

Victorian Challenge 2011

Literature

The time for New Year's resolutions is almost upon us, so what are you going to do? Edinburgh-based writer and blogger Bethany Anderson (23), has set up a [Victorian Reading Challenge](#) to keep her busy.

"I had a lovely gift set of abridged classics as a child, and progressed onto the full novels in my teens," Bethany explained.

"Victorian writers examined all aspects of humanity; the highs and lows of society, the roles of gender, the place of religion and/or lack of in the world. There's so much going on, and it's all perceived so beautifully!"

There are four levels to the challenge. 'Sense and Sensibility' means reading 1-4 books, 'Great Expectations' is 5-9, 'Hard Times' is 10-14, and 'Desperate Remedies' involves reading 15 or more classics from the period.

Bethany, of course, is reading fifteen books, almost all by English writers.

"That was absolutely deliberate," she says. "Although it's fascinating to see how other culture and countries coped with the 19th century, the Victorian experience is something that was only really felt by writers living in the UK."

✘ It's not hard to guess who Bethany's favourite Victorian author might be. Her list includes four books by Thomas Hardy. But why?

"He's been my favourite author since I read Tess of the d'Urbervilles when I was 14. Most of my academic career was focused on Hardy's works – from standard grade essays to my MA

dissertation.

Still, the more I read and learn, the more I love his work. Hardy's characters are real, the difficulties they face are real, and yet his novels have a beautiful tragic quality."

His characters have almost a soap-like quality, we suggest, which means they can still be compelling to an audience in 2011.

"Absolutely! When I was reading *Jude the Obscure* in my final year at high school, I always updated my friends about what was happening next. My gossiping was met with, 'Oh my God! Arabella did that?' etc etc. Hardy deals with very human concepts of pain, loss and love. All that stuff is timeless."

So far, over forty people have signed up.

"Lots of the people who have joined in are encouraging themselves to read classics that they've wanted to pick up for years. Others, like myself, are already huge fans of Victorian literature and are using it as a way to get into it further. It's interesting to see how different the American readers' lists are compared with that of British readers – 'Victorian literature' seems to conjure up different authors for each."

You can follow the challenge or sign up to take part through Bethany's blog, [here](#). Good luck!