

## Morality in Hardy's novels: Tess of the d'urbervilles and Jude the Obscure

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### Abstract

Thomas Hardy occupies a prominent place in the realm of English literature. His works especially fiction signifies his rooted convictions like his belief in destiny, chance and in morality. Hardy not only represented morality in his fiction but also offered its various forms. Hardy's second wife Mrs. Florence Emily Hardy says that Hardy lost his faith in Christianity by the age of 27. He considered the so called morality as the very cause of man's suffering which he termed as positive evil. Thomas Hardy's Novels Tess of the d'Urbervilles and Jude the Obscure chiefly represent the morality of the time. Victorian period which is known for not only much growth of science but also for many compromises. Hardy's impression about life and morality seem to be the fundamental problems of mankind. And all his novels can be read as pointers to this problem. Hardy pleads, like the postmodernists, to employ more than one hermeneutic approach to decipher the meaning and purpose of life. It isn't wrong to say Hardy has tried to be moralist in his novels. He has been a true preacher in giving guidance and directness to society to behave well and to be morally correct.

**Keywords:** thomas hardy, english literature, d'urbervilles

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### Introduction

There is no denying the fact that Thomas Hardy has been a strict moralist who wants society to behave properly especially he wished that women of Victorian society must follow the code of morality. Tess of d'Urbervilles one of the prestigious and much talked novels of Hardy reflect certain code of morality of that time. Of the novels of Hardy Tess of the d'Urbervilles is regarded by many critics as the 'most problematic novel, stable in scarcely any aspect. Apart from its superficial theme of agricultural crisis and the destruction of English peasantry, the novel engages into a vigorous examination of Victorian morality and 'the complexity of sexual morality as a whole. Clementina Black praises the novel for its 'profoundest moral earnestness. Echoing more or less akin critical insight, Katherine Porter observes: Hardy's mind led him out of the tradition of orthodoxy into another tradition of equal antiquity, equal importance, equal seriousness, a equal antiquity, equal importance, equal seriousness, a body of opinion running parallel throughout history to body of law in church and state: the great tradition of dissent.

Furthermore, Dorothy Van Ghent, Irving Howe and Dale Kramer, among other things, try to treat the novel as a fictional enquiry into the inevitable tragedy of individual consciousness. A recent critic, Peter J. Casagrande examines the novel as a study in, to use his own jargon, 'beaugliness' beauty in suffering, ugliness and defeat. Rutland's acute observation in this connection is worth quoting:

Tess is, among other things, an argument. It is an argument made up of two related, but quite distinct elements: one is a grievance against the organization of human society; the other is a quarrel with the ordering of the universe.

We come to know that women were supposed to keep intact their virginity before marriage and once their virginity is violated, she is considered immoral though there isn't any fault of girl. Tess, a poor girl, who is ignorant of atrocities of

man's lust. She is so innocent that she can't help herself in saving herself from Alec who is personification of lust. She is raped yet she doesn't raise her voice against male dominated society, even she goes further to conceal her rape as it was considered bad for a girl though there isn't any mistake of the girl, even much of blame is imposed on girl. So Tess is forced to hide this stigma. Her mother not only urges her to hide this rape but treats this as a non serious act. The girls arenormally shatter from such physical violence like Tess faces. She always considers herself not only victim but also a sinner. Even society reckons such girl as a shame on society which is a sheer bias and is unjust. Tess knowing well this wrong concept of society tries as much as she can to hide her tragic and shameful past. She even doesn't want anybody to know about her past. She firstly tries to conceal her past from her lover Angel Clare and after letting her past to her husband on wedding night she is meted out a cruel treatment, which she hasn't expected. She is again left stunned and in miserable condition by society this time by her own husband who keeps double standard of morality.

We come across here a very interesting point that if a man maintains physical relationship before marriage with a woman, he isn't treated with disgust or hatred a woman is treated. Although Angel Claire too had maintained a passionate time with a woman, but he considers himself pure and Tess an impure woman. Though he knew fully that there wasn't any mistake of Tess if she was raped but he represents himself a typical biased Victorian who holds double morality standard. Through this novel Hardy has raised certain important questions, like if a woman is raped, then how she becomes impure?

