



*The Young Queen Victoria*

## The Victorian Age

A very large number of poets and novelists produced their best work between 1837 and 1902 – the “Victorian Age” – the years when Victoria was the Queen (and Empress) of Great Britain and its Empire.

This was an age when the world, society and literature underwent major changes.



*The Old Queen Victoria*

### The adjective “Victorian” has come to mean

- Improved standards of morality and decency
- Self-satisfaction because of the huge increase in Britain’s wealth
- The prosperity of the nation as a whole
- The immense industrial and scientific development
- An attitude of proper behaviour (and a lack of humour)
- An unquestioning acceptance of authority and “proper” behaviour

This wide range of sixty years saw many changes in Society. These changes were reflected in the literature of the age as poets and novelists dealt with the splendours, miseries and morality of a rapidly changing world.

### The Poets of the Victorian Age

The most important of the poets writing during the Victorian Age added more complexity to the ideas and style they inherited from the Romantics. Yes, there was still beauty in nature that could arouse great lyrical feelings, but this was a changing world where cities and industries were growing, and religious certainties were being tested. The Victorian Poets recognised these changes and dealt with them as best they could

**Alfred, Lord Tennyson**  
**Elizabeth Barrett Browning**  
**Robert Browning**  
**Christina Rossetti**  
**Gerard Manley Hopkins**

And, on the fringe, Edward Fitzgerald.

## The Novelists of the Victorian Age

The greatest literary achievements of the 19th Century were provided by a number of outstanding novelists including

**The Brontës**  
**Charles Dickens**  
**William Makepeace Thackeray**  
**George Eliot**  
**Thomas Hardy**  
**Henry James**  
**Joseph Conrad**

The last named, Henry James and Joseph Conrad, are “cross-over” novelists, writing partly in the 19th and partly in the early 20th Century. In terms of subject and general feeling Henry James is best considered as a novelist of the Victoria Age, while Joseph Conrad more properly belongs in the 20th Century.

## The Main Themes and Subjects of Victorian Literature

### The role of women in Society:

In Victorian England women are not treated as equal to men. They have to struggle for their independence. The women novelists frequently address these themes.

- In Emily Brontë’s “Wuthering Heights “ (1847) Cathy chooses a loveless marriage because of society’s attitude to women.
- In Charlotte Brontë’s “Jane Eyre” (1847) , Jane Eyre struggles to be treated as equal to Mr Rochester.
- George Eliot’s Maggie in “Mill on the Floss” (1860) is an independent, high-spirited young woman who does not fit in with the community around her.

However, the male novelists see things differently. In Dickens’ novels women are sometimes treated as objects to be adored, worshipped and protected.

- In “Nicholas Nickleby” (1839) both Madeline Bray and Nicholas’s sister, Kate, need to be “rescued” from men who treat them badly.
- In “David Copperfield” (1848) women are pretty and empty-headed – David marries Dora Spenlow because she seems to be the ideal wife – and later, when Dora dies, he marries Agnes Spenlow, who is especially kind and high-minded.
- William Makepeace Thackeray in “Vanity Fair” (1848) has two excellent examples of womankind: Amelia - pure, sweet and innocent – and Becky Sharpe – clever, scheming and independent.

### Social Conscience and Reform:

A major theme of early Victorian literature is social inequality and injustice. The richer people must help the poor. Corruption must be stamped out. The major force was Charles Dickens. His novels included “Oliver Twist” (1838) about crime and ill-treatment of young boys; “Bleak House” (1852) about the need to reform the law, and “Hard Times” (1854), about the pursuit of money and industry above all else.

### The need to find spiritual peace in an industrial world:

In 1850, after his death, Wordsworth’s “Prelude” was published. Poets and philosophers of the Victorian age could see the beauties of Nature, the spiritual side of life threatened by industry and greed. Wordsworth said people should find inner peace in Nature.

In 1859 the poet **Edward Fitzgerald** translated an old Eastern poem by the Persian poet, Omar Khayyam, into English under the title “The Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam”(\*).

(\* *The word “Rubaiyat” was an Arab word meaning a special kind of verse form*).

This poem suggested ancient Middle-Eastern philosophies of calm and peace and tranquillity were needed in a world of hurry and industry. The poem was very successful and influential. The Persian poet suggested that all one needed to achieve perfect happiness in life was

Here with a loaf of bread beneath the bough  
A flask of wine, a book of verse , and Thou  
Beside me singing in the Wilderness.  
And Wilderness is Paradise enow! (\*)

(\* “enow” = “enough”)

and a number of people agreed that things were changing too quickly in Victorian England. The rush to make money and to achieve scientific progress was causing people to lose the simple, basic and important things in life—things like reading poetry beneath a tree, listening to music and enjoying a glass of wine. The need to balance the demands of modern life with spiritual and religious peace was a theme much considered by the Victorian poets



*An illustration from “The Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam”*

### **The increasing movement from countryside to town**

The second half of the Victorian Age saw rapid industrialisation, the development of the railways, and ever-growing towns and cities. This caused the movement of large numbers of country people into the towns, looking for work.

