

The Victorian Novel

Louis James

The Victorian Novel

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The Victorian Novel

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How to Use This Book

This study is aimed at graduates and postgraduates, but it should be of interest also to members of reading groups, and to all who enjoy Victorian literature. It is intended to be a practical tool, concerned both with what to read and how to read. So, for instance, the section on melodrama and the novel gives the factual background, but also shows how the conventions of nineteenth-century drama shaped characters, *mise-en-scène* and plot in fiction. A discussion of the novels' 'implied readers' aims to give a better understanding of the way a work's style and approach were shaped by its intended audience. Context is there for its historical interest, but also to demonstrate the different ways novels were being read through the century, both for entertainment and in response to specific situations and events, and to show how this can affect their content.

The first section reveals the great diversity of the 'Victorian' period, and shows how novels became a means through which readers defined their social identity and formed their attitudes to such issues as nationalism, gender differences and the nature of the family. This leads to a consideration of how the novel emerged as a 'realist' form, closely linked to history and biography, responding to the religious and scientific controversies of the time. The study continues with a discussion of the way Victorian assumptions about society, ethics, and even time and space, can differ from our own.

Sections on 'key' authors, texts and topics are designed to help those looking for specific information about the Victorian novel. Because the field is so large, entries had to be selective. However, I have tried to strike a balance between novels distinguished as major literary achievements, and lesser works whose popularity makes them nevertheless important

in the history of the novel. The 'topics' range widely, from the methods of novel publication to the significance of the 'sensation' novel and the issues raised by colonialism.

While this study aims to inform, it does not try to give definitive 'answers'. Its main purpose is to recover the fresh immediacy of literature too often dulled by familiarity or the routine of academic study, and to allow the reader the pleasure of recovering its power, not as a 'text', but as an original work of the creative imagination. If in the reading this book makes itself redundant, it will have performed its task.

Note: Throughout this Guide, an asterisk (*) is used to indicate that an author or title is described in a separate main entry.

Chronology

[P.] = poetry; [D.] = drama; [I.] = ideas

Date	Novels	Events
1830	Bulwer Lytton, <i>Paul Clifford</i> ; Lyell, <i>Principles of Geology</i> (to 1833); Tennyson, <i>Poems Chiefly Lyrical</i> [P]; <i>Fraser's Magazine</i> begun (to 1882); Comte, <i>Cours de philosophie positive</i> (France) [I.] prepares way for sociology	Accession of William IV; Reform Bill proposed; Manchester and Liverpool Railway opens; cholera epidemic (to 1832)
1831	Disraeli, <i>The Young Duke</i> ; Gore, <i>Mothers and Daughters</i> ; Peacock, <i>Crotchet Castle</i> ; Surtees, <i>Jorrocks's Jaunts and Jollities</i> (serial to 1832); Hugo, <i>Notre Dame de Paris</i> (France)	Reform Bill passed by House of Commons, vetoed by the Lords, followed by riots in Bristol and Nottingham; 'Swing' agricultural riots in southern England; Dickens (anonymously) reports debates for <i>Mirror of Parliaments</i>
1832	Bulwer Lytton, <i>Eugene Aram</i> ; Scott, <i>Tales of My Landlord</i> (4th series); Byron, <i>Works and Letters</i> (to 1835) [P.]; Harriet Martineau, <i>Illustrations of Political Economy</i> (to 1834); Darwin, <i>Narrative of the Beagle</i> (to 1836) [I.]	Reform Bill forced through
1833	Dickens' short story, 'A Dinner at Poplar Walk', appears in <i>Monthly Magazine</i> ; Newman, Pusey, Keble et al., <i>Tracts for the Times</i> (to 1841) starts the Oxford Movement; Bulwer Lytton, <i>England and the English</i> [I.]; Carlyle, <i>Sartor Resartus</i> in <i>Fraser's Magazine</i> (to 1834); Charles Knight, <i>Penny Cyclopaedia</i> (to 1844)	Factory Acts restrict child labour; slavery abolished throughout British Empire

