

University Mohammed Seddik Benyahia, Jijel

Faculty of Letters and Languages

Department of English

Third Year Classes

Groups: 1-6

Literary Texts



Chapter One

Introduction into Modernism

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Lecture One: Introduction into Modernism in Literature

I. The Realistic Tradition:

Realism dates to the 1850's but its dominance over the British fiction reached its peak during the Victorian era. As a movement in the arts, realism refers to the faithful representation of reality in artistic and literary production. It is defined as

a common tendency from the early nineteenth century onwards to represent real life in fiction and painting, and to do so using common conventions of representation...Realism is often associated with representing average experience - the lives of middle-class characters who do little that is unusual or exciting; it prefers an objective standpoint, and is illusionist in that it asks its readers to forget that they are reading fiction. (Key Concepts in Literary Theory, 85-86)

In fiction, writers used objective writing that portrays characters in their ordinary life situations and leads the readers to identify with them. Characters usually stand for their classes (middle or lower) and gain more importance than action.

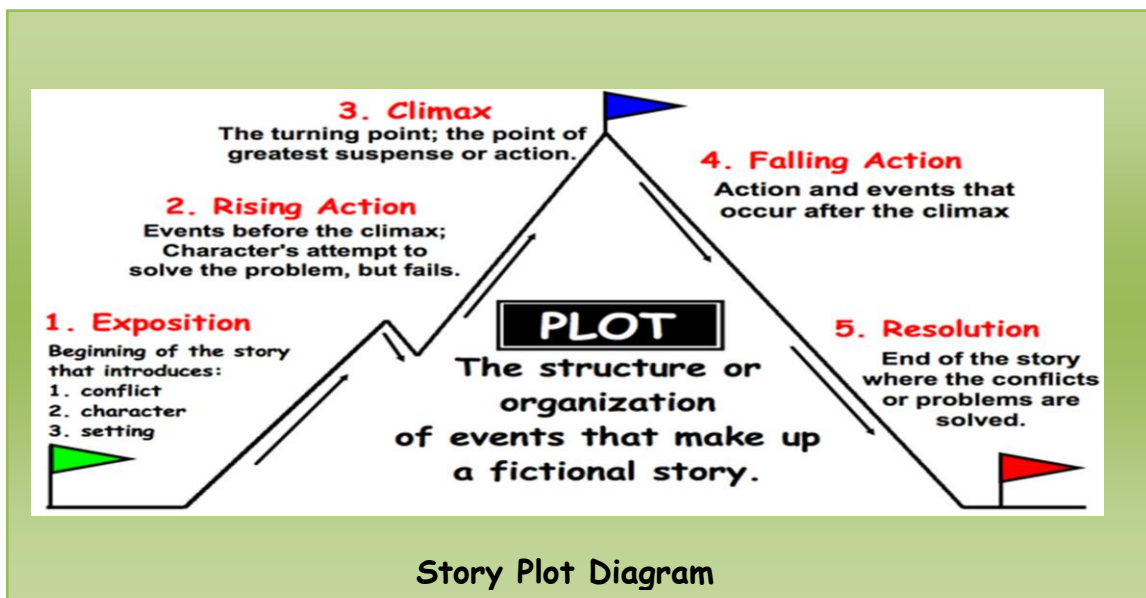
Realistic conventions of writing fiction made it easy for readers to identify with characters as real people, understand their motives and anticipate the resolutions of the plots. Such is done through the following:

A- Narration:

Victorian writers use omniscient narrators who are 'all-knowing' and provide the readers with explanations of the motives behind the action the fact that allows the readers to make judgments and predictions while reading the story.

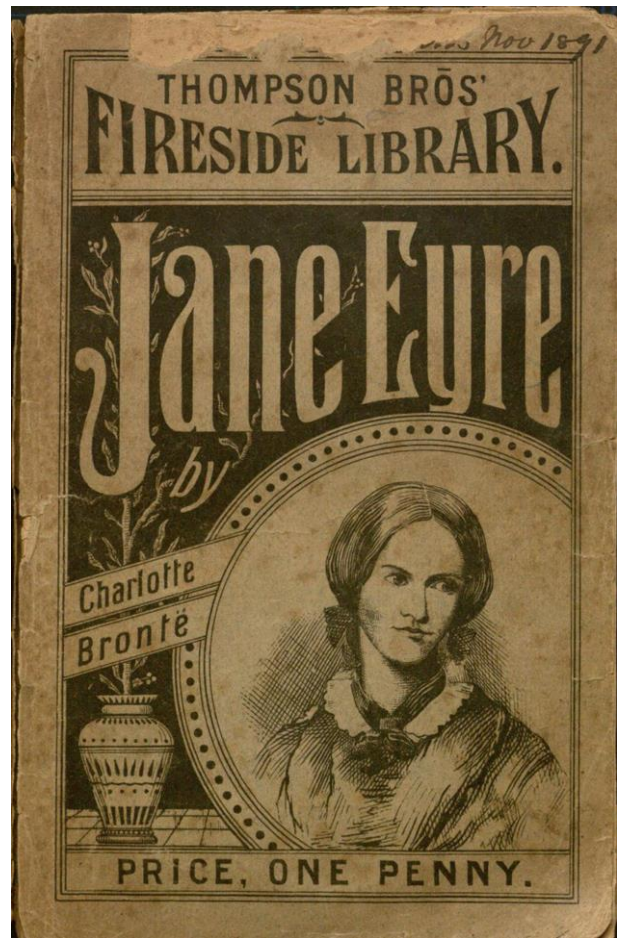
B- The Plot:

Victorian fiction is written in chronological plots that start at a date and progress to the future with the rising action. When the action reaches the climax, the resolution is usually logical and can be easily determined by the reader. Reading Victorian fiction was a satisfactory entertaining act that gave readers the possibility to witness the story with the characters that were very close to real people in their representations.



c- The Probability of the Events:

Victorian novelists constructed their plots in a way that makes the stories closer to reality than to imagination. The probability of action existed in the majority of Victorian fiction (despite the use of some supernatural elements by authors like Charlotte Brontë in *Jane Eyre*, they appear interweaved within a realistic frame). Moreover, realistic fiction presented contemporary life and issues related to everyday problems, industrial revolution, poverty, nobility and family life.