### **The changing world of class distinctions:**

Tess in “Tess of the D’Urbervilles” (1891) represents the changing role of farm-workers in England in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. Tess herself does not fit into the “old” folk culture of the earlier generation, but poverty stops her from moving to a higher position in life. She is “in-between”, both socially and culturally.

### **The changing world of religious attitudes:**

19<sup>th</sup> Century England had to face a clash between orthodox Christian faith and writers like Charles Darwin and “The Origin of Species”. Darwin claimed man was descended from the apes. Orthodox religion said God created Man as a special case.

This clash can be seen in the character of Angel Clare in Hardy’s “Tess of the D’Urbervilles”. He fights against the older religious ideas of his parents and follows the more modern ideas. On the other hand, the novels of George Eliot were deeply religious. She believed that people suffered hardship in their lives as a preparation, a kind of “purification”, so that at their death they would get to Heaven. In “Middlemarch” (1872), in the character of Mr Bulstrode, she is very critical of religious hypocrisy.

If organized religion no longer gave all the answers, then how could man be certain about the difference between Good and Evil? Robert Louis Stevenson’s “Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde” explored the contrast between Good and Evil in one man.



*The areas marked in red were all part of the British Empire  
—an Empire on which “the sun never set”*

Much of 19th century poetry concerned itself with religion, with uncertain faith, with a search for inner peace and with reconciling God and Man in the modern world.

### **The theme of Empire and civilization:**

By the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century the British had so many colonies under its control that it was said: “the sun never sets on the British Empire”. This was an exciting world with new lands to explore.

It was also an age of complacency and pride. The British Empire was the greatest since Roman times: some of it

had been won in battle, but most of it has been gained at the request of the various countries seeking the protection of the all-powerful British army and, especially, its Navy.

However, being responsible for the lives of foreign people brought with it a sense of moral duty. It was the duty of every Briton working abroad in the Colonies, in the Dominions and in the far-flung outposts of the Empire to bring British values and British standards to the lives of these people.

**Joseph Conrad** was one of the first novelists to suggest that Europeans controlling the lives of other nations was a bad thing. In “The Heart of Darkness” (1902) he shows that Europeans having power over African nations raises questions of morality and corruption. Absolute power could lead to cruelty, and to men behaving in a way that is not human and civilized. (However, the British believed this did not happen in the lands controlled by the British themselves. It was the smaller nations - France, Belgium, Holland - and their smaller colonies where this kind of thing happened. !)

At the very end of the Victorian Age the writer, **Henry James** (American by birth, but British by adoption) was able to find some hope in the future. In “The Ambassadors” (1903) he was able to see some civilisation and dignity in the European way of life. He felt that America’s pursuit of money, business and success was bad for Society, and the European was more relaxed, generous and gracious.

### **Conclusion:**

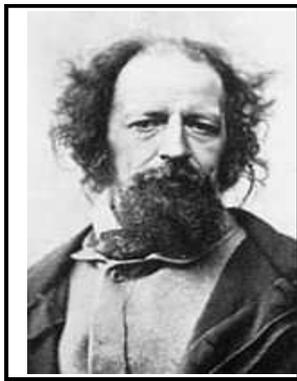
Over the sixty years of Queen Victoria’s reign Literature had changed. Society had changed. The world had changed. The role of women, the treatment of the poor, the search for inner peace, the role of the Church, and the growth of Empire and social responsibility had all been major themes of Victorian writers.

When Queen Victoria died in 1902, after a reign of 65 years, everyone recognised it was the end of an era. Everyone believed they could confidently look forward to a better, fairer and more civilised future.

(Sadly, just twelve years later, a World War would end all these hopes, but no one could have guessed that at the time.)

## THE POST ROMANTIC POETS

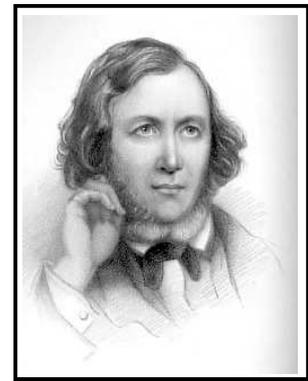
The great outpouring of Romantic poetry had mostly finished by the 1830s—chiefly due to the early deaths of the main contributors. The poets that followed had their own individual styles: Tennyson was highly lyrical, making extensive use of classical and medieval legends; Browning created dramatic portraits and monologues; his wife, Elizabeth Barrett at the time was acclaimed as the finest woman poet in English Literature; Christina Rossetti was much loved for her devout and religious poetry. The most complex poet was Gerard Manley Hopkins, who created a new style called “sprung rhythm” - but his work not published in his lifetime and did not make its impact until many years later.