<i>Date</i>	<i>Novels</i>	<i>Events</i>
1834	Ainsworth, <i>Rookwood</i> ; Bulwer Lytton, <i>Last Days of Pompeii</i> ; Marryat, <i>Peter Simple</i> ; Balzac, <i>Père Goriot</i> (France)	Old Houses of Parliament burn down; Poor Law Amendment act creates Union workhouses; abortive founding of Grand National Consolidated Trades Union; transportation of six ‘Tolpuddle Martyrs’ for taking illegal oaths to agricultural workers’ union
1835	Bulwer Lytton, <i>Rienzi</i> ; Clare, <i>The Rural Muse</i> [P.]	Municipal Reform Act
1836	Dickens, <i>Sketches by ‘Boz’</i> ; <i>Pickwick Papers</i> (in monthly parts to 1837); Marryat, <i>Mr Midshipman Easy</i>	Commercial boom (to 1836); early speculation in railways
1837	Dickens’ <i>Pickwick Papers</i> in one volume; <i>Oliver Twist</i> serialized in <i>Bentley’s Miscellany</i> (to 1838); Carlyle, <i>A History of the French Revolution</i>	William IV dies; accession of Queen Victoria
1838	Surtees, <i>Jorrocks</i> (volume edition); Dickens, <i>Nicholas Nickleby</i> (to 1839); Lyell, <i>Elements of Geology</i> [I.]	Anti-Corn Law League founded in Manchester; People’s Charter founds the Chartist Movement (active to 1848); first Afghan War; Daguerre and Niépce pioneer commercial photography (Paris)
1839	Ainsworth, <i>Jack Sheppard</i> ; Harriet Martineau, <i>Deerbrook</i> ; Frances Trollope, <i>Michael Armstrong, the Factory Boy</i> ; Thackeray, <i>Catherine</i> (to 1840)	Chartist riots; First Opium War in China

1840	Ainsworth, <i>The Tower of London</i> ; Dickens' <i>The Old Curiosity Shop</i> published in <i>Master Humphrey's Clock</i> ; Darwin, <i>Voyage of the Beagle</i> ; Poe, <i>Tales of the Grotesque</i> (USA)	Marriage of Queen Victoria to Albert; penny post instituted; building of the new Houses of Parliament begun; Nelson's Column erected
1841	Dickens, <i>Barnaby Rudge</i> (in <i>Old Curiosity Shop</i>); Thackeray, <i>Samuel Titmarsh and the Great Hoggarty Diamond</i> ; Lever, <i>Charles O'Malley</i> ; Carlyle, <i>On Heroes, Hero-Worship and the Heroic in History</i> ; <i>Punch</i> founded; Cooper, <i>The Deerslayer</i> (America)	
1842	Dickens, <i>American Notes</i> ; Lover, <i>Handy Andy</i> ; Tennyson, <i>Poems</i> [P.]	
1843	Dickens, <i>Christmas Carol</i> ; Martin Chuzzlewit (to 1844); Carlyle, <i>Past and Present</i> ; Ruskin, <i>Modern Painters</i> , vol. I (II, 1846; III–IV, 1856; V, 1860)	SS <i>Great Britain</i> launched; Wordsworth made poet laureate
1844	Dickens, <i>The Chimes</i> ; Disraeli, <i>Coningsby</i> ; Kinglake, <i>Eothen</i> ; Jerrold, <i>Story of a Feather</i> ; Thackeray, <i>Luck of Barry Lyndon</i> ; Reynolds, <i>Mysteries of London</i> (with <i>Mysteries of the Court of London</i> , to 1856); Robert Chambers, <i>Vestiges of Creation</i> [I.]	Irish Potato Famine (to 1846); Marx meets Engels in Paris; railway speculation mania (to 1845); Turner paints <i>Rain, Steam and Speed</i>
1845	Dickens, <i>Cricket on the Hearth</i> ; Disraeli, <i>Sybil</i> ; Browning, <i>Dramatic Romances and Lyrics</i> [P.]; Poe, <i>Tales of Mystery and Imagination</i> (USA)	Newman joins Church of Rome
1846	Bulwer Lytton, <i>Lucretia</i> ; Dickens, <i>Dombey and Son</i> (to 1848); Jerrold, <i>Chronicles of Clovernook</i> ; Thackeray, <i>Snobs of England</i> (in <i>Punch</i> ; afterwards published as <i>The Book of Snobs</i>); George Eliot's translation of Strauss' <i>Life of Jesus</i>	Repeal of the Corn Laws; first Christmas card printed

