

# popular novels 1850s

popular novels 1850s represent a significant period in literary history, marked by influential works that have shaped the trajectory of modern literature. This decade witnessed the rise of novels that explored social issues, romance, adventure, and gothic elements, reflecting the complexities of the mid-19th century society. The 1850s were characterized by diverse literary styles, with authors ranging from prolific English novelists to emerging American voices. These works not only gained widespread popularity during their time but also left a lasting impact on literary traditions worldwide. This article delves into the most popular novels of the 1850s, examining their themes, authors, and cultural significance. The exploration includes notable titles, key literary figures, and the social context that influenced these enduring classics.

- Notable Popular Novels of the 1850s
- Influential Authors of the 1850s
- Common Themes in 1850s Literature
- Impact and Legacy of Popular Novels 1850s

## Notable Popular Novels of the 1850s

The 1850s produced several novels that achieved immense popularity and critical acclaim. These novels often combined elements of romance, social commentary, and adventure, captivating readers across different regions. Some of the most notable popular novels 1850s include works that remain staples in literary studies today.

## **“Moby-Dick” by Herman Melville ( 1851)**

One of the most renowned novels published in the 1850s is Herman Melville’s “Moby-Dick.” This epic tale of Captain Ahab’s obsessive quest for the white whale explores themes of fate, obsession, and the struggle between man and nature. Although not initially a commercial success, “Moby-Dick” has since become a cornerstone of American literature and is widely studied for its complex narrative and symbolism.

## **“Bleak House” by Charles Dickens ( 1853)**

Charles Dickens continued to dominate the literary scene with “Bleak House,” a novel that critiques the British legal system and Victorian society. Serialized throughout the early 1850s, this novel blends mystery, social criticism, and character-driven storytelling, making it one of Dickens’ most enduring works and a popular novel of the 1850s.

## **Other Popular Novels**

- “The Scarlet Letter” by Nathaniel Hawthorne (1850) – A profound exploration of sin, guilt, and redemption set in Puritan New England.
- “North and South” by Elizabeth Gaskell (1854-1855) – A novel highlighting class conflict and industrialization in England.
- “David Copperfield” by Charles Dickens (1850) – Although serialized earlier, its popularity extended well into the 1850s, showcasing Dickens’ semi-autobiographical storytelling.

# Influential Authors of the 1850s

The decade's popular novels were shaped by a number of influential authors whose styles and themes defined the era. These writers contributed significantly to the literary culture of the 1850s, each bringing unique perspectives and innovations to the novel form.

## Herman Melville

Herman Melville's work in the 1850s, especially "Moby-Dick," reflects a deep engagement with philosophical and existential questions. Melville's narrative style and thematic depth challenged the conventions of popular fiction, blending adventure with profound symbolism.

## Charles Dickens

Charles Dickens remained a literary giant during the 1850s, producing works that combined social critique with compelling storytelling. His ability to create memorable characters and intricate plots ensured his novels' popularity among a broad readership.

## Elizabeth Gaskell

Elizabeth Gaskell emerged as a significant voice in the 1850s, addressing social issues such as industrialization and class disparity. Her novels often portrayed the struggles of the working class and highlighted the tensions between different social groups.

## Common Themes in 1850s Literature

The popular novels 1850s commonly explored themes that resonated with contemporary readers and reflected societal concerns. These themes contributed to the novels' enduring appeal and relevance.

## **Social Critique and Reform**

Many novels from the 1850s focused on exposing social injustices and advocating for reform. Issues like poverty, class conflict, and legal corruption were frequently examined, particularly in works by Dickens and Gaskell.

## **Romance and Morality**

Romantic relationships often served as central plot elements, intertwined with moral dilemmas and societal expectations. Novels like “The Scarlet Letter” explored the consequences of personal choices within rigid moral frameworks.

## **Adventure and Exploration**

The spirit of adventure and human confrontation with nature was a significant motif, exemplified by “Moby-Dick.” Such narratives combined thrilling plots with meditations on humanity’s place in the world.

## **Impact and Legacy of Popular Novels 1850s**

The popular novels of the 1850s have had a profound and lasting impact on literature and culture. They influenced subsequent generations of writers and helped to shape the novel as a form capable of addressing complex social and philosophical issues.

## **Literary Influence**

These novels expanded the boundaries of storytelling, blending realism with symbolism and social commentary. Their innovative narrative techniques and thematic depth paved the way for modern literary movements.

## Cultural Significance

Beyond literature, the popular novels 1850s contributed to public discourse on morality, justice, and social change. They offered readers insights into the challenges of their time while entertaining with compelling narratives.