**Alfred, Lord Tennyson**  
1809 –1892



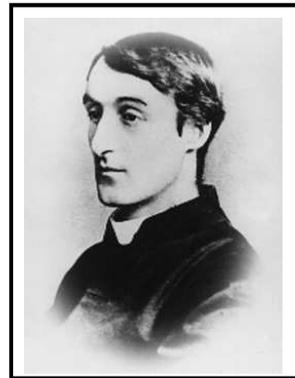
**Elizabeth Barrett Browning**  
1806-1861



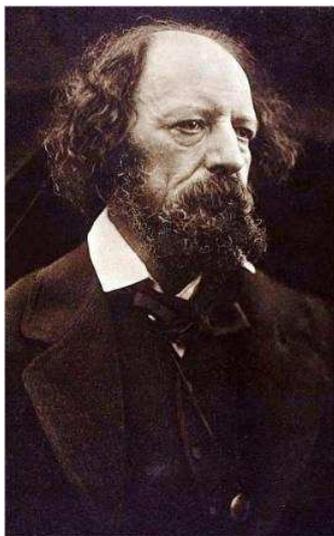
**Robert Browning**  
1812-1889



**Christina Rossetti**  
1830-1894



**Gerard Manley Hopkins**  
1844-1889



## ALFRED, LORD TENNYSON (1809-1892)

Alfred Tennyson, was the most important poet of the Victorian era and one of the most original, musical and finest lyric poets in the English language. He was a great favourite of Queen Victoria herself, and she honoured him with various titles, including making him a “Lord”.

Tennyson was the son of a clergyman and by the time he was 15 he was writing verse plays and poetry in the style of Lord Byron. He went to Cambridge University and his first poems were published while he was still a student. At University he became very friendly with a fellow-student, Arthur Hallam. This friendship continued after their University days, and Hallam eventually became engaged to marry Tennyson’s sister.

Shortly before the marriage Arthur Hallam suddenly died of a cerebral haemorrhage. Tennyson became deeply depressed and for the next ten years published very little, though he continued to write. In 1842 he published a two-volume collection of poems including “Morte d’Arthur” and “Ulysses”, and overnight he became the most popular poet of the day. In 1850 he published “In Memoriam A.H.H.” a tribute to the memory of Arthur Hallam. His later works included a collection called “Maud” and then in later years he devoted himself to writing his epic “Idylls of the King” based on the legends of King Arthur.

Like many Victorian poets, he illustrates the spirit of the age in his feeling for order and his tendency to moralizing and to self-indulgent melancholy. He also reveals a concern with the conflict between religion and science. Like many writers whose publications cover a large number of years, he can occasionally be pompous or banal, but his works mostly contain a magnificent lyricism and technical mastery.

### Major Publications:

1830	Poems, Chiefly Lyrical
1832	Poems
1842	Poems (2 volumes)
1850	In Memoriam A.H.H.
1855	Maud
1859-85	Idylls of the King

### Subject matter and Lyrical Style:

Tennyson’s poems cover a wide range of subject matter, from medieval legends to classical myths and from domestic situations to observations of nature. The influence of John Keats and the Romantics can be seen in his early poetry but he developed a great lyrical style of his own, and was a craftsman who polished and revised his manuscripts extensively. Few poets have displayed such a masterful use of rhythm and metre. Many of the phrases in his poems have become commonplaces in the English Language, and next to the Bible and Shakespeare, he is the most quoted writer in everyday English speech.

### Some of his best-loved poems

are still learnt and recited in schools today, and most people can quote some of his lines even though they may not know who wrote them. Examples of this are:

#### **"Break, Break, Break"** (*from the 1842 Poems*)

The poem is an elegy describing Tennyson's feelings of loss after the death of Arthur Hallam. The poet describes a feeling of loss throughout the world, but, by looking at the sea, finds there is some life within that loss. The sea represents something greater beyond the cycle of life and death .

Break, Break, Break  
 On thy cold, gray stones, O Sea!  
 And I would that my tongue could utter  
 The thoughts that arise in me.

.....

**In Memoriam A.H.H** (*published 1850*)

Written over a period of 17 years, its meditation on the search for hope after great loss deals with many of the important and deeply-felt concerns of Victorian society. It contains some of Tennyson's most accomplished lyrical work, and is widely considered to be one of the great poems of the 19th century. Its most famous lines have become the equivalent of an English proverb:

This truth came borne with bier and pall, (\*)  
 I felt it when I sorrowed most,  
 'Tis better to have loved and lost  
 Than never to have loved at all

.....