<i>Date</i>	<i>Novels</i>	<i>Events</i>
1847	Charlotte Brontë, <i>Jane Eyre</i> ; Emily Brontë, <i>Wuthering Heights</i> ; Disraeli, <i>Tancred</i> ; Thackeray, <i>Vanity Fair</i> (to 1848); Trollope, <i>The Macdermots of Ballycloran</i> ; Rymer, <i>Varney the Vampyre</i> (to 1848)	Factory Act restricts women and children to ten hours' work a day
1848	Gaskell, <i>Mary Barton</i> ; Newman, <i>Loss and Gain</i> ; Thackeray, <i>Pendennis</i> (to 1850); Marx and Engels, <i>Communist Manifesto</i> [I.]	Revolutions in Paris, Berlin, Vienna, Rome; cholera epidemic in London; Health Act; Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood founded
1849	Charlotte Brontë, <i>Shirley</i> ; Dickens, <i>David Copperfield</i> (to 1850); Bulwer Lytton, <i>The Caxtons</i> ; Mayhew, <i>London Labour and the London Poor</i> (to 1850); Ruskin, <i>The Seven Lamps of Architecture</i> ; Macaulay, <i>History of England</i> I–II (III–IV, 1855)	Bedford College London founded
1850	Kingsley, <i>Alton Locke</i> ; Dickens starts <i>Household Words</i> (to 1859); Tennyson, <i>In Memoriam</i> [P.]; Wordsworth, <i>The Prelude</i> [P.]	Catholic hierarchy in England restored
1851	Gaskell, <i>Cranford</i> (to 1853); Carlyle, <i>Life of John Sterling</i> ; Ruskin, <i>The Stones of Venice</i> (to 1853); Melville, <i>Moby Dick</i> (USA); Stowe, <i>Uncle Tom's Cabin</i> (USA)	The Great Exhibition, Hyde Park; Owens College, Manchester founded
1852	Dickens, <i>Bleak House</i> (to 1853); Thackeray, <i>Henry Esmond</i>	Second Burma War; Duke of Wellington dies

1853	Charlotte Brontë, <i>Villette</i> ; Gaskell, <i>Ruth</i> ; Surtees, <i>Mr Sponge's Sporting Tour</i> ; Thackeray, <i>The Newcomes</i> (to 1855); Yonge, <i>Heir of Redclyffe</i> ; Harriet Martineau's translation of Comte's <i>Positive Philosophy</i> [L.]	
1854	Dickens, <i>Hard Times</i> ; Gaskell, <i>North and South</i> (to 1855); George Eliot translates Feuerbach's <i>Essence of Christianity</i>	Crimean War starts (ends 1856)
1855	Dickens, <i>Little Dorrit</i> (to 1857); Kingsley, <i>Westward Ho!</i> ; Trollope, <i>The Warden</i> ; Browning, <i>Men and Women</i> [P.]; Tennyson, <i>Maud</i> [P.]	Livingstone discovers Victoria Falls
1856	Reade, <i>It's Never Too Late to Mend</i> ; Yonge, <i>The Daisy Chain</i>	
1857	Charlotte Brontë, <i>The Professor</i> ; Eliot, <i>Scenes of Clerical Life</i> (in <i>Blackwood's</i>); Hughes, <i>Tom Brown's Schooldays</i> ; Thackeray, <i>The Virginians</i> ; Trollope, <i>Barchester Towers</i> ; E. B. Browning, <i>Aurora Leigh</i> [P.]; Gaskell, <i>Life of Charlotte Brontë</i> ; Flaubert, <i>Madame Bovary</i> (France)	Indian Mutiny (suppressed 1858); Second Opium War (to 1858); Matrimonial Causes Act allows divorce without Act of Parliament
1858	Macdonald, <i>Phantastes</i> ; Trollope, <i>Dr Thorne</i> ; Morris, <i>Defence of Guinevere</i> [P.]	Dickens begins public readings; Brunel's Great Eastern launched
1859	Dickens, <i>Tale of Two Cities</i> ; Eliot, <i>Adam Bede</i> ; Meredith, <i>Ordeal of Richard Feverel</i> ; Darwin, <i>Origin of Species</i> ; Mill, <i>On Liberty</i> ; Smiles, <i>Self-Help</i> ; Tennyson, <i>Idylls</i> (cont. 1869, 1872, 1873)	Franco-Austrian War (to 1861)
1860	Collins, <i>Woman in White</i> ; Dickens, <i>Great Expectations</i> (to 1861); Eliot, <i>Mill on the Floss</i> ; <i>Cornhill Magazine</i> (ed. Thackeray) leads a new wave of illustrated, fiction-carrying magazines	Huxley defeats Bishop Wilberforce in debate on evolution at British Association

