

PAPER

THE IMPORTANCE OF FAMILY AND SOCIETY IN THE VICTORIAN AGE AND MODERN ENGLISH LITERATURE

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Abstract

This article explores the evolving representation of family and society in modern English literature, highlighting the shift from traditional family models to more inclusive and diverse structures. It examines how modern literature reflects changing cultural norms through characters and narratives that challenge rigid societal expectations. Using examples such as *How the Grinch Stole Christmas!*, *Harry Potter*, and *The Kite Runner*, the article illustrates how emotional bonds, moral support, and personal identity redefine the concept of family. It also contrasts modern perspectives with Victorian ideals, showing how literature has moved from portraying family as a rigid moral institution to embracing individual choice and social diversity. The article emphasizes that modern literature serves not only as a reflection of societal change but also as a force that shapes our understanding of ethics, identity, and human relationships.

Key words:

family and society, relationship bonds, modern literature, Victorian age, Grinch, Carol, cultural norms, emotional support, cultural identity, individualism, cultural shifts, moral responsibility, traditional family model, isolation.

Main part

Family and society have long been pivotal themes in literature, offering reflections of the societal norms, values, and struggles of their respective time periods. The Victorian era and modern English literature offer contrasting yet interconnected views of these concepts, revealing the changing landscape of family dynamics and social expectations. By exploring the representations of family and society in these two periods, we gain insight into how literature responds to the social and cultural challenges of its time. Family and Society in the Victorian Age: The Victorian era, spanning from 1837 to 1901, was a time of great social, economic, and political change. [1, 48].

As Britain experienced the effects of the Industrial Revolution, social and family structures underwent significant transformations. The family was considered the cornerstone of society, upholding moral values and order. Traditional roles within the family were rigidly defined, with distinct expectations placed upon men, women, and children.

1. The Role of Family in Victorian Society:

The family unit in Victorian society was largely patriarchal, with the father as the head of the household, responsible for economic sustenance, and the mother as the caretaker and moral guide for the children. Marriage was viewed as a duty, with emphasis on respectability and social standing, rather than emotional fulfillment. The concept of "family honor" and reputation was crucial, and personal desires were often subjugated to social expectations. The role of women in the family was central, but also limited, reflecting the era's gender norms. Women were expected to be the moral backbone of the home, teaching children virtues such as duty, self-restraint, and compassion. [2, 25].

2. The Representation of Family in Victorian Literature:

Charles Dickens' *A Christmas Carol* (1843) depicts family as the core of human happiness. Scrooge's transformation emphasizes the redemptive power of family, highlighting the contrast between his isolated existence and the warm, supportive Cratchit family. Dickens presents the Cratchits as models of unconditional love and moral resilience despite their poverty. In works such as

Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847), the concept of family is explored through the protagonist's struggle for independence and self-respect. The story critiques the limitations placed on women and how societal structures force women into familial roles that limit their autonomy. Thomas Hardy's *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* (1891) presents the theme of social expectations and familial responsibility. Tess, as a victim of her family's name and the societal constraints of her time, ultimately suffers from the harshness of social judgment, showcasing the consequences of rigid family structures and societal morality.

3. Victorian Family and Social Class:

Class distinctions were deeply embedded in Victorian society, with family roles often shaped by social standing. Families in the upper classes were seen as paragons of respectability and moral superiority, while working-class families were frequently portrayed as struggling and vulnerable. [3, 61] The working-class family often faced harsh conditions due to the rise of industrialization, urbanization, and economic inequality. Dickens, through novels like *Oliver Twist* (1838), illuminated the harsh realities faced by poor families and the impact of poverty on children. This social critique calls attention to the moral duty of society to care for the vulnerable, especially within the family structure. Family and Society in Modern English Literature: The 20th and 21st centuries saw dramatic changes in social structures, particularly in relation to family dynamics. The aftermath of two world wars, the rise of feminism, and shifts in social and economic systems transformed the way families were perceived and depicted in literature. Modern literature, influenced by a more fluid societal structure, presents diverse portrayals of family, breaking away from the Victorian ideals of a rigid, moralistic family model.

