

Class 3 : Four Victorian Novelists

B. Romance: Charlotte Brontë

1. Class title: Four Victorian Novelists

That first hour was all Victorian-era paintings, mostly narrative, and mostly British. It seems obvious to continue with literary Victorian narrative, with scenes from four 19th-century novels. They are from different decades, and set in different parts of the country. It would be lovely to open entire chapters in front of us, read them, and compare, but that would take all week! So instead we are going to compare scenes from various films. I don't expect we'll be particularly subtle about it; let's take a single task: to discuss how the director's choice of realistic detail contributes to the storytelling in each case.

2. Covers of *Jane Eyre*

I have two films of *Jane Eyre* (1847) by **Charlotte Brontë** (1816–55). One is the 1997 production by **Franco Zeffirelli**, with **Charlotte Gainsbourg** as Jane, and **William Hurt** as Rochester. The other is more recent, from 2011, directed by **Cary Fukunaga**, with **Mia Wasikowska** as Jane and **Michael Fassbender** as Rochester. In each case, I shall show the scene when Jane first meets Rochester on the moors, not realizing that he is her employer. This, of course, is an outdoor setting, which we didn't really see in our paintings, but I think we can still discuss how each director balances naturalistic detail with atmosphere.

3. Zeffirelli: *Jane Eyre* (1997), first meeting
4. Fukunaga: *Jane Eyre* (2011), first meeting
5. Covers of *Jane Eyre* (repeat)

C. Industry: Dickens and Gaskell

6. Covers of *Hard Times* and *North and South*

One of the last pictures I showed before the break was *After the Strike* by José Uría. A strike that turns violent is a climactic event in the 1855 novel *North and South* by **Elizabeth Gaskell** (1810–65). It is far more in the vein of social realism than *Jane Eyre*, or indeed most novels of the period, but there is one notable exception. Gaskell serialized her novel in the weekly magazine *Household Words*, edited by **Charles Dickens** (1812–70). Just a few months before, Dickens had serialized his own novel *Hard Times*, which is also set in an industrial city, most probably based on Manchester. I have got British television productions of both of them. *Hard Times* comes from 1977, and was directed by **John Irvin**. *North and South* comes from 2004, directed by **Brian Percival**.

We shall watch some scene-setting sequences from each production. The one from *Hard Times* comes just after the credits; the circus and school-room both feature in the novel as well; I have tacked on a short sequence from a little later showing the inside of the mill itself. The scene from *North and South* comes a little later in the story, as the heroine **Margaret Hale (Daniela Denby-Ashe)** is uprooted from the comfortable South and brought North by her father, a former Anglican vicar. It also links two sections and is rather longer, because I wanted to follow Margaret into the mill itself, and into contact with Gaskell's equivalent of Mr. Rochester, **John Thornton (Richard Armitage)**. Again, how does each director use realism?

7. Irvin: *Hard Times* (1997), opening sequence
8. Percival: *North and South* (2004), Margaret arrives in Milton
9. Covers of *Hard Times* and *North and South* (repeat)

D. Wessex: Thomas Hardy

10. Covers of *Far from the Madding Crowd*

Far from the Madding Crowd (1874) is the only novel by **Thomas Hardy** (1840–1928) to end happily; it was his first success. Like all his other novels, it is set in his imaginary county of **Wessex**, roughly Somerset and Devon in Southwest England. The heroine **Bathsheba Everdene** inherits a sheep farm, which she manages with difficulty. Her beauty makes her subject to the attentions of many men, and she makes some unwise choices. There is a famous film by **John Schlesinger** from 1967 with **Julie Christie** as Bathsheba; I also have a 2015 production by **Thomas Vinterberg**, starring **Carey Mulligan**.

Much of each film is set around sheep farms, but they come to a climax in a ball in the house of the lonely but prosperous landowner **William Boldwood**, who intends to use it to propose to Bathsheba, in full confidence that she will accept. So I am interested in how each director uses the trappings of the ball and the rich house to frame the ensuing drama. Two other men also feature in this scene. One is **Gabriel Oak**, a former shepherd who has become her friend and confidant (and whom she will eventually realize she has been in love with all along). The other is her ne'er-do-well husband **Frank Troy**, a former army sergeant whom she married on impulse, only to see him almost destroy her; he is believed to have drowned at sea, so his reappearance now takes everybody by surprise. The men in the 1967 version are played by **Peter Finch** (Boldwood), **Alan Bates** (Gabriel), and **Terence Stamp** (Troy), and in the 2015 version by **Michael Sheen**, **Matthias Schoenaerts**, and **Tom Sturridge** respectively.

11. Schlesinger: *Far from the Madding Crowd* (1967), Boldwood's ball
12. Vinterberg: *Far from the Madding Crowd* (2015), Boldwood's ball
13. Covers of *Far from the Madding Crowd* (repeat)