## Enduring Popularity

Many novels from the 1850s remain widely read and studied today. Their continued popularity attests to their artistic merit and the universal themes they address, making them essential components of the literary canon.

## Frequently Asked Questions

### What were some of the most popular novels published in the 1850s?

Some of the most popular novels published in the 1850s include "Moby-Dick" by Herman Melville (1851), "Bleak House" by Charles Dickens (1853), "Madame Bovary" by Gustave Flaubert (1856), and "The Scarlet Letter" by Nathaniel Hawthorne (1850).

### Who were prominent novelists in the 1850s?

Prominent novelists in the 1850s included Charles Dickens, Herman Melville, Gustave Flaubert, Nathaniel Hawthorne, and Elizabeth Gaskell, among others.

### What literary themes were common in popular novels of the 1850s?

Common literary themes in popular novels of the 1850s included social criticism, moral complexity, romanticism, realism, and explorations of individual identity and societal constraints.

## How did the novel "Moby-Dick" reflect the trends of 1850s literature?

"Moby-Dick" reflected 1850s literary trends through its complex symbolism, exploration of human obsession, and blending of realism with philosophical and existential themes, marking a significant work in American Romanticism.

## Were there any significant female novelists popular in the 1850s?

Yes, female novelists such as Elizabeth Gaskell and George Eliot (Mary Ann Evans) gained popularity in the 1850s, contributing important works that combined social critique with rich character development.

## How did serialization impact the popularity of novels in the 1850s?

Serialization, publishing novels in installments in magazines or newspapers, greatly increased the popularity and accessibility of novels in the 1850s, allowing authors like Charles Dickens to reach a broad audience and build suspense over time.

## Additional Resources

### 1. *Bleak House*

Charles Dickens' "Bleak House," published in the early 1850s, is a complex and multi-layered novel that explores the intricacies of the English legal system. The story revolves around the long-running court case of Jarndyce and Jarndyce and the impact it has on various characters. Dickens uses his sharp social critique to expose the inefficiencies and corruption within the Chancery Court, while weaving a compelling narrative filled with mystery and memorable characters.

### 2. *David Copperfield*

Though initially serialized in the late 1840s and early 1850s, Charles Dickens' "David Copperfield" is a semi-autobiographical novel that follows the life of its titular character from childhood to maturity. The

novel explores themes of personal growth, social class, and resilience through a vivid cast of characters. It remains one of Dickens' most beloved works, celebrated for its emotional depth and rich storytelling.

### 3. *The Scarlet Letter*

Nathaniel Hawthorne's "The Scarlet Letter," published in 1850, is a seminal work of American literature that delves into themes of sin, guilt, and redemption in a Puritan New England community. The story centers around Hester Prynne, who is publicly shamed and forced to wear a scarlet "A" for adultery. Hawthorne's exploration of moral complexity and social judgment has made this novel a timeless classic.

### 4. *Hard Times*

Charles Dickens' "Hard Times," published in 1854, critiques the industrial revolution and its effects on society, particularly focusing on the fictional Coketown. The novel contrasts the utilitarian philosophy of the time with the human need for imagination and compassion. Dickens portrays the harsh realities of industrial life, highlighting the struggles of both workers and the middle class.

### 5. *Little Women*

Louisa May Alcott's "Little Women," published in 1868 but written with influences from earlier decades including the 1850s, tells the story of the four March sisters growing up during the American Civil War era. The novel explores themes of family, love, and personal development, emphasizing the strength and individuality of each sister. It has become a beloved classic for its warm portrayal of domestic life and female empowerment.

### 6. *Wuthering Heights*

Emily Brontë's "Wuthering Heights," published posthumously in 1847 but widely influential throughout the 1850s, is a dark and passionate tale of love and revenge on the Yorkshire moors. The novel's complex narrative structure and intense emotions set it apart from other Victorian novels. Its exploration of human nature, obsession, and the supernatural continues to captivate readers.

### 7. *Jane Eyre*

Charlotte Brontë's "Jane Eyre," published in 1847, had a profound impact on the literary world throughout the 1850s and beyond. The novel follows the life of the orphaned Jane Eyre, her moral and emotional growth, and her passionate romance with Mr. Rochester. It is celebrated for its strong, independent female protagonist and its critique of class and gender inequality.

#### 8. *Uncle Tom's Cabin*

Harriet Beecher Stowe's "Uncle Tom's Cabin," published in 1852, is a powerful anti-slavery novel that had a significant impact on attitudes toward slavery in the United States. The story centers on Uncle Tom, a dignified enslaved man, and portrays the brutal realities of slavery and the moral imperative for abolition. The novel galvanized abolitionist sentiment and remains a crucial work in American literary history.