1. Changing Family Structures:

In modern literature, the traditional family model is no longer seen as the only valid or stable unit. Single-parent families, blended families, and families based on same-sex relationships reflect the increasing diversity of family structures. This evolution challenges the idea that family identity must align with rigid, traditional norms. The changing role of women is also a critical factor in modern portrayals of family life. Women in modern literature often assert their independence, balancing career aspirations with family life, reflecting a move away from the "angel in the house" ideal that dominated the Victorian period. [4, 23]

2. Family and Society in Modern Literature:

In Dr. Seuss' *How the Grinch Stole Christmas!* (1957), the concept of family extends beyond biological connections. The Whoville community, although diverse, operates as a family united by love and shared values. The Grinch's transformation from isolation to community emphasizes that family can be defined by emotional bonds rather than traditional kinship. This reflects modern values of inclusivity, demonstrating that love and belonging can form the foundation of family. In J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* series (1997-2007), the idea of family transcends biology, with Harry Potter finding surrogate families in his friends, notably the Weasley family. [5, 41] The series focuses on the power of friendship and loyalty, suggesting that family can be chosen rather than given by birth. This challenges traditional notions of kinship and highlights the importance of emotional and moral support in building a family. Khaled Hosseini's *The Kite Runner* (2003) explores the complex relationships within families, focusing on themes of betrayal, redemption, and cultural identity. It shows how societal norms, family expectations, and personal guilt

can affect individuals' relationships with their families. Modern literature increasingly addresses how family members may be torn apart by secrets and societal pressures.

3. The Role of Society in Modern Literature:

In contrast to the rigid, often oppressive societal structures of the Victorian era, modern literature often portrays society as a more dynamic and multifaceted entity. Society's influence on individuals is no longer absolute, and individuals are more empowered to define their identities outside societal expectations. Themes of alienation, individualism, and self-discovery are prevalent in modern works. Society is seen as a complex, often contradictory force that can both support and constrain individuals and families. However, similar to Victorian literature, modern works still explore how family and society influence moral and ethical choices, albeit with a more critical eye toward the flaws in social systems.

The portrayal of family and society in literature reflects the evolving values and cultural shifts of each era. In the Victorian period, family was depicted as a moral cornerstone of society, with rigid expectations governing both family roles and social conduct. In contrast, modern English literature embraces a more flexible, inclusive approach to family, acknowledging diverse structures and emphasizing personal choice over social conformity. Both *A Christmas Carol* and *How the Grinch Stole Christmas!* convey the importance of love, community, and moral responsibility, yet they do so in ways that reflect the distinct societal contexts of their time. Through these works, we see how literature not only mirrors but also shapes our understanding of family and society. [6, 33]

Conclusion

In conclusion, the Victorian era's literary landscape positioned the family as the moral linchpin of society, governed by strict roles, social duty, and class hierarchies. Works such as *A Christmas Carol*, *Jane Eyre*, and *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* illustrate how familial duty and reputation were paramount, often at the expense of individual desires and autonomy.

At the same time, Victorian authors wielded their narratives as instruments of social critique—highlighting the plight of the poor, the constraints on women, and the moral obligations of the privileged—thereby underscoring literature's role in both reflecting and challenging the societal norms of the time. By contrast, modern English literature embraces a multiplicity of family forms—single parents, blended households, chosen kinships, and same-sex partnerships—emphasizing emotional bonds and personal agency over inherited duty.

Texts from *How the Grinch Stole Christmas!* to the *Harry Potter* series and *The Kite Runner* show that family can be redefined through love, loyalty, and self-determination. In doing so, contemporary narratives not only mirror evolving cultural values but actively shape readers' understanding of identity, ethics, and community. Thus, across both periods, literature emerges as a dynamic force: preserving the past's moral lessons while continually redefining the bonds that unite individuals within society.

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