



Two On A Tower, By Thomas Hardy: "But time is short, and science is infinite..."

Thomas Hardy

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Thomas Hardy (2nd June 1840 – 11th January 1928), celebrated poet and writer, was born in a modest thatched cottage near Dorchester in the West country, to a builder father. His mother came from a line of intelligent, lively and ambitious women so ensured her son had the best formal education available for their modest means although this ended when he was 16. He became a draughtsman specialising in the building of churches was able to give it up to be a full time writer and poet with the publication of *Far From the Madding Crown* which became a bestseller and like much of his work was serialised. His writing reflects his passionate beliefs for social reform and exposes the hypocrisy of the rules of the Victorian age which constrained many freedoms with convention and restricted the transcending of class boundaries. His novels are almost entirely set in rural Wessex which although fictional is clearly rooted in the SW counties of England where he was born and lived most of his life. Hardy's writing caused controversy in his lifetime but despite this he was highly praised and showered with honorary doctorates from many universities, a knighthood, which he refused and in 1910 the prestigious Order of the Merit. Hardy sets out the premise of *Two on a Tower* in the preface as a “a wish to set the emotional history of two infinitesimal lives against the stupendous background of the stellar universe, and to impart to readers the sentiment that of these contrasting magnitudes the smaller might be the greater to them as men.” Astronomy and science was of particular interest to Hardy and he was clearly knowledgeable in this area as this novel demonstrates.. The two on the Tower are Lady Vivette Constantine and Swithin St Cleeve. The former is the wife of a wealthy land owner whose husband is away in Africa and the latter a young keen astronomer who has been using the Tower, on her land, to observe the night sky. The two fall in love and their ensuing relationship allows Hardy to explore love across class and age divide fully with many compelling twists and turns.



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