

Victorian Period

1837-1901

The Church



- People attended Church of England and other denominations (combined) in equal numbers
- Darwin publishes *The Origin of Species*
- People were strongly influenced by the King James Version of the *Bible* and the *Book of Common Prayer*





Politics

- Queen Victoria succeeded her uncle, William IV, ascending the throne in 1837
- She and her husband, Prince Albert, had nine children
- No interest in social issues or technology
- Was highly partisan and many sought to control her.

Social Developments

- Manufacturing made England dominant in the world
- The financial sector grew
- Inventions accelerated
- The rail network was built between the 1830s and the 1870s



Social Developments

- The population more than doubled between 1812 and 1870
- Questioning authority (king/God) resulted in moral abandon. Darker appetites for literature and entertainment became more mainstream, even in “polite society”



- Both motherhood and family were idealized
- Victorians are credited with “inventing childhood” via efforts to stop child labor and make education compulsory

Social Developments

- "Confident progress"
 - ◆ More enlightened laws
 - ◆ Benefits of generations of wealth at all levels
 - ◆ Greater political stability
- Deference to class and authority
- Respect for the law
- The belief that work is a blessing and a duty that is good for the soul



Literary Trends

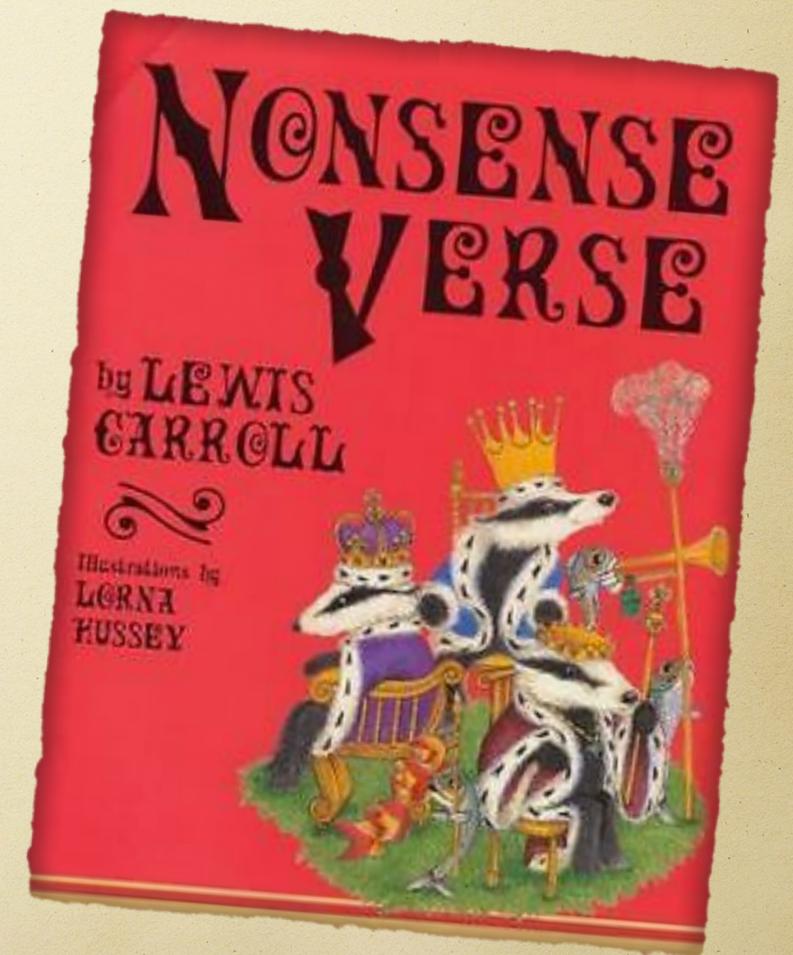
- Romantic Period stressed idealism; Victorian Period stressed realism
- The novel reigned supreme
- Social focus was on care for widows, orphans, and the poor; problems of social class and new wealth; conflict between employers and employees
- A return from solitude to society, from nature to industry, from concepts to issues, from spiritualism to skepticism
- Writers absorbed the language and rhythm of the Bible