Although some Victorian classics narrate stories that happened decades before their publication (*Vanity Fair* (1847-8), *Wuthering Heights* (1847), *Jane Eyre* (1847)), the majority of Victorian novels explicitly addressed the contemporary condition including Dickens' *Hard Times* (1854), [Elizabeth Gaskell's](#) *North and South* (1854-5), Charles Kingsley's *Alton Locke* (1850) and Benjamin Disraeli's *Sybil* (1845).

II. Subtypes of the Victorian Novel:

Writing literature became a business in the Victorian era and fiction dominated the literary production. The major subtypes of the Victorian novel are mentioned in the following table:



WILLIAM MORRIS'S STUDY AT KELMSCOTT HOUSE, HAMMERSMITH. From an unpublished photograph by Henry Walter Dr. Cook

Type of Novel	Author	Title	Publication Date
-Family Life	-Jane Austen	- <i>Sense and Sensibility</i>	-1795
-Historical Novel	-Walter Scott	- <i>Waverley</i>	-1814
-Social Novel			
-(poverty, institutions, work)	-Charles Dickens	- <i>Hard Times</i>	-1854
-(nobility)	-William Makepeace Thackeray	- <i>Vanity Fair</i>	-1847-8
-Romance	-Charlotte Brontë	- <i>Wuthering Heights</i>	-1847
	-William Wilkie		

-Detective	Collins	<i>-The Woman in White</i>	-1860
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Novelists made living by writing fiction. While George Eliot and Charles Dickens became famous and rich, others such as Mathew Arnold, Charles Kingsley had to depend on other jobs for living.

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Lecture Two: Introduction into Modernism

I. The Shift towards Modernism

Many of the Victorian perceptions of objectivity and certainty lost their value near the end of the nineteenth century.



A variety of external factors led to a shift in the arts from realistic conventions of creation to a search for new forms and subjects adequate to the new era. The major factors that led to the appearance of Modernism can be summarised as follows:

a- Political and Social Changes:

- **Queen Victoria's Jubilee (1887):** The celebration of the fiftieth anniversary of Queen Victoria's reign marked a beginning of a new era of doubt and consciousness among intellectuals.
- **Change in Life Style (1911):** By 1911, 70% of the British population has moved to live in the cities as a result of the industrial revolution. This led to a loss of the sense of community and a rise of individualism in society.
- **Disintegration of the British Empire:** The British Empire that reached 13 million square miles started to lose some of its

colonies especially after the Boer War (1899-1902) in South Africa. Some of the colonies were encouraged to rebel against the British rule.

- **The Change in Parliament:** The socialist party grew to exert more power and represent the interests of middle and lower classes.
- **WWI:** The damage caused by WWI led to a spread of pessimism among intellectuals who questioned the nobility of the war especially when the soldiers in the front lines sent letters home describing the horror of the war. The destruction caused by the war led to the appearance of new ideological attractions such as Marxism.
- **Universal Suffrage for Women (1928):** Women gained the right to vote which will set the ground for other achievements in the public sphere.

b- Cultural Changes:

- **Charles Darwin's On the Origins of Species (1859):** The publication of Charles Darwin's work came as a shock for it put into question the existence of God, denied the church its legitimacy and power and made serious doubts about the human nature. It also influenced scientific and philosophical thinking and spread globally.
- **Education Act (1870):** When education became compulsory for everyone between 5 and 13, literacy rose quickly, however, the reading public grew into two distinct classes: the literate masses who could read newspapers and magazines and the

intellectuals who understood more sophisticated works that demanded background knowledge in various fields.

- **Split in Literature:** The literature produced at the beginning of the Twentieth century also split into two categories: popular genres for the masses and more highly experimental genres for the elite.
- **Development of artistic Expression:** Other forms of expression developed including painting, music, TV and cinema. There was an aesthetic interaction between all the modes of artistic creation new techniques were borrowed from or by literature.
- **New Theories in Psychology:** Sigmund Freud's theories in psychoanalysis had great influence on intellectuals at the wake of the Twentieth century. Writers became interested in the human mind and its workings and aimed to represent it in literature. Internal lives of characters gained importance over traditional plots, speech and action.

The aforementioned changes led to a sense of disillusionment, despair and pessimism among intellectuals who started asking questions about moral values, humanity and art. Most of them felt alienated from the masses that were concerned with basic needs of survival and did not question the directions that political, economic and social systems took and their devastating results.

Questions to Consider:

- 1- In what ways do the realistic conventions of literary production fail to represent the new era?
- 2- Did society remain the guardian of morality?
- 3- In what ways does Victorian stoicism come to an end at the late Nineteenth century?

Suggested Readings:

“Broken Mirrors: The First World War and Modernist Literature” by Randall Stevenson

<https://www.bl.uk/20th-century-literature/articles/broken-mirrors-the-first-world-war-and-modernist-literature>

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