<i>Date</i>	<i>Novels</i>	<i>Events</i>
1861	Eliot, <i>Silas Marner</i> ; Henry Kingsley, <i>Ravenshoe</i> (to 1862); Reade, <i>Cloister and the Hearth</i> ; Trollope, <i>Framley Parsonage</i> ; Wood, <i>East Lynne</i> ; Braddon, <i>Lady Audley's Secret</i> (to 1862)	Prince Albert dies; American Civil War (to 1865); the term 'sensation novel' appears
1862	Eliot, <i>Romola</i> (to 1863); Meredith, <i>Modern Love</i> [P.]; C. Rossetti, <i>Goblin Market</i> [P.]	
1863	Gaskell, <i>Sylvia's Lovers</i> ; Kingsley, <i>Water-Babies</i> ; Oliphant, <i>Salem Chapel</i>	Lincoln's Gettysburg Address; Thackeray dies
1864	Dickens, <i>Our Mutual Friend</i> (to 1865); Le Fanu, <i>Uncle Silas</i> ; Trollope, <i>Can You Forgive Her?</i> ; Gaskell, <i>Wives and Daughters</i> (to 1866); Newman, <i>Apologia pro Vita Sua</i>	First Socialist International meets in London
1865	Lewis Carroll, <i>Alice's Adventures in Wonderland</i> ; Meredith, <i>Rhoda Fleming</i> ; Arnold, <i>Essays in Criticism, First Series</i> ; Swinburne, <i>Atalanta in Corydon</i> [P.]	Mrs Gaskell dies
1866	Collins, <i>Armada</i> ; Eliot, <i>Felix Holt</i> ; Oliphant, <i>Miss Marjoribanks</i> ; Yonge, <i>A Dove in the Eagle's Nest</i>	Cholera epidemic
1867	Ouida, <i>Under Two Flags</i> ; Trollope, <i>Last Chronicle of Barset</i> ; Marx, <i>Das Kapital</i> , vol. 1	Second Reform Act extends votes for urban electorate; typewriter invented; Dominion of Canada Act
1868	Alcott, <i>Little Women</i> ; Eliot, <i>Spanish Gypsy</i> [P.]; Collins, <i>The Moonstone</i> ; Trollope, <i>He Knew He Was Right</i> ; Browning, <i>The Ring and the Book</i> [P.]	Last public execution; national telegraph system

1869	Reade, <i>Foul Play</i> ; Trollope, <i>Phineas Finn</i>	
1870	Dickens, <i>Edwin Drood</i> ; Disraeli, <i>Lothair</i>	Franco-Prussian War (to 1871); First Married Women's Property Act; Dickens dies
1871	Eliot, <i>Middlemarch</i> (to 1872); Lewis Carroll, <i>Through the Looking Glass</i> ; Hardy, <i>Desperate Remedies</i> ; Darwin, <i>Descent of Man</i> [I.]	Bank holidays introduced
1872	Hardy, <i>Under the Greenwood Tree</i>	Strike of agricultural labourers; secret ballots established
1873	Trollope, <i>Eustace Diamonds</i> ; J. S. Mill, <i>Autobiography</i> ; Pater, <i>Studies of the . . . Renaissance</i>	Mill dies
1874	Hardy, <i>Far from the Madding Crowd</i> ; Trollope, <i>The Way We Live Now</i> (to 1875); Thomson, <i>City of Dreadful Night</i> [P.]	
1875		Public Health Act; Disraeli buys control of Suez Canal
1876	Eliot, <i>Daniel Deronda</i>	Queen Victoria Empress of India; Bell invents telephone
1877	James, <i>The American</i> ; Zola, <i>L'Assommoir</i> (France); Meredith, 'The Idea of Comedy'	Russo-Turkish War
1878	Hardy, <i>Return of the Native</i>	Salvation Army founded; Congress of Berlin on Eastern Question; Swan demonstrates electric light bulb in UK