(\* "bier" is a portable frame on which a dead body is placed and then carried to the grave. [Not to be confused with the other "beer", which needs no definition!] A "pall" is a cloak used to cover the dead body.)

**The splendour falls on castle walls** (*from "The Princess, 1847*)

The splendour falls on castle walls  
 And snowy summits old in story:  
 The long light shakes across the lakes,  
 And the wild cataract leaps in glory.  
 Blow, bugle, blow, set the wild echoes flying,  
 Blow, bugle; answer, echoes, dying, dying, dying

.....

**The Charge of the Light Brigade** (*Published in "The Examiner" in 1855*)

This was written after a disastrous military decision in the Crimean War when 600 British cavalrymen were ordered to attack the Russians in circumstances that were clearly suicidal. 600 men charged into the valley but afterwards just over 200 survived unharmed. The reckless bravery caused the French Marshal, Pierre Bosquet, to state "C'est magnifique, mais ce n'est pas la guerre." ("It is magnificent, but it is not war.")

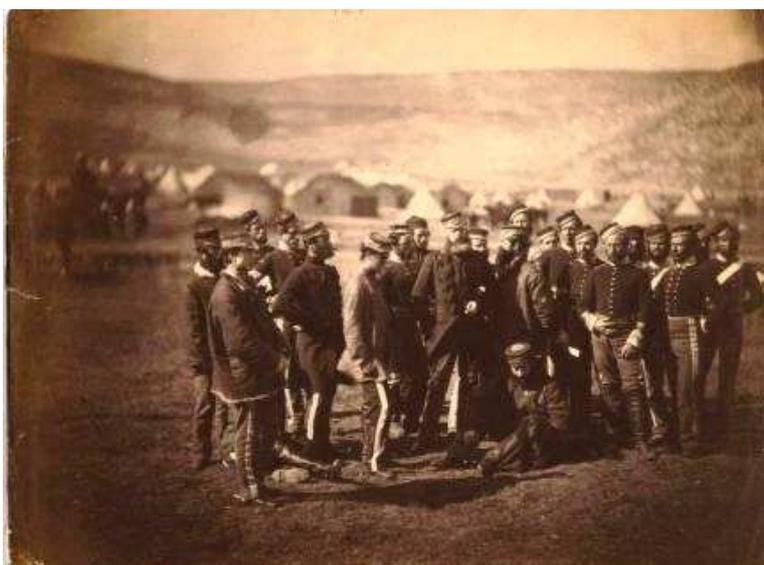
Half a league, half a league,  
 Half a league onward,  
 All in the valley of Death  
 Rode the six hundred

.....

Their's not to make reply,  
 Their's not to reason why,  
 Their's but to do and die:  
 Into the valley of Death  
 Rode the six hundred.

.....

Cannon to right of them,  
 Cannon to left of them,  
 Cannon in front of them  
 Volleyed and thundered;  
 Stormed at with shot and shell,  
 Boldly they rode, and well,  
 Into the jaws of Death,  
 Into the mouth of Hell  
 Rode the six hundred.



The surviving officers and men of the Light Brigade.  
 Photographed by Roger Fenton

## ELIZABETH BARRETT BROWNING 1806-1861



In the middle of the 19th Century Elizabeth Barrett was acclaimed as the best woman poet in England. Nowadays she is best remembered for her love poems inspired by her husband, Robert Browning.

She was the eldest of 12 children and her father was a wealthy British owner of estates in Jamaica. He encouraged her writing and even privately published some of her work when she was just 14, but he was an extremely possessive and difficult man and eventually quarrelled with all his children.

When she was 15 tuberculosis damaged her spine and she spent much of her life as an invalid. She carried on writing and by the time she was 32 she was a very successful and popular poet. She received a letter from fellow-poet, Robert Browning, saying how much he admired her poetry and asked if he could meet her.

They met and fell in love. Against her father's wishes they secretly married and ran away to Italy. There they had a son and lived happily for her last 15 years. Her famous "Sonnets from the Portuguese" - 44 poems about her love for Robert Browning—appeared in 1850. These poems used rhyme schemes stylistically similar to the Portuguese poet Luis de Camões, but they were also a private joke, since Robert's pet nickname for his wife was "Portuguese".

Her verse-novel, "Aurora Leigh" (1856) was enormously successful, and was the autobiographical story of a woman writer making her way in life, balancing her work and love. An American critic described her poetry as the work of "a woman of great learning, rich experience, and powerful genius, uniting to her woman's nature the strength which is sometimes thought peculiar to a man".

Robert Browning published her "Last Poems" the year after she died.