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New Literary Forms

- Historical fiction in which the story is set in a recent historical period
- Scientific philosophy went mainstream
- Children's literature
- Nonsense verse was born during this era
- School themes and settings emerged
- Comic opera combined music and humor
- "Nature" writing



Characteristics of Victorian Prose

- Compositions became much longer, resembling treatises more than essays
- Concepts of morality conveyed with satire and humor
- Mary Ann Evans, a.k.a. George Eliot, used a male pen name to distance herself from the female authors of the Romantic and Victorian periods, and the light-hearted romances with which they were associated
- Plots and characters became more complex

Characteristics of Victorian Poetry

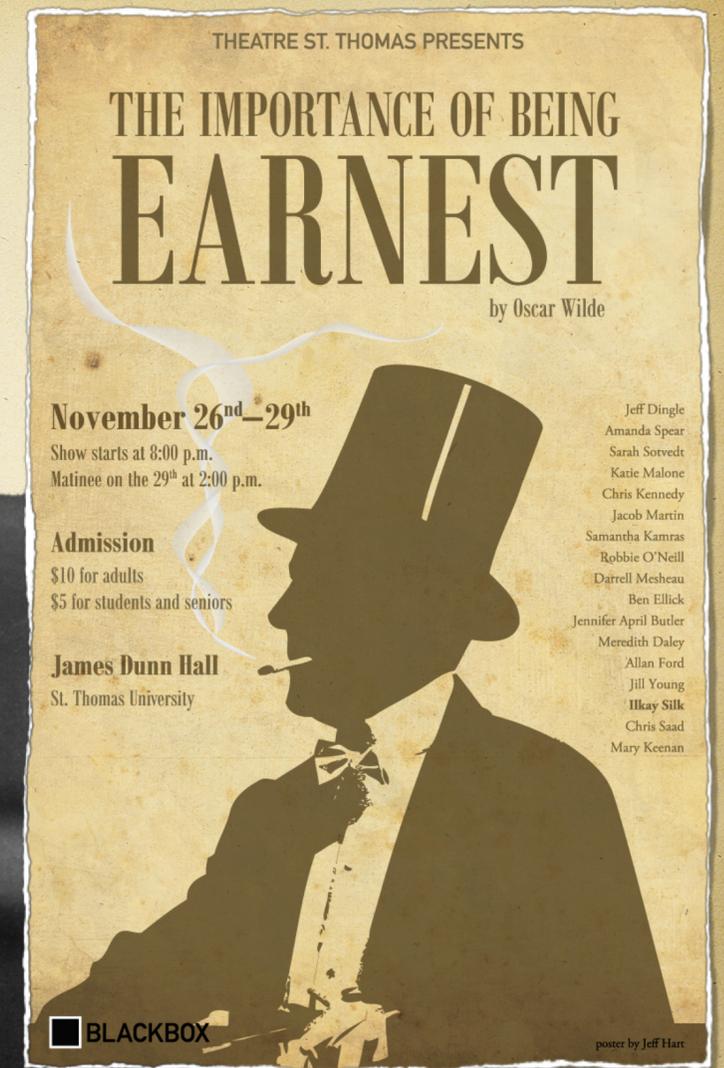
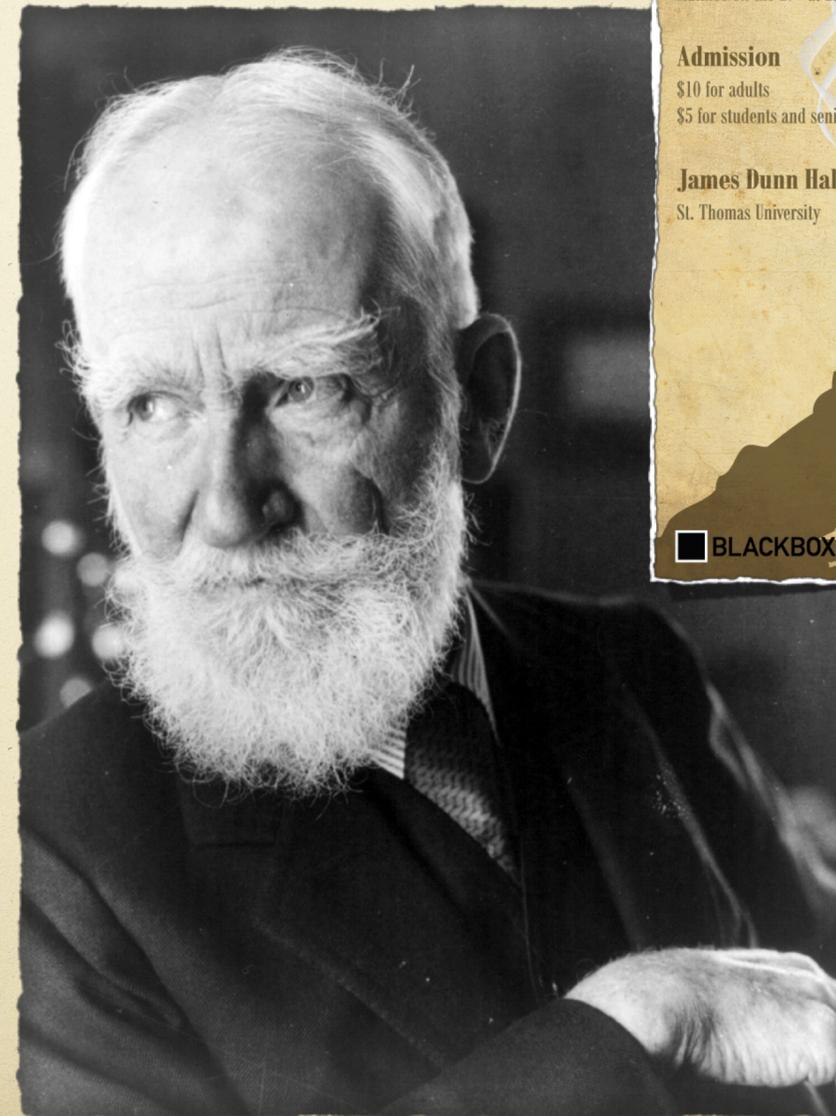
- Myth and folklore incorporated more than in the Neoclassical and Romantic periods
- Religious poetry focuses more on the personal experience than eternal truth
- Themes explored uncomfortable emotions (goes back to complex characters)
- Conflict (i.e., evolution/faith, materialism/social reform)

