

# The Victorian Novel

*Louis James*



# The Victorian Novel

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*Louis James*

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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  |



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|------|--|--|
| 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  |

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|------|--|---|
| 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;<br>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   |

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|------|---|--|
| 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  |

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# 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.<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>2</sup> On the other hand,

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

<sup>2</sup> 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.<sup>3</sup>

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'.<sup>4</sup> 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.<sup>5</sup> The subject of 'English literature' was included in the syllabus of the University of London when it was founded in 1851.<sup>6</sup> 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'<sup>7</sup> 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

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

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

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

<sup>6</sup> 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).

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

of truth as healthful as a mountain breeze'.<sup>8</sup> 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',<sup>9</sup> 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.<sup>10</sup> 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.<sup>11</sup> 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.<sup>12</sup>

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.<sup>13</sup> 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

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

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

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

<sup>11</sup> 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.

<sup>12</sup> 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.

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