

## ABSTRACT

### RESTORING HARDY'S FATE

This analysis examines the fiction and poetry of Thomas Hardy as a means of exploring his significant, although often overlooked, role as a Victorian social critic. Through a variety of critical approaches, including feminist and socio-historical analyses, this thesis investigates Hardy's fictional and poetical depictions of England's fallen citizens—especially its ruined women—and society's responsibility in their usually tragic fates. In doing so, it counters the somewhat dogmatic interpretations of Hardy as a relentless pessimist with literary evidence of his belief that humanity could and would, through charity and mercy, eventually improve the conditions of society.

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