### Main works:

- 1850 Sonnets from the Portuguese
- 1856 Aurora Leigh
- 1862 Last Poems

Her most famous poem is No 43 of the "Sonnets from the Portuguese" (It has become almost traditional for this poem to be read at most weddings in the UK)

### How do I love thee? Let me count the ways

How do I love thee? Let me count the ways.  
 I love thee to the depth and breadth and height  
 My soul can reach, when feeling out of sight  
 For the ends of Being and ideal Grace.  
 I love thee to the level of everyday's  
 Most quiet need, by sun and candlelight.  
 I love thee freely, as men strive for Right;  
 I love thee purely, as they turn from Praise.  
 I love thee with the passion put to use  
 In my old griefs, and with my childhood's faith.  
 I love thee with a love I seemed to lose  
 With my lost saints,—I love thee with the breath,  
 Smiles, tears, of all my life!—and, if God choose,  
 I shall but love thee better after death.



## ROBERT BROWNING 1812-1889

Robert Browning was one of the great late-Victorian poets. His family was wealthy, so Browning had no need to work for a living and he spent much of his youth in his father's huge library. As a result, Browning became one of the most learned, intellectual and best-educated of all Victorian writers. He often wrote about obscure people, places and cultures and crammed his meaning into so few words that many readers could not grasp what he meant.

There is an often told story describing how one of his admirers wrote to Browning asking him what exactly was meant by a passage in one of his darker poems. Browning is said to have replied: "When that poem was written, two people knew what it meant : God and Robert Browning. And now, God only knows what it means."

In his best poems, people from the historical past reveal their thoughts and loves as if they are speaking or thinking aloud. A typical Browning poem tells of a key moment in the life of a prince, or a priest, or painter of the Italian Renaissance, and Browning himself will show how he dislikes anyone who wastes his life instead of working hard to achieve something. Browning believed that even people who failed would find happiness in Heaven as long as they had tried their best.

He wrote many plays and long story-poems such as the "Pied Piper of Hamelin", but his speech-like poems and monologues, especially "The Ring and the Book" (1868-9) made him famous. He was over 50 before he became better known than his wife, Elizabeth Barrett Browning. Their secret wedding and elopement to Italy is a famous love-story. After she died Browning returned to live in England and eventually his fame outgrew hers.

### Major works

1842	Dramatic Lyrics
1845	Dramatic Romances and Lyrics
1855	Men and Women
1864	Dramatis Personae
1868-9	The Ring and the Book

### Dramatic Lyrics (1842)

This was a collection of 16 poems, privately published and containing the first appearance of some of his best known pieces, including "My Last Duchess" and "The Pied Piper of Hamelin"

#### My Last Duchess

The poem is a dramatic monologue set in the Italian Renaissance. The Duke of Ferrara is giving a visitor a tour of the artworks in his home. He draws a curtain to reveal a painting of his deadtake wife, "My last Duchess". In the portrait she is happy and smiling and he now keeps her painting hidden behind a curtain so that only he can see it, and she smiles only for him.

#### The Pied Piper of Hamelin

Browning's poem has become the best known version of the Pied Piper legend: the town of Hamelin is over-run with rats and the citizens hire a rat-catcher to charm the rats away with his magic pipe. He does so, but the citizens then refuse to pay him, so he gets his revenge by turning his magic on all the children of the town . He leads them away just as he did with the rats. Browning's version is notable for its humour, its wordplay and its jingling rhymes:



Rats! They fought the dogs and killed the cats,  
 And bit the babies in the cradles,  
 And ate the cheeses out of the vats,  
 And licked the soup from the cooks' own ladles,  
 Split open the kegs of salted sprats, (\*)  
 Made nests inside men's Sunday hats,  
 And even spoiled the women's chats,  
 By drowning their speaking  
 With shrieking and squeaking  
 In fifty different sharps and flats. (\*)

(from "The Pied Piper of Hamelin")

(\* - "salted sprats" are small fish, herrings. "Sharps and flats" are musical notes. On a piano, the white notes are "flats" and the black notes are "sharps")

### Dramatic Romances and Lyrics (1845)

This was a collection of 25 poems, also self-published. Its most enduring poem is "Home Thoughts from Abroad" which contains the lines:

Oh, to be in England  
 Now that April's there,  
 And whoever wakes in England  
 Sees, some morning, unaware,  
 That the lowest boughs and the brushwood sheaf  
 Round the elm-tree bole are in tiny leaf, (\*)  
 While the chaffinch sings on the orchard bough (\*)  
 In England—now!

(from "Home Thoughts from Abroad")

(\* "bole" is the trunk or stem of a tree. "Bough" is the branch of a tree, and is pronounced "bow" - to rhyme with "cow" - one of those strange English words that drive students mad!)