<i>Date</i>	<i>Novels</i>	<i>Events</i>
1879	Meredith, <i>The Egoist</i> ; Stevenson, <i>Travels with a Donkey</i> ; Ibsen's <i>A Doll's House</i> produced in Oslo, London première, 1890 [D.]	Zulu War
1880	Disraeli, <i>Endymion</i> ; Gissing, <i>Workers in the Dawn</i>	First Anglo-Boer War (to 1881); Eliot dies
1881	James, <i>Portrait of a Lady</i> ; Stevenson, <i>Treasure Island</i> (to 1882); Mark Rutherford, <i>Autobiography</i>	Death of Disraeli
1882	Hardy, <i>Two on a Tower</i>	Married Women's Property Act; Foundation of Society for Psychological Research; Britain occupies Egypt
1883	Schreiner, <i>Story of an African Farm</i> ; Trollope, <i>Autobiography</i>	
1884	Twain, <i>Huckleberry Finn</i> (USA); James, 'The Art of Fiction'	Third Reform Act; Fabian Society founded
1885	Moore, <i>A Mummer's Wife</i> ; Haggard, <i>King Solomon's Mines</i> ; Pater, <i>Marius the Epicurean</i>	Death of Gordon in the Sudan; Third Burma War
1886	Hardy, <i>Mayor of Casterbridge</i> ; Stevenson, <i>Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde</i> ; <i>Kidnapped</i>	Gold found in Transvaal; first Home Rule Bill for Ireland introduced
1887	Hardy, <i>The Woodlanders</i> ; Haggard, <i>She</i> ; Doyle, <i>A Study in Scarlet</i>	Queen's Golden Jubilee
1888	Kipling, <i>Plain Tales from the Hills</i> ; Mrs Humphry Ward, <i>Robert Elsmere</i> ; Rolf Boldrewood [T. A. Brown], <i>Robbery Under Arms</i> (Australia)	Jack the Ripper murders in London; accession of Kaiser Wilhelm II

1889	Gissing, <i>The Nether World</i> ; Stevenson, <i>Master of Ballantrae</i>	London dockers' strike; national movement for woman's suffrage founded; Collins, Browning, Hopkins die
1890	William James, <i>Principles of Psychology</i>	Fall of Bismarck
1891	Morris, <i>News from Nowhere</i> ; Gissing, <i>New Grub Street</i> ; Hardy, <i>Tess of the D'Urbervilles</i> ; Wilde, <i>Portrait of Dorian Gray</i>	
1892	Zangwill, <i>Children of the Ghetto</i> ; Doyle, <i>The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes</i>	Tennyson dies
1893	Gissing, <i>The Odd Women</i> ; Grand, <i>The Heavenly Twins</i>	Independent Labour Party founded
1894	Du Maurier, <i>Trilby</i> ; Hope, <i>Prisoner of Zenda</i> ; Kipling, <i>Jungle Book</i> ; Moore, <i>Esther Waters</i>	
1895	Wells, <i>Time Machine</i> ; Hardy, <i>Jude the Obscure</i> ; Wilde, <i>The Importance of Being Earnest</i> [D.]	Trials of Oscar Wilde
1896	Wells, <i>Island of Dr Moreau</i>	Jamieson raid in South Africa; reconquest of Sudan (to 1896)
1897	Hardy, <i>The Well-Beloved</i> ; Wells, <i>Invisible Man</i> ; Bram Stoker, <i>Dracula</i>	Queen's Diamond Jubilee
1898	Wells, <i>War of the Worlds</i> ; Hardy, <i>Wessex Poems</i> [P.]; Wilde, <i>Ballad of Reading Gaol</i> [P.]; Shaw, <i>Plays Pleasant and Unpleasant</i> [D.]	Death of Gladstone
1899	Kipling, <i>Stalky and Co.</i> ; Mrs Oliphant, <i>Autobiography</i>	Second Anglo-Boer War (to 1902)
1900	Conrad, <i>Lord Jim</i>	Ruskin, Wilde die; Commonwealth of Australia Act
1901	Kipling, <i>Kim</i>	Queen Victoria dies

Introduction

The term 'Victorian novel' is at best an academic flag of convenience. Firstly, there is the problem of dates. Queen Victoria's death in 1901 comes too long after her coronation in 1837 for the term 'Victorian' to have much precise significance, either for history or for literature. The first major Victorian novel, Dickens' *Oliver Twist*, appeared conveniently in 1837, in time for the future queen to be reading it on the night before her coronation, but for a decade after this the novels of Dickens stood largely alone among a sea of minor work. Raymond Williams and Kathleen Tillotson saw the 'true' Victorian novel as starting some ten years later, in the literary ferment of the years 1847–8.¹ In 1880 the death of George Eliot coincided with changes in both the content and readership of fiction, and the genre's major phase ends around that period. But the novels that followed reflect back on the earlier period in important ways.

