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TEMA

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The Victorian Novel

La novela victoriana.

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Material de elaboración propia a partir de las fuentes oficiales que se citan al final del tema. No es un temario oficial ni sustituye a la normativa publicada.

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1. INTRODUCTION

"It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness." Charles Dickens wrote these words at the opening of A Tale of Two Cities in 1859, and they describe the Victorian age better than the French Revolution they introduce. Britain was the workshop of the world and a country of slums; it was proud of its progress and anxious about its soul. The novel was the form that held both sides together, and that is the central idea of this topic: the Victorian novel was not only entertainment but the main way in which a society read, argued with and imagined itself.

I will first outline the context of the reign of Queen Victoria (1837–1901), paying particular attention to the way novels were produced and sold. Secondly, I will study Charles Dickens, the central figure of the period. Thirdly, I will consider Thackeray, the Brontë sisters and Elizabeth Gaskell. Fourthly, I will examine George Eliot, Anthony Trollope and the sensation novel. Next, I will turn to Thomas Hardy and the last decades of the century. Finally, I will consider the pedagogical and didactic implications of the topic.

Before moving on, I would like to mention the sources consulted: Andrew Sanders's The Short Oxford History of English Literature; Richard D. Altick's The English Common Reader: A Social History of the Mass Reading Public, 1800–1900; Patrick Brantlinger and William B. Thesing's A Companion to the Victorian Novel; and Francis O'Gorman's A Concise Companion to the Victorian Novel. I have checked dates and quotations against the texts of Project Gutenberg. As for the legal framework, I refer to Organic Law 3/2020 (LOMLOE), which amends Organic Law 2/2006 on Education; to Royal Decrees 217/2022 and 243/2022 on Compulsory Secondary Education and Bachillerato; and to the Extremaduran Decrees 110/2022 and 109/2022.