### Men and Women (1855)

Browning's "Men and Women" consists of fifty-one poems, all of which are monologues spoken by different people. Some of these people are named, and some are not. The first fifty cover a very wide range of historical, religious or European situations, while the last poem, "One Word More", is the voice of Robert Browning himself, and is dedicated to his wife. This collection of poems has been described as one of Victorian England's most significant publications and one of the all-time great poetry achievements.

Among the many brilliant monologues is "A Grammarian's Funeral" which clearly states Browning's belief that even failures can find happiness as long as they have tried their best. The famous lines from this poem say:

That low man seeks a little thing to do,  
 Sees it and does it:  
 This high man, with a great thing to pursue,  
 Dies ere (\*) he knows it.  
 That low man goes on adding nine to one,  
 His hundred's soon hit:  
 This high man, aiming at a million,  
 Misses an unit.

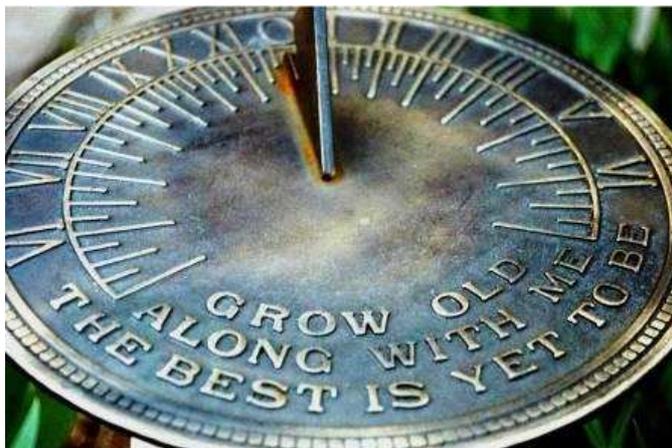
(from "A Grammarian's Funeral")

(\* "ere" is an old-fashioned word meaning "before")

### **Dramatis Personae (1864)**

This was Browning's first publication for nine years following the death of his wife. It was also the first of his successes. Up to this time he had been considered a minor poet, certainly far less important than his wife.

The 20 poems in *Dramatis Personae* are dramatic, with a wide range of narrators. In the earlier collection, "Men and Women", the narrators were usually speaking to a second person. In "*Dramatis Personae*" the speeches are mostly soliloquies. They are generally more serious than the earlier poems, and from now on most of Browning's poetry is about religious and marriage problems - two much discussed issues of this time.



*Browning's lines from the poem "Rabbi ben Ezra" have become a standard inscription on ornamental sun-dials,*

Among the lasting poems in this collection is one called "Rabbi ben Ezra", a poem about the 12th Century poet, mathematician and scholar, Abraham ibn Ezra, who wrote on grammar and astronomy. It is not a biography of Ben Ezra; like all of Browning's historical poems, it is a free interpretation of the ideas that Ben Ezra's life and philosophy suggests to Browning. Its famous opening lines say:

Grow old along with me!  
The best is yet to be,  
The last of life, for which the first was made:  
Our times are in his hand  
Who saith, "A whole I planned,  
Youth shows but half; trust God: see all, nor be afraid!"  
*(from "Rabbi Ben Ezra")*

### **The Ring and the Book (1868-69)**

"The Ring and the Book" is an extremely long narrative poem, a verse-novel containing more than 21,000 lines. It was published in four instalments between 1868 and 1869 in the *Cornhill Magazine*. It tells the true story of a murder trial in Rome in 1698 when a poor nobleman, Count Guido Franceschini, was found guilty of murdering both his wife, Pompilia Comparini, and her parents, because he believed she was having an affair with a young clerk called Giuseppe Caponsacchi.

Franceschini claimed he was innocent, but the court did not believe him and he was sentenced to death. He appealed to the Pope, Innocent XII, but despite his protests, he was sentenced to death.

The poem consists of twelve books, nine of which are dramatic monologues spoken by different witnesses, (Franceschini speaks twice) and the witnesses often give different accounts of the same events. The first and last books are narrated by the poet himself.

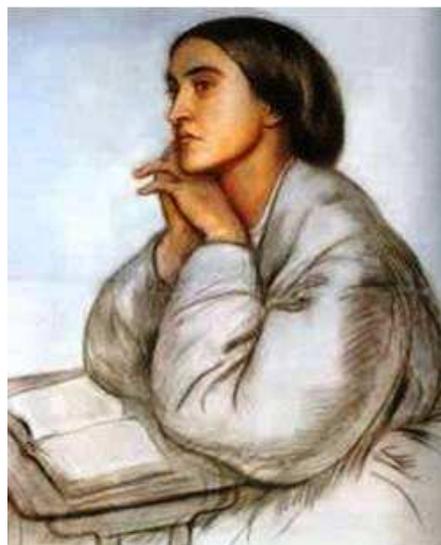
This amazingly complex and fascinating work became a best-seller. The depth of its philosophical, psychological and spiritual insight meant that the poem was universally hailed as a work of genius, and elevated Robert Browning to the first rank of English poets.