Then there is a question of the 'Victorian consciousness'. The first readers of Dickens and George Eliot did not think of themselves as living in the 'Victorian period'. 'Victorian' was first recorded in 1839, but it only gained general currency, largely as a term of disapproval, with the Edwardians. The British experienced the nineteenth century as a period of turbulent transition; although the term has been high-jacked by critics of the next era, they felt themselves to be inhabitants of the 'modern' period, a word that appears some six hundred times in the book titles listed in *The Nineteenth Century Short Title Catalogue* for 1816–70.² On the other hand,

¹ See Kathleen Tillotson, *Novels of the Eighteen-forties* (2nd edn, 1955); Raymond Williams, *The English Novel from Dickens to Lawrence* (1974).

² Raymond Williams, *Keywords* (1976), pp. 174–5; Andrew Sanders, *Dickens and the Spirit of the Age* (1999), p. 9.

the major writers of the era grew up in the earlier years of the Regency and William IV, and had their imaginations shaped by the age of English Romanticism. The 'nineteenth century' might be seen to begin in 1789, when the French Revolution opened up a fault line across the social, mental and religious structures of Europe, irreversibly changing ways of thinking and living, and laying the basis for the Romantic movement with its elevation of 'common' life, childhood and the emotions. The vision of Scott and Wordsworth lived on to culminate in the imaginative creations of George Eliot a decade after the mid-century. The creative tension within mid-Victorian literature comes from a cultural schizophrenia. If it was 'modern', materialist, factual, concerned with 'things as they are', it was also in many ways Romantic, fascinated with the 'savage' Gothic, melodramatic, idealistic.³

The 'novel' itself had little of the formal definition it has today. It was seen simply as a narrative form opposed to 'romance', a work of fiction dealing with the affairs of everyday life. As late as 1884 *Henry James could complain that, as a form, it 'had no air of having a theory, a conviction, a consciousness of itself behind it'.⁴ Prose fiction was written, read and reviewed as part of a continuous spectrum of literature dealing with the humanities and science. No one would have debated where Scott the historian ended and Scott the novelist began, or thought the question relevant. Criticism of the novel genre goes back to the early eighteenth century, and was widely discussed during the Victorian period.⁵ The subject of 'English literature' was included in the syllabus of the University of London when it was founded in 1851.⁶ But studies of the novel were largely ethical, concerned with the 'truth' of literature, and Matthew Arnold's famous definition of poetry in 1888 as 'a criticism of life'⁷ would have been applied equally to the novel. G. H. Lewes praised Charlotte Brontë's **Villette* (1853), although it showed a 'contempt for conventions in all things, in style, in thought, even in the art of story-telling', because it had 'an astonishing power and passion . . . an influence

³ See D. D. Stone, *The Romantic Impulse in Victorian Fiction* (1980).

⁴ Henry James, 'The Art of the Novel', *Longman's Magazine* (1884).

⁵ A useful, concise survey is still Miriam Allott, ed., *Novelists on the Novel* (1959). See also Further Reading.

⁶ D. J. Palmer, *The Rise of English Studies* (1965); Franklin E. Court, *Institutionalizing English Literature: The Culture and Politics of Literary Study, 1750–1900* (1992).

⁷ Matthew Arnold, 'The Study of Poetry', *Essays in Criticism, Second Series* (1888).

of truth as healthful as a mountain breeze'.⁸ Literate readers were interested in the world in general, and even Dickens' populist *Household Words* (1850–9) offered novels like *Hard Times* (1854) in a magazine that contained more non-fiction than fiction. In general, before about 1880, critics saw form as a means of representing reality; in the later century, 'reality' became increasingly the basis for artistic form.

