

THE TRANSITION FROM VICTORIAN TO MODERN LITERATURE: THOMAS HARDY AND HENRY JAMES

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ABSTRACT

The transition from Victorian to Modern English literature marked a fundamental shift in literary style, worldview, and narrative techniques. This article examines how Thomas Hardy and Henry James—two central figures at the turn of the 20th century—embody this transformation. Hardy preserved Victorian concerns such as morality, determinism, and society's constraints, yet introduced darker realism and pessimism that foreshadow modernist ideas. Henry James, in contrast, advanced psychological depth, interiority, and innovative narrative perspectives, establishing foundations for modern fiction. Through comparative analysis, this paper highlights how both writers bridged two eras, influencing the emergence of 20th-century modernism.

KEY WORDS:

Victorian Era, Modernism, Thomas Hardy, Henry James, narrative style, psychological realism, transition.

ANNOTATSIYA

Ushbu maqolada Viktoriya davridan Modern adabiyotiga o'tish jarayoni Thomas Hardy va Henry James ijodi misolida tahlil qilinadi. Hardy o'z asarlarida Viktoriya davriga xos axloq, jamiyat bosimi va taqdirning qat'iy kuchlarini aks ettirgan bo'lsa-da, uning realizmi va pessimizmi modernizmga o'tishning muhim bosqichini tashkil qildi. Henry James esa psixologik tahlil, ong oqimi, murakkab nuqtai nazar kabi usullardan foydalanib,

zamonaviy roman tamal toshini qo'ydi. Maqola ushbu ikki yozuvchining ikki davrni bog'lovchi o'rni va modern adabiyotga ta'sirini yoritadi.

KALIT SO'ZLAR:

Viktorian adabiyoti, modernizm, Thomas Hardy, Henry James, psixologik realizm, o'tish davri.

АННОТАЦИЯ

В статье рассматривается переход от викторианской литературы к модернизму на примере творчества Томаса Хардия и Генри Джеймса. Харди сохранил викторианские темы морали, судьбы и социальных ограничений, но его мрачный реализм предвосхитил идеи модернизма. Джеймс, напротив, развивал психологический анализ, внутренний монолог и сложные повествовательные перспективы, заложив основы современного романа. Сравнительный анализ показывает, как оба автора стали связующим звеном между двумя литературными эпохами.

КЛЮЧЕВЫЕ СЛОВА:

Викторианская литература, модернизм, Томас Харди, Генри Джеймс, повествовательные техники, психологизм.

INTRODUCTION

The transition from Victorian to Modern English literature represents one of the most significant transformations in literary history. By the late nineteenth century, rapid industrialization, scientific discoveries, and changes in philosophical thought had begun to reshape the worldview of writers and readers. The stable moral structure, social ideals, and objective realism characteristic of Victorian literature were increasingly questioned. Within this shifting environment, Thomas Hardy and Henry James emerged as two key figures whose works reflect both the legacy of the Victorian era and the early impulses of modernism. Their contributions reveal how literature gradually moved from external observation to deeper psychological and existential concerns.

Thomas Hardy is traditionally associated with the late Victorian period, yet his worldview diverges sharply from classical Victorian optimism. In novels such as *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, *Jude the Obscure*, and *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, Hardy presents a

universe governed not by moral justice but by fate, coincidence, and social constraint. His characters frequently face forces beyond their control, and their struggles reveal the harshness of rural life, class limitations, and the indifference of nature. This fatalistic outlook challenges Victorian confidence in progress and morality, suggesting instead a world filled with tragedy and unavoidable suffering. Hardy's narrative style also moves beyond simple realism: he uses symbolic landscapes, emotionally charged descriptions, and morally ambiguous characters, all of which anticipate later modernist techniques. Though rooted in Victorian settings, his themes of alienation, inner conflict, and societal oppression make him a significant transitional figure. While Hardy pushes Victorian realism toward darker and more deterministic territory, Henry James engages in a different kind of literary transformation. James is often regarded as the precursor of psychological modernism because of his focus on consciousness, perception, and the inner workings of the mind. In novels like *The Portrait of a Lady*, *The Turn of the Screw*, and *The Ambassadors*, James shifts attention from external events to the subjective experiences of his characters. His use of limited point of view, complex narrative voices, and ambiguous interpretations breaks away from the authoritative Victorian narrator and introduces a more fluid, interpretive style. Rather than providing clear moral judgments, James invites the reader to navigate uncertainty, multiple perspectives, and psychological depth. This emphasis on subjectivity plays a crucial role in shaping the modernist concerns of writers such as Virginia Woolf and James Joyce. Both Hardy and James reflect elements of continuity with Victorian literature while simultaneously laying the groundwork for modernism. They portray individuals in conflict with society, though in different ways. Hardy focuses on the external pressures of class, tradition, and fate, while James investigates internal conflicts rooted in perception, emotion, and moral hesitation. Their differing methods represent two directions in which literature was evolving at the turn of the century: one toward existential pessimism and social critique, the other toward psychological exploration and experimental narrative form. Despite their stylistic contrasts, the works of both authors contribute to dismantling the moral certainty and narrative stability of Victorian novels. The legacy of Hardy and James is evident in the major modernist writers of the twentieth century. Hardy's exploration of human suffering,

instinct, and social injustice influenced D. H. Lawrence and other novelists concerned with emotional repression and societal constraints. James's focus on consciousness and narrative ambiguity shaped the development of the stream-of-consciousness technique and inspired writers like Woolf and Faulkner.

CONCLUSION

The transition from Victorian to Modern literature cannot be understood without examining the contributions of Thomas Hardy and Henry James. Hardy challenged the moral and social ideals of Victorian society through his deterministic and tragic worldview, while James reshaped the narrative form by emphasizing psychological depth and subjective experience. Together, they mark the point where English literature began to turn away from rigid realism and move toward the experimental, introspective, and ambiguous qualities that characterize the modern literary era.

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