Because of the wide range of his subjects and the difficulty in understanding his verse, Browning's popularity declined during the first half of the 20th Century. However, his work has been re-valued in more recent years, and he is now recognised as one of the all-time great poets, and a towering figure of 19th Century poetry.

## CHRISTINA ROSSETTI 1830-1894

Christina Rossetti was a leading Victorian poet, remembered for her simple but popular ballads, sonnets and carols. She was born in London of Italian parents. One of her brothers was the famous poet and painter Dante Gabriel Rossetti. She was 31 when her first volume of poems appeared. It was called “Goblin Market” and consisted of several poems already published in various magazines.

Her first poems showed a use of words that was almost songlike, a love of fantasy and an underlying sadness. Two of her favourite themes - death and giving up earthly love - came from her own devout religious feelings. In her early years she was a volunteer worker at the St. Mary Magdalene "house of charity", a refuge for former prostitutes, and there are many feminist themes in her poetry. In addition, she actively spoke out against war, slavery in the American Civil War, and cruelty to animals. During these years she was a semi-invalid living at home with her mother and sister. At the age of 40 she developed a disease of the thyroid gland and became a recluse. However, that did not stop her producing poetry, though most of her later works deal with sombre, religious feelings.



*A portrait of Christina Rossetti by her brother, Dante Gabriel Rossetti*

### Major works

#### **Goblin Market and Other Poems (1862)**

In this, her most famous collection, the title poem is a simple story of two sisters' misadventures with goblins. But, it also has underlying layers: it is an allegory about temptation and salvation, a commentary on Victorian attitudes to women, and a work about temptation, sin and redemption through suffering. (It has parallels with Coleridge's “Rime of the Ancient Mariner”)

The “Goblin Market” collection also includes a poem called “Remember” which has become one of the most popular poems from the last century

#### **Remember**

Remember me when I am gone away,  
Gone far away into the silent land;  
When you can no more hold me by the hand,  
Nor I half turn to go, yet turning stay.  
Remember me when no more day by day  
You tell me of our future that you plann'd:  
Only remember me; you understand  
It will be late to counsel then or pray.  
Yet if you should forget me for a while  
And afterwards remember, do not grieve:  
For if the darkness and corruption leave  
A vestige of the thoughts that once I had,  
Better by far you should forget and smile  
Than that you should remember and be sad.

Although the poetry of Christina Rossetti went out of fashion in the early years of the 20th Century, recent scholarship has restored her to a high place in studies of Victorian poetry - not just for her technical skill but as an excellent example of the moods and concerns of that era.



## GERARD MANLEY HOPKINS 1844-1889

Gerard Manley Hopkins was a major poet of the 19th Century but completely unknown until his works were published in 1918, nearly thirty years after his death. He was born to middle-class parents in East London and educated at Oxford University, where he became a convert to Roman Catholicism. From 1868 to 1877 he trained to become a Jesuit priest, during which time he wrote no poetry except in 1875 when he was deeply moved by a shipwreck in which five nuns were drowned.

Encouraged by his Jesuit superior, he wrote "The Wreck of the Deutschland", a long and complex poem making use of a new kind of verse which he called "sprung rhythm". This "new" style was based on the natural rhythms in which

people speak, and Hopkins went on to develop this in a further series of poems, such as "The Windhover" and "Pied Beauty".

In 1877 he was ordained as a priest and in 1884 he became Professor of Greek Literature at the University of Dublin. Five years later he died, aged 44, from typhoid. The sonnets he wrote in his last years - sometimes called the "terrible sonnets" - show him torn between his love of the world and his obligation to God.

### The "terrible sonnets"

Although most of his poetry rings with religious joy, Gerard Manley Hopkins suffered many "black hours" of spiritual anguish and frustration. These painful hours led to a short series of poems known as Hopkins's "terrible sonnets" where we can see the poet, a deeply religious Jesuit, struggling at the edge of despair. These sonnets include "Carrion Comfort", "No Worst, there is none" and "Thou Art Indeed Just, Lord", the last of which expresses an inability to understand God's ways:

Thou art indeed just, Lord, if I contend (\*)  
With thee; but, sir, so what I plead is just.  
Why do sinners' ways prosper?  
(From: "Thou art indeed just, Lord")

(\*) "contend with" is "to argue with", "to disagree with")

Most of his strange, difficult verse is about God's relationship to humankind, and develops ideas from earlier philosophers and poets. None of his work was published in his lifetime, but when it was finally made available in 1918 it made a great impact and had considerable influence on many 20th Century poets, including W.H.Auden and T.S.Eliot.

