THE VICTORIAN AGE

The Victorian age took its name from **Queen Victoria.** The Victorian era was the age of **progress**, **stability** and **great social reforms** but in the same time was characterised by **poverty**, **injustice** and **social unrest** (tensioni sociali).

VICTORIAN VALUES
The Victorians were great moralisers. They promoted a code of values based on personal **duty**, **hard work**, **respectability** and **charity**.
These values were of equal application to all strata of society, but were given their essential Victorian form by the upper or middle classes.
The idea of respectability distinguished the middle from the lower class. **Respectability** was a mixture of morality, hypocrisy and conformity to social standards. It meant (significava):
- The possession of **good manners** (buone maniere);
- The ownership (proprietà) of a comfortable **house** with servants and a carriage (carrozza);
- Regular attendance at **church** (presenza regolare in chiesa);
- Charitable activity (attività caritativa). **Philanthropy** was a wide phenomenon that absorbed the energies of thousands of Victorians.

Bourgeois ideals also dominated Victorian **family** life:
- The family was a **patriarchal** unit;
- The **man** represented the authority;
- The **women** had the key role regarded the education of children and the managing of the house.

The category of **"fallen women"**, adulteresses (adultere) or unmarried mothers (ragazze madri) or prostitutes, was condemned and emarginated.
Sexuality was generally repressed and **prudery** in its most extreme manifestations (nella sua estrema manifestazione) led (ha portato) to the denunciation of nudity in art and the rejection (rifiuto) of words with sexual connotation from everyday vocabulary (vocabolario quotidiano).

PATRIOTISM
Civil pride (orgoglio civile) and national fervour (fervore nazionale) were frequent among the British.
Patriotism was deeply (profondamente) influenced by ideas of **racial superiority**. The British had the convinction that the races of the world were divided by physical and intellectual differences, that some were destined to be led by others (alcuni erano destinati ad essere guidati da altri).
The concept of "**the white man's burden**" (fardello dell'uomo bianco) was exalted by the colonial writers (dagli scrittori coloniali), like Kipling, and the expansion of the empire was regarded as a mission (era vista come una missione).

EVANGELICALISM
The religious movement known as **Evangelism**, ispired by **Wesley** the founder of Methodism, exerted an important influence on Victorian code of values. The Evangelicals indeed (infatti) believed in:
- Obedience to a **strict code of morality**;
- Dedication to **humanitarian causes and social reform**.

UTILITARIANISM

The 19th-century social thinking was influenced also by the philosophical movement of **utilitarianism**, based on **Bentham**'s principles.

Utilitarianism contributed to the Victorian conviction that any problem could be overcome (possa essere superato) through **reason.** The key-words of this philosophy were: **usefulness, happiness and avoidance of pain** (utilità, felicità e di evitare il dolore).

EMPIRICISM

Utilitarian indifference to human and cultural values was attacked by many intellectuals including Charles Dickens and **John Stuart Mill**, a major figure of empiricism.

He thought:
- Legislation could help men develop their natural talents and personalities;
- Progress came from mental energy and therefore (perciò) he accorded great importance to education and art;

He promoted a series of reforms: popular education, trade union organisation, emancipation of women, the development of cooperatives, etc.

DARWINISM

The scientific discovery began to disturb the belief in a universe stable (la credenza di un universo stabile). There was a new view of the **universe**, perceived as being **incessantly changing** (in cambiamento continuo).

Charles **Darwin** in his famous work "**On the origin of species**" argued that man is the result of a process of **evolution** and that in the fight for life only the **strongest species survived**. Darwin's theory discarded (scardina) the version of creation given by the Bible.

THE AGE OF EXPANSION AND REFORMS

Queen Victoria's reign (1837-1901) was the **longest** in the history of England. The Victorian age **began with the First Reform Act** (1832), a great social achievement (una grande conquista sociale).

It was a period of significant political, social and technological progress and expansion both economic and territorial.

The merits of this positive period belonged (veniva) to the Quenn, who, in marked contrast with the other European monarchs, **reigned constitutionally** (regnò in maniera costituzionale). She was a mediator between the two party (Liberals and Conservatives) and never overruled (annullò) Parliament.

The Government had to face two major problems such:
- a strong campaign for liberal trade (commercio libero) that led to the abolition (che condusse all'abrogazione) of the **Corn Laws** (tassa sull'importazione del grano);
- the **Chartist**: a working-class movement who called for social reforms and the extension of the right to vote.

THE GREAT EXHIBITION

The **great exhibition** of 185, held (tenutasi) in Crystal Palace in London, celebrated British advances (progressi) in science, technology and the Empire.

In the meantime (nel frattempo) workers had begun to come together (hanno iniziato ad unirsi) in Trade Unions (in Sindacati). After strong opposition from the Government, the **Trade Unions** are legalised in 1882 and in 1906 the **Labour Party** (Partito Laburista) was born.

