) Tess of the D'urbervilles (b) Jude the Obscure
(c) The Return of the Native (d) The Trumpet Major
Ans. B
(Dec. 2014, Paper-II)
4. Identify the novel with the wrong subtitle listed below:
(A) Middlemarch, a Study of Provincial life
(B) Tess of the D'Urbervilles, A Pure Woman
(C) The Mayor of Casterbridge, A Man of Character
(D) Felix Holt, the Socialist
Ans. D
(June 2012, Paper-III)
5. What alternative title to her Frankenstein did Marry Shelley give?
(A) A Gothic Tale (B) A Gothic Romance
(C) The Modern Prometheus (D) A Modern Parable
Ans. C
(Dec. 2012, Paper-III)