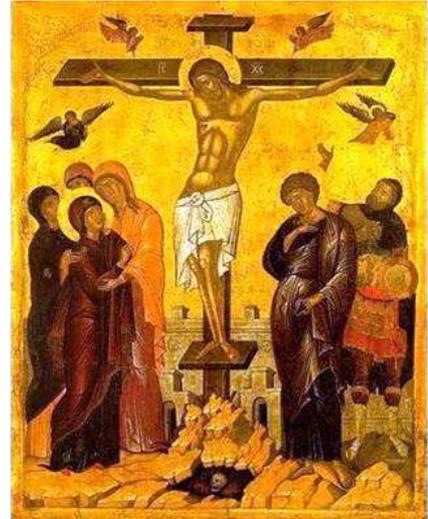
### "Sprung rhythm"

Hopkins is an important poet because of the changes he brought to the form of poetry, rejecting the established ideas of metre. He became fascinated with the older rhythmic structure of the Anglo-Saxon tradition, of which "Beowulf" is the most famous example. Hopkins called his own rhythmic structure "sprung rhythm", created around lines of variable number of syllables, usually between one and four syllables per foot, with the stress always falling on the first syllable in a foot. This extremely complicated style is a forerunner of the "free verse" of the 20th Century.

### Use of language

The language of Hopkins's poems is often striking. His imagery can be simple, as in his poem "Heaven-Haven," where the comparison is between a nun entering a convent and a ship entering a harbour out of a storm. But he uses many archaic and dialect words, and also invents completely new

words, often creating compound adjectives to concentrate the images. He also makes extensive use of alliteration, assonance, onomatopoeia and rhyme. His imagery can also be metaphysical and complex as in his poem "As Kingfishers Catch Fire", where he leaps from one image to another to show how each thing expresses its own uniqueness, and how the hand of God can be seen through all of them.



#### As Kingfishers catch Fire

As kingfishers catch fire, dragonflies draw flame;  
 As tumbled over rim and roundy wells  
 Stones ring; like each tucked string tells, each hung bell's  
 Bow swung finds tongue to fling out broad its name;  
 Each mortal thing does one thing and the same:  
 Deals out that being indoors each one dwells;  
 Selves- goes itself; myself it speaks and spells,  
 Crying What I do is me: for that I came.  
 I say more: the just man justices;  
 Keeps grace: that keeps all his goings graces;  
 Acts in God's eye what in God's eye he is--  
 Christ. For Christ plays in ten thousand places,  
 Lovely in limbs, and lovely in eyes not his  
 To the Father through the features of men's faces.

This reliance on similar sounding words with close or differing senses mean that his poems are best understood if read aloud, though students need not worry if they find it hard to understand. Everyone finds it hard to understand, and most people give up!

#### “Inscape” and “Instress”

An important element in his poetry is Hopkins's own idea of the individual essence and uniqueness of every physical thing. He calls this the “inscape”, and his poems try to present this "inscape" so that a poem like “The Windhover” creates not just an image of the bird in general, but the bird in that one unique moment in relation to the wind that carried its flight.

#### The Windhover: To Christ Our Lord

I caught this morning's minion, king-  
 dom of daylight's dauphin, dapple-dawn-drawn Falcon, in his riding  
 Of the rolling level underneath him steady air, and striding  
 High there, how he rung upon the rein of a wimpling wing  
 In his ecstasy! then off, off forth on swing,  
 As a skate's heel sweeps smooth on a bow-bend the hurl and gliding  
 Rebuffed the big wind. My heart in hiding  
 Stirred for a bird -- the achieve of; the mastery of the thing!  
  
 Brute beauty and valour and act, oh, air, pride, plume, here  
 Buckle! AND the fire that breaks from thee then, a billion  
 Times told lovelier, more dangerous, O my chevalier!  
 No wonder of it: shéer plód makes plough down sillion  
 Shine, and blue-bleak embers, ah my dear,  
 Fall, gall themselves, and gash gold-vermillion.

"The Windhover" is the most startlingly experimental of many superb sonnets written by Hopkins, effortlessly incorporating extra-metrical feet and the energies of his “sprung rhythm” into the conventional sonnet form. The poem is inspired by the flight of a kestrel, and it is clear the bird is also a symbol of Christ. Christ's Passion is central to the poem, where the plunge of bird onto its prey suggests not only the Fall of Man, but how Christ descended into the world of human misery and cruelty in order to redeem mankind. Like all Hopkins's poetry the work is essentially spiritual, of course, but it doesn't forget the "sheer plod" of the farm-labourer.