

## NEGATIVE PORTRAIT OF VICTORIAN SOCIETY IN THE WORKS OF THOMAS HARDY

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**Abstract:** *This article examines the negative portrait of Victorian society in the works of Thomas Hardy. Through an analysis of the writer's works, this article explores Hardy's critique of social norms, values, and inequalities prevalent in Victorian England. Compared to other authors of the period, this analysis highlights the continuing relevance of Hardy's criticism and its implications for modern society.*

**Key words:** *Victorian society, a strict social hierarchy, Victorian era, gender roles, critical portrayal, social constraints, irony, a melancholy polemic, binary figures, negative perspective.*

**Аннотация:** *В данной статье рассматривается негативный портрет викторианского общества в творчестве Томаса Харди. Посредством анализа произведений писателя в этой статье исследуется критика Харди социальных норм, ценностей и неравенства, распространенных в викторианской Англии. По сравнению с другими авторами того периода, этот анализ подчеркивает сохраняющуюся актуальность критики Харди и ее последствия для современного общества.*

**Ключевые слова:** *Викторианское общество, строгая социальная иерархия, викторианская эпоха, гендерных роли, критическое изображение, социальные ограничения, ирония, меланхолическая полемика, негативная перспектива.*

**Izoh:** *Ushbu maqola Tomas Hardi asarlarida Viktoriya jamiyatining salbiy tasvirini o'rganadi. Yozuvchining asarlarini tahlil qilish orqali bu maqola Hardining Viktoriya davridagi Angliyada keng tarqalgan ijtimoiy me'yorlar, qadriyatlar va tengsizliklar haqidagi tanqidini o'rganadi. Davrning boshqa mualliflari bilan taqqoslash, bu tahlil Hardi tanqidining doimiy dolzarbligini va uning zamonaviy jamiyat uchun ta'sirini ta'kidlaydi.*

**Kalit so`zlar:** *Viktoriya jamiyati, qat'iy ijtimoiy ierarxiya, Viktoriya davri, gender rollari, tanqidiy tasvir, ijtimoiy cheklovlar, ironiya, g'amgin polemika, salbiy nuqtai nazar.*

Victorian society refers to the period of British history during the reign of Queen Victoria, from 1837 to 1901. It was a time of significant social, economic, and political change, marked by industrialization, urbanization, and the growth of the middle class. The Victorian era was characterized by a strict social hierarchy, with the upper class consisting of aristocrats and wealthy landowners, followed by the middle class, which included professionals such as doctors and lawyers, and then the working class, which comprised laborers and factory workers. Women were expected to conform to strict gender roles, with marriage and motherhood being their primary goals in life. Education for women was limited, and they were excluded from many professions. Child labor was prevalent during this era, with children as young as five or six working in factories and mines. The conditions were often dangerous and unsanitary. Despite the economic growth of the era, poverty and inequality were widespread. Many people lived in overcrowded slums, with little access to healthcare or education. The Victorian era was also marked by significant cultural changes, including the rise of the novel as a popular form of literature and the emergence of new art movements such as Pre-Raphaelitism. Overall, Victorian society was complex and multifaceted, with both positive and negative aspects. It continues to be studied and debated by scholars today.

Considered a Victorian realist, Hardy examines the social constraints on the lives of those living in Victorian England, and criticizes those beliefs, especially those relating to marriage, education and religion, that limited people's lives and caused unhappiness. Such unhappiness, and the suffering it brings, is seen by poet Philip Larkin as central in Hardy's works: 'What is the intensely maturing experience of which Hardy's modern man is most sensible? In my view it is suffering, or sadness, and extended consideration of the centrality of suffering in Hardy's work should be the first duty of the true critic for which the work is still waiting Any approach to his work, as to any writer's work, must seek first of all to determine what element is peculiarly his, which imaginative note he strikes most plangently, and to deny that in this

case it is the sometimes gentle, sometimes ironic, sometimes bitter but always passive apprehension of suffering is, I think, wrong-headed.'<sup>88</sup>

Many of Hardy's poems deal with themes of disappointment in love and life, and "the perversity of fate", but the best of them present these themes with "a carefully controlled elegiac feeling". Irony is an important element in a number of Hardy's poems, including "The Man He Killed" and "Are You Digging on My Grave". A few of Hardy's poems, such as "The Blinded Bird", a melancholy polemic against the sport of vinkenzetting, reflect his firm stance against animal cruelty, exhibited in his antivivisectionist views and his membership in the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals.

