**The Victorian Age (1837 – 1901)**

**HISTORICAL BACKGROUND:**

**AGE OF REFORMS:** the Chartist movement

**PROGRESS:** the Great Exhibition, new social services, transports, medicine; new buildings in London (Gothic and Classical revival).

**COLONIAL EXPANSION:** the British Empire, idea of superiority of the white man (see photograph of Queen Victoria)

**SOCIAL PROBLEMS:** poverty, overcrowded towns, terrible living conditions (workhouses).

**AGE OF CONTRADICTIONS:** the Victorian compromise, a strict moral code that concealed social injustices.

**THE VICTORIAN NOVEL, main features:**
- Read by the middle classes (circulating libraries)
- Often published in instalments
- Set in the city
- With a moral aim

**THE AESTHETIC MOVEMENT:**
- Main principle: art for art’s sake: importance of beauty and pleasure, reaction to the strict Victorian moral code.
- Life as a work of art
- No moral aim, isolation of the artist from contemporary society
- European movement (Huysman, D’Annunzio, Wilde)

**CHARLES DICKENS.** Some features of his novels:
- Set in London, his characters are stereotypes, interest in the working class and in children, moral message.

**OLIVER TWIST:** he analysed 3 different social levels: the workhouse, the criminal world, the middle class. Contrast between children and adults (comparison with Rosso Malpelo by Verga).

**Woman** as the angel of the house, idea of patriarchal family

**Oscar Wilde**

**The Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood**
OSCAR WILDE (1854 – 1900)

During his lifetime he was especially famous for his theatre production (witty comedies that satirized the Victorian upper classes and its hypocrisy). He also wrote short stories and one novel:

THE PICTURE OF DORIAN GRAY:
- Theme of the double
- Cult of beauty
- Hypocrisy of the Victorian middle-class
- Moral aim (in spite of the Aesthetic principle that art shouldn’t have any moral aim).
THE PRERAPHAELITE BROTHERHOOD

- Founded by English painters who had as a model the Italian art of the 13th and 14th centuries (before Raphael)
- They admired its purity and simplicity in contrast to the ugliness of contemporary industrial society.

D.G. ROSSETTI: *La Ghirlandata:*
- It combines the vision of the angelic woman with sensuality.

WILLIAM MORRIS and the Arts and Crafts Movement:
- Revival of handicraft for interior design;
- Idea of pleasure both for the creator of the work and for the viewer (in contrast to the alienation of the assembly line and the ugly products of mass production)
- Patterns inspired by nature