

## THE ROLE OF LANGUAGE IN THE REPRESENTATION OF CLASS IN VICTORIAN LITERATURE

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**ABSTRACT:** *This article was written about language, its role, in Victorian literature. This article provides information about Victorian literature, the role of language in it, and the representation of adjectives as symbols. To do this, we shall examine the Victorian period and some notable events happenings that happened during this period in order to situate our aim in this essay.*

**Keywords:** *language, Victorian literature, Victorian era, social class, communication, history*

### INTRODUCTION

Language plays a pivotal role in the representation of class in Victorian literature, serving as a lens through which authors explore and critique the rigid social hierarchies of 19th-century England. Through the use of dialects, speech patterns, and linguistic styles, writers such as Charles Dickens, Charlotte Bronte, and George Eliot highlight the distinctions between the upper, middle, and working classes. Language not only reflects an individual's education and social status but also serves as a marker of moral and cultural values. This article examines how Victorian authors used language to characterize individuals, expose class-based prejudices, and question the societal inequalities of their time. Each period in history is always known for a particular thing or the other, whether positive or negative or even both. This Victorian period is noted for many changes, growth and numerous developments which, in fact, transient into the modern era

in the history of England. It has been suggested that the period was preceded by the Romanticism and followed by the Edwardian Age.

### FINDINGS

The term Victorian is formed from the morphological process known as affixation. The word is derived from the Noun Victoria. It is derived because the suffix added is a derivational morpheme as it changes the word class. However, there is the problem of syncretism where the derived word can perform two grammatical functions. Hence, the word Victorian can be a noun or an adjective. In this case, the word performs the function of an adjective. Thus, the base word is Victoria which is the name of the queen who ruled during this period and the -“ian” suffix to mean of relating to Victoria. It is believed that the Victorian era was the period of the reign of Queen Victoria from the year 1837 to 1901.

The Victorian period in history is one of drastic development and growth. This is exactly captured in the words of Aronowitz et al that: the sixty four-year reign of Queen Victoria was a time of progress and prosperity for Britain. New colonies in Africa and Asia meant that Victoria’s subjects could literally boast that “the sun never set on the British empire”. Vast strides in science and technology fostered British industry and the rapid growth of the middle class, whose values — hard work, strict morality, social reform, and pragmatism — increasingly became the values of the age. Gradual reform addressed many of the social problems that the industrial revolution had created; progress inspired optimism and self-assurance. At the same time, however, new ideas in government, science, and economics stirred curiosity, doubt, and controversy.

- **Language as a Marker of Social Class.** Language in Victorian literature often served as a clear indicator of social class. Authors used dialect, vocabulary, and speech patterns to distinguish between different social strata. For example, characters from the upper classes often spoke in a refined and polished manner, while those from lower classes used regional dialects and colloquialisms.

- **Social Critique and Reform.** Many Victorian writers used language to critique social inequalities and advocate for reform. Charles Dickens, for

instance, highlighted the struggles of the poor and working classes through his vivid and often satirical depictions of their speech and circumstances. His works often aimed to raise awareness and inspire change.

- **Representation of the Criminal Class.** The concept of a "criminal class" emerged during the Victorian era, and language played a crucial role in its representation. Authors like Henry Mayhew depicted the lives of criminals and the urban poor, using their unique speech patterns to emphasize their marginalization and the societal perception of their moral degeneracy.

### CONCLUSION

In Victorian literature, language acts as a powerful tool for representing class distinctions and critiquing the entrenched social systems of the era. By using speech patterns, dialects, and linguistic nuances, authors vividly portray the lives and struggles of people across different social strata. These depictions not only reveal the deep divides in Victorian society but also challenge readers to consider the implications of class-based biases. Ultimately, the role of language in Victorian literature underscores the enduring relationship between communication, identity, and social structure, offering timeless insights into human behavior and societal organization.

### REFERENCES

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