Although his poems were initially not as well received as his novels had been, Hardy is now recognized as one of the great poets of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and his verse had a profound influence on later writers, including Robert Frost, W. H. Auden, Dylan Thomas and Philip Larkin. Poet-critic Donald Davie's *Thomas Hardy and English Poetry* considers Hardy's contribution to ongoing poetic tradition at length and in creative depth. Davie's friend Thom Gunn also wrote on Hardy and acknowledged his stature and example.

In *Two on a Tower*, for example, Hardy takes a stand against these rules of society with a story of love that crosses the boundaries of class. The reader is forced to reconsider the conventions set up by society for the relationships between men and women. Nineteenth-century society had conventions, which were enforced. In this novel Swithin St Cleeve's idealism pits him against such contemporary social constraints. In a novel structured around contrasts, the main opposition is between Swithin St Cleeve and Lady Viviette Constantine, who are presented as binary figures in a series of ways: aristocratic and lower class, youthful and mature, single and married, fair and dark, religious and agnostic...she [Lady Viviette Constantine] is also deeply conventional, absurdly wishing to conceal their marriage until Swithin has achieved social status through his scientific work, which gives rise to uncontrolled ironies and tragic-comic misunderstandings. Fate or chance is another important theme. Hardy's characters often encounter crossroads on a journey, a junction that offers alternative physical destinations but which is also symbolic of a point of opportunity and transition, further suggesting that fate is at work. Far from the *Madding Crowd* is an example of a novel in which chance has a major role: "Had Bathsheba not sent the Valentine, had Fanny not missed her wedding, for example, the story would have taken an

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<sup>88</sup> Franchere, G. (1968). *A Voyage the Northwest Coast of America* (First Edition). NY The Citadel Press (1968)

entirely different path.”<sup>89</sup> Indeed, Hardy’s main characters often seem to be held in fate’s overwhelming grip.

“Two on a Tower” by Thomas Hardy and other Victorian society works such as “Middlemarch” by George Eliot or “Great Expectations” by Charles Dickens both explore themes of love, social class, and morality in Victorian society. However, there are some key differences between “Two on a Tower” and these other works. One major difference is the focus on unconventional relationships in “Two on a Tower”. The novel follows the forbidden love affair between Lady Viviette Constantine, a wealthy and married woman, and Swithin St. Cleeve, a poor astronomer. This relationship challenges the social norms of the time and explores themes of love, desire, and societal expectations. In contrast, works like “Middlemarch” and “Great Expectations” focus more on traditional romantic relationships and the impact of social class on individuals. In “Middlemarch”, the characters navigate the complexities of marriage, societal expectations, and personal ambition. In “Great Expectations”, the protagonist Pip struggles with his desire to rise above his humble origins and achieve success in a society that values wealth and status.

Additionally, Hardy’s writing style in “Two on a Tower” is characterized by its lyrical prose and detailed descriptions of the natural world. His use of symbolism and imagery adds depth to the story and enhances the themes of love and connection. In comparison, other Victorian society works may have a more straightforward narrative style and focus more on character development and social commentary. Overall, while “Two on a Tower” shares some common themes with other Victorian society works, its exploration of unconventional relationships and its unique writing style set it apart from the rest.

In conclusion, Thomas Hardy’s works are characterized by their deep exploration of human nature and society, their realistic portrayal of rural life, and their poignant depiction of the struggles and tragedies faced by his characters. Hardy’s contributions to literature have had a lasting impact, and his works continue to be studied and appreciated for their profound insights into the human condition. Thomas Hardy’s works offer a bleak and critical portrayal of Victorian society, exposing its oppressive social structures, restrictive moral codes, and the detrimental effects of industrialization. Through his literature, Hardy challenges the romanticized image of the

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<sup>89</sup>Hardy, T. (1992). *Far from the Madding Crowd*. Oxford University Press (1992).

Victorian era and presents a more nuanced and negative perspective on the realities of life during that time.

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