Major Works of Poetry

- Gerard Manley Hopkins's "My Own Heart," "The Wreck of the Deutschland," and other poems
- Christina Rossetti's "A Better Resurrection," "Remember," and other poems
- Robert Browning
- Alfred Lord Tennyson's "The Charge of the Light Brigade"
- Thomas Hardy - known as a novelist, but wrote poetry all his life. Didn't publish his poetry until 1898

Major Theatrical Works

- George Bernard Shaw (shown right), a music and theater critic, wrote *Pygmalion*
- Gilbert & Sullivan were known for operettas and musicals
- Oscar Wilde's "The Importance of Being Ernest" is still performed today



Major Non-Fiction Works

- Scientific Philosophy: Charles Darwin's *The Origin of Species*
- Politics: John Stuart Mill, one of the most influential thinkers, philosophers, and economists of the 19th century, and an important voice in individual freedom vs. strong state control
- Religion: Tracts for our Times, a series of 90 theological publications produced by the English Oxford movement (Anglican-Catholic revival)

Major Fiction Works

- George Eliot's *Middlemarch* and *Silas Marner*
- Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray*
- William Makepiece Thackeray's *Vanity Fair* was a portrait of British society
- Charlotte Bronte's *Jane Eyre*
- Emily Bronte's *Wuthering Heights*
- Charles Dickens' *Great Expectations*
- Thomas Hardy's *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*
- Anna Sewell's *Black Beauty*