#### 9. *Mary Barton*

Elizabeth Gaskell's "Mary Barton," published in 1848 but influential into the 1850s, offers a vivid depiction of working-class life in industrial Manchester. The novel explores social injustice, poverty, and the struggles of the laboring class through the eyes of Mary Barton and her family. Gaskell's compassionate storytelling sheds light on the human cost of industrial progress and social inequality.

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2008-11-27 Analyzing novels by women writers from the 1850s to the 1930s, this book argues that representations of mobility offer a fruitful way to explore the location of women within modernity and, specifically, the opportunities for (or limitations on) women's agency in this period, considering the mobility of the female subject in the city and beyond.

**popular novels 1850s: Bachelors, Manhood, and the Novel, 1850-1925** Katherine V. Snyder, 1999-09-02 Katherine Snyder's study explores the significance of the bachelor narrator, a prevalent but little-recognised figure in premodernist and modernist fiction by male authors, including Hawthorne, James, Conrad, Ford and Fitzgerald. Snyder demonstrates that bachelors functioned in cultural and literary discourse as threshold figures who, by crossing the shifting, permeable boundaries of bourgeois domesticity, highlighted the limits of conventional masculinity. The very marginality of the figure, Snyder argues, effects a critique of gendered norms of manhood, while the symbolic function of marriage as a means of plot resolution is also made more complex by the presence of the single man. Bachelor figures made, moreover, an ideal narrative device for male authors who themselves occupied vexed cultural positions. By attending to the gendered identities and relations at issue in these narratives, Snyder's study discloses the aesthetic and political underpinnings of the traditional canon of English and American male modernism.

**popular novels 1850s: English Fiction and the Evolution of Language, 1850-1914** Will Abberley, 2015-05-21 Explores how Victorian fiction and science imagined the evolution of language, from primordial noise to modern English.

**popular novels 1850s: Women's History: Britain, 1850-1945** June Purvis, 2008

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**popular novels 1850s: Science, Medicine, and Aristocratic Lineage in Victorian Popular Fiction** Abigail Boucher, 2023-08-31 *Science, Medicine, and Aristocratic Lineage in Victorian Popular Fiction* explores the dialogue between popular literature and medical and scientific discourse in terms of how they represent the highly visible and pathologized British aristocratic body. This book explores and complicates the two major portrayals of aristocrats in nineteenth-century literature: that of the medicalised, frail, debauched, and diseased aristocrat, and that of the heroic, active, beautiful 'noble', both of which are frequent and resonant in popular fiction of the long nineteenth century. Abigail Boucher argues that the concept of class in the long nineteenth century implicitly includes notions of blood, lineage, and bodily 'correctness', and that 'class' was therefore frequently portrayed as an empirical, scientific, and medical certainty. Due to their elevated and highly visible social positions, both historical and fictional aristocrats were frequently pathologized in the public mind and watched for signs of physical excellence or deviance. Using popular fiction, Boucher establishes patterns across decades, genres, and demographics and considers how these patterns react to, normalise, or feed into the advent of new scientific and medical understandings.

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**popular novels 1850s: Timelines of American Women's History** Sue Heinemann, 1996 Spanning five hundred years of American history, this definitive reference provides an incisive look

at the contributions that women have made to the social, cultural, political, economic, and scientific development of the United States. Original.

**popular novels 1850s:** *Swedish Women's Writing, 1850-1995* Helena Forsås-Scott, 1997-01-01 Provides a survey of women's writing in Sweden, from the beginnings of the struggle for emancipation in the 1850s to the present day. These writers are seen within the political, cultural and economic context of women's lives. Modern critical currents are also assessed and Swedish feminist criticism is considered alongside the French and American traditions.

**popular novels 1850s:** *A History of American Magazines, Volume II: 1850-1865* Frank Luther Mott, 1938 The first volume of this work, covering the period from 1741-1850, was issued in 1931 by another publisher, and is reissued now without change, under our imprint. The second volume covers the period from 1850 to 1865; the third volume, the period from 1865 to 1885. For each chronological period, Mr. Mott has provided a running history which notes the occurrence of the chief general magazines and the developments in the field of class periodicals, as well as publishing conditions during that period, the development of circulations, advertising, payments to contributors, reader attitudes, changing formats, styles and processes of illustration, and the like. Then in a supplement to that running history, he offers historical sketches of the chief magazines which flourished in the period. These sketches extend far beyond the chronological limitations of the period. The second and third volumes present, altogether, separate sketches of seventy-six magazines, including *The North American Review*, *The Youth's Companion*, *The Liberator*, *The Independent*, *Harper's Monthly*, *Leslie's Weekly*, *Harper's Weekly*, *The Atlantic Monthly*, *St. Nicholas*, and *Puck*. The whole is an unusual mirror of American civilization.