THE URBAN HABITAT

The poor lived in **slums** (baraccopoli), appalling (orribili) quarters characterised by squalor, disease (malattia) and crime.

The conditions of life were very bad: there was an high death rate (alto tasso di mortalità) and terrible working conditions. The **atmosphere was polluted** (inquinata) and that caused a disastrous effect especially on children's health (salute dei bambini).

The Government promoted an **campaign against national ill health** (cattiva salute) through (attraverso):

- cleaning up of the towns (ripulitura delle città);
- foundation of professional organisations to control medical education and research;
- building of modern hospitals.

A lot of services, such as water, gas, lighting, parks, stadiums, were introduced. Even new Victorian institutions like prisons, police stations, boarding schools (convitti), town halls (municipi).

Law and order were among the major problems of the urban environment (ambiente urbano). The Prime Minister Sir Robert Peel founded the Metropolitan Police, known as "**bobbies**" from the name of their founder.

THE BRITISH EMPIRE

The british empire extended his power all over the world: into Asia (Ceylon, India), Africa (Egypt, Kenya, Sudan, Rhodesia), Central America and Oceania.

Most British citizens were extremely proud of their empire and regarded colonial expansion as a mission. This attitude came to be known as "**jingoism**" (sciovinismo).

THE AMERICAN CIVIL WAR

In America the political situation was tense (era tesa) because of the growing split (crescente frattura) between the North and the South. While the North was industrialised and the population was especially white (the immigrants from Europe settled in the North), the economy of the South was based on the vast plantations of tobaccos and cotton, and on the slavery (schiavitù).

North was abolitionists and gave pressure (fece pressione) on Southern states to abolish slavery.

The **civil war** lasted (durò) four years (**from 1861 to 1865**) and ended (si conclude) with the **abolition of slavery**.

However (tuttavia) the abolition of slavery did not grant (non garantì) the blacks equality and economic security. The blacks were free but penniless (poveri), they were discriminated in schools, hospitals and transport (black code), were frightened (furono terrorizzati) and persecuted by the racists (Ku Klux Klan).

During the war many possession sparished (molte ricchezze svanirono), especially, in the South, but in the North big fortunes were made and financial empire was created by men who rose from nothing (da uomini che venivano dal nulla) (es.: Rockefeller) and embodied (incarnò) the **American dream** (sogno americano): the myth of the **self-made man** (il mito dell'uomo che si è fatto da solo).

Other important events were: the discovery of gold in California, the relevants technological developments and the railroad (ferrovia) that joined (che unì) Atlantic to the Pacific. The America become (diventa) the richest and most modern country in the world.

AMERICAN RENAISSANCE

In New England, the centre of American cultural life, developed (si sviluppò) the movement known as the "**New England Renaissance**". This movement represent the beginning (rappresenta l'inizio) of the American literature.

Example of writers: Herman Melville and Walt Whitman. Also Emily Dickinson was an outstanding figure but isolated (fu una figura di spicco ma isolata).

The most influential figure of American Renaissance was Ralph Waldo **Emerson**. His philosophy, called **Trascendentalism**, encouraged an optimistic and self-reliant point of view which found expression (che trovò espressione) particularly in the poems of Walt Whitman.

THE VICTORIAN NOVEL

During the Victorian Age the **novels** (romanzi) became the most popular form of literature and the main form of entertainment (la maggior forma di intrattenimento) because they were read aloud (ad alta voce) within the family (all'interno della famiglia).

They were first published in instalments (pubblicati a puntate) in the pages of periodicals.

The novelists in their works described society as they saw it (descrivevano la società come la vedevano). They denounced the evils of their society, however their criticism was not radical.

A great number of novels were written **by women** but some women used a male pseudonym (usavano uno pseudonimo maschile) because for a woman it wasn't easy to publish. The woman's novel was an realistic exploration of the daily lives (nella vita quotidiana) and values of women (nei valori femminili) within the family and the community (all'interno della famiglia e della comunità). Also the majority of readers were women because they had more time than men to spend at home.

It's possible to divideVictorian novels into three groups:
1) The **Early-Victorian novel**. Main writer was Charles Dickens. Themes: social and humanitarian.
2) The **Mid- Victorian novel**. Main writers: Bronte sisters and Robert Stevenson. Themes: Romantic and Gothic traditions and psychological vein.
3) The **Late- Victorian novel**. Main writers: Thomas Hardy and Oscar Wilde. Themes: sense of dissatisfaction (insoddisfazione) with values of the age.

The most common features:
- There is a **narrator** that comment and erect a rigid barrier between right and wrong;
- The setting often was the **city**, symbol of industrial civilisation and in the same time expression of anonymous lives;
- The **plot** was **long** and complicated;
- The analysis of the **characters**' inner lives (analisi delle vite interiori dei personaggi);
- In the **final chapter** the events are explained and justified.