David Lodge has remarked that 'novels burn facts as engines burn fuel',⁹ and Victorian fiction consumed whole forests of miscellaneous information. But this brought with it a great diversity. By mid-century David Masson could identify thirteen sub-genres of novel by type, objective and subject.¹⁰ In the 1940s Leo J. Henkin summarized over 2,000 novels reviewed in *The Athenaeum* between 1860 and 1900, and placed them in fifteen categories ranging from scientific discovery and religious debate to politics and colonial settlement.¹¹ In an even more strenuous exercise, the librarian Myron Brightfield drew on a lifetime of reading Victorian novels for a social history of the period, at his death leaving a dense mosaic of extracts culled from some 2,000 novels, relating to over a hundred main topics.¹²

There can be no accurate account of the number of novels issued during this period, but a conservative estimate taken from *The Publisher's Circular* between 1837 and 1901 suggests about 60,000 titles were published.¹³ This, however, excluded novels published only in periodicals, and most of those written for a mass readership appeared in ephemeral publications. There have been various attempts to map this vast sea. In *Fiction with a Purpose* (1967), the late Robert A. Colby related eight key Victorian titles to large clusters of contemporary fiction sharing the same interest. In 1999 the greatly extended third edition of the *Cambridge Bibliography of English Literature* included over 270 novelists writing between 1835 and

⁸ Quoted in Miriam Allott, ed., *The Brontës: The Critical Heritage* (1947), p. 186.

⁹ David Lodge in Michael Irwin et al., ed., *Tensions and Transitions* (1990), p. 191.

¹⁰ David Masson, *British Novelists and their Styles* (1859), pp. 215ff. Hereafter Masson.

¹¹ Leo J. Henkin, 'Problems and Digressions in the Victorian Novel (1860–1900)', *The Bulletin of Bibliography*, vol. 18, no. 2 (Sep–Dec 1943) to vol. 20, no. 1 (Jan–April 1950). Hereafter Henkin.

¹² A selection was published in Myron F. Brightfield, *Victorian England in its Novels (1840–1870)*, 4 vols (1967–8). The full file occupies several filing cabinets in the UCLA library. Hereafter Brightfield.

¹³ John Sutherland, *The Longman Companion to Victorian Fiction* (1999), p. 1. Hereafter Sutherland.

1900, but covered little ‘popular’ fiction. John Sutherland’s invaluable *Longman Companion to Victorian Fiction* (1999) records nearly 900 novelists and gives brief synopses of nearly 500 works of fiction. But it makes no attempt to be comprehensive. Nor does this guide, which, with some exceptions, focuses on the writers who have selected themselves by their enduring literary quality, though these were not necessarily the most widely read novelists at the time.¹⁴

The ‘classic’ Victorian novel read and studied today was largely written by and for a specific, large but restricted middle-class readership, and consolidated middle-class cultural values. It is a myth that even Dickens was read by ‘everyone’ in the Victorian period. Sales of his early works were almost certainly exceeded by cheap plagiarisms recycling his fiction for popular consumption,¹⁵ and if he was delighted that his pioneering venture into the popular market, the twopenny *Household Words*, sold 40,000 copies, this circulation was dwarfed by comparable lower-middle-class journals like *The Family Herald*, which had an estimated circulation of 300,000. When Trollope boasted in 1870 that ‘novels are in the hands of all: from the Prime Minister, Mr Gladstone, down to the last-appointed scullery maid’, he omitted to say that the fiction pored over below stairs would have been very different to that found in the parlours of Downing Street. The amusing novel by the Mayhew brothers on *The Greatest Plague in Life* (i.e., the maidservant) featured the novel-reading Betsy, whose reading included the revealing titles *The Black Pirate*, *The Heads of the Headless*, *Ada the Betrayed* and *Amy, or Love and Madness*, all actual penny-issue works published by Edward Lloyd.¹⁶ Betsy was reading in the late 1840s: average serving-girl literary tastes may have moved upwards by 1870, but not by that much.

Yet the middle-class Victorian novel was nevertheless related to the revolution in printing and reading that affected everyone in early nineteenth-century Britain. Print had played an important role in previous social and religious developments in earlier periods of change. But what happened in early nineteenth-century England was different. The Industrial Rev-

¹⁴ A useful introduction to the distinction between ‘original’ and ‘formulaic’ literature is still John G. Cawelti’s *Adventure, Mystery and Romance* (1976). Hereafter Cawelti.

¹⁵ See Louis James, *Fiction for the Working Man, 1830–1850* (revised edn, 1974), ch. 4.

¹⁶ Augustus and Henry Mayhew, *The Greatest Plague in Life* (1847), pp. 112ff.; Louis James, ‘The Trouble with Betsy’, in *The Victorian Press: Samplings and Soundings*, ed. Joanne Shattock and Michael Wolff (1982), pp. 349–66.