**popular novels 1850s:** *The American Novel to 1870* J. Gerald Kennedy, Leland S. Person, 2014 The American Revolution and the Civil War bracket roughly eight decades of formative change in a republic created in 1776 by a gesture that was both rhetorical and performative. The subsequent construction of U.S. national identity influenced virtually all art forms, especially prose fiction, until internal conflict disrupted the project of nation-building. This volume reassesses, in an authoritative way, the principal forms and features of the emerging American novel. It will include chapters on: the beginnings of the novel in the US; the novel and nation-building; the publishing industry; leading novelists of Antebellum America; eminent early American novels; cultural influences on the novel; and subgenres within the novel form during this period. This book is the first of the three proposed US volumes that will make up Oxford's ambitious new twelve-volume literary resource, *The Oxford History of the Novel in English (OHONE)*, a venture being commissioned and administered on both sides of the Atlantic.

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**popular novels 1850s:** *Garibaldi* Lucy Riall, 2008-10-20 Giuseppe Garibaldi, the Italian revolutionary leader and popular hero, was among the best-known figures of the nineteenth century. This book seeks to examine his life and the making of his cult, to assess its impact, and understand its surprising success. For thirty years Garibaldi was involved in every combative event in Italy. His greatest moment came in 1860, when he defended a revolution in Sicily and provoked the collapse of the Bourbon monarchy, the overthrow of papal power in central Italy, and the creation of the Italian nation state. It made him a global icon, representing strength, bravery, manliness, saintliness, and a spirit of adventure. Handsome, flamboyant, and sexually attractive, he was worshiped in life and

became a cult figure after his death in 1882. Lucy Riall shows that the emerging cult of Garibaldi was initially conceived by revolutionaries intent on overthrowing the status quo, that it was also the result of a collaborative effort involving writers, artists, actors, and publishers, and that it became genuinely and enduringly popular among a broad public. The book demonstrates that Garibaldi played an integral part in fashioning and promoting himself as a new kind of “charismatic” political hero. It analyzes the way the Garibaldi myth has been harnessed both to legitimize and to challenge national political structures. And it identifies elements of Garibaldi’s political style appropriated by political leaders around the world, including Mussolini and Che Guevara.

**popular novels 1850s: Blockbusters of Victorian Theater, 1850-1910** Paul Fryer, 2023-11-15 This edited collection of essays details a wide-ranging selection of some of the most sensationally successful theatre productions of the long Victorian era, the real blockbusters of the age. Ranging from the world of operetta and music hall to spectacular drama and sensational melodrama, the productions included provide the reader with definitive proof that the phenomenon of the smash hit show is not restricted to modern Broadway. This is a world that encompassed the ground-breaking stage technology of Ben Hur, the wide political impact of Uncle Tom's Cabin and the sheer creative originality of L'Enfant Prodigue. Supporting the star system, productions featured some of the greatest names of the period - Sir Henry Irving, Sir Johnston Forbes Robertson, James O'Neill and Dion Boucicault. This was the very dawning of a new media age, which saw many of the productions transfer to the new world of silent cinema for the very first time

**popular novels 1850s: Fiction and ‘The Woman Question’ from 1850 to 1930** W. R. Owens, Alexis Weedon, Nicola Darwood, 2020-07-02 This book is about how ‘The Woman Question’ was represented in works of fiction published between 1850 and 1930. The essays here offer a wide-ranging and original approach to the ways in which literature shaped perceptions of the roles and position of women in society. Debates over ‘The Woman Question’ encompassed not only the struggle for voting rights, but gender equality more widely. The book reaches beyond the usual canonical texts to focus on writers who have, in the main, attracted relatively little critical attention in recent years: Stella Benson, Kate Chopin, Marie Corelli, Dinah Mulock Craik, Clemence Dane, Arthur Conan Doyle, George Gissing, Ouida, and William Hale White (who wrote under the pseudonym ‘Mark Rutherford’). These writers dealt imaginatively with issues such as marriage, motherhood, sexual desire, adultery and suffrage, and they represented female characters who, in varying degrees and with mixed success, sought to defy the social, sexual and political constraints placed upon them. The collection as a whole demonstrates how fiction could contribute in striking and memorable ways to debates over gender equality—debates which continue to have relevance in the twenty-first century.

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