As a genuine originator, Hardy considered the issues of man's life, his association with woman, society and his own self. He ruminated over the issues of man's innovative life, human qualities and the worldwide comprehension. He had sympathy toward Man's association with winged creatures, monsters

and the organic environment. He was immersed in considerations about the working of human personality, 'man's brutality to man, woman and the lower animals. He was glad about the improvement of science and its utilization in innovation and was fulfilled about the advance made in the fields of expressions, science and present day business. He enjoyed the advance done in terms with man's global co-operation and comprehension. Truth should be told, he was an industrious and genuine organizer and a humanist of the main request. This response against the traditional profound quality, prudery and fake assembled force in the succeeding decades till finally in the end decade of the most recent century it formed into an open revolt and achieved the end of Victorianism. A few components, similar to the impact of cutting edge logical through, new social mindfulness, French naturalism, current brain research and the development for the liberation of ladies, joined to achieve this change. Science urged the contemporary writers to grow free deduction and a discerning and basic disposition towards life and disposes of the traditional ideas of respectability, prudery and fake. Science went a stage forward and announced sex as a standout amongst the most principal impulses of man. It said that if a man was not embarrassed about appetite and thirst, there was definitely no explanation behind him to be embarrassed about sex.

In *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* for serious he delineates the young women enduring created by the genders and the ordinary ethical quality bringing about human distress and enduring when Hardy licenses Jude and Sue to live respectively as a couple without their relationship. For him enthusiastic physical love is as vital as profound closeness amongst man and woman. Hardy's straightforwardness where sex was worried in *Tess* made him, according to his peers, the English of the considerable European writer Tolstoy Zola.

In his last novel, *Jude the Obscure*, Hardy forgets about the old origination of strait-bout ethical quality and prudery and strongly delineates the sexual relations amongst men and ladies. He even allows Jude and Sue to live respectively without being hitched. Be that as it may, there was a solid response against the production of this novel and a large number of its duplicates were exposure blazed by pastors and others. Solid was truly stunned at this unfriendly gathering concurred to his novel by people in general and he composed no more novels and swung to verse. He arranged to acknowledge the open treatment of sexual connection in novels. When he comes to now that his better half, Tess, is tained by traditional ethical quality, he moves in the opposite direction of her. In any case, he unwittingly makes it clear that he adores and craves her. Heavenly attendant Clare who put stock in these perspectives coolly overlooks that he himself has experienced a comparable affair and deserts Tess. The catastrophe that emerges out of these unyielding laws of society conveys home to the pursuers more mightily the remorselessly of these twofold benchmarks of ethical quality. At each open door, Hardy upholds his primary lesson, that the main standard of knowledge is to dispose of all unnerving religious doctrines and to recognize regular laws and simulated traditions.

In the same way, Sue Bridehead in *Jude the Obscure* is unequipped for genuine love. She is absolutely against physical union. She can't persevere through any physical contact with him, not even his honest kiss. One night as her

better half coolly goes into her room she hops out of the window, She steals away with Jude, yet just on howdy condition that she will live with him essentially as a companion and not as a spouse. Be that as it may, Hardy views Tess as sexually unadulterated. Tess is denounced by the contemporary society, which takes after a badly adjusted and unbending tradition, for her "unlawful" union with Alec and the resulting birth of an "ill-conceived" fate. These terms mirror the religious and moral misconception of the general population who don't consider how Tess' heredity and verse, time and chance have formed her profession and realized her ruin. Be that as it may, Hardy sees Tess' as sexually immaculate, on the grounds that "unchastity" can't be dealt with as something unnatural. He considers the murder under the compel of the irregular circumstance which is pushed onto her by the ordinariness of her better half, Angel, and the carelessness of her blame. She is "an immaculate woman" as indicated by Hardy's origination of profound quality. Again Hardy denounces the twofold standard of ethical quality so loyally honed by the Victorians. They watched one standard of profound quality for men and another for ladies. For example in Angel deserts Tess, his recently wedded spouse for she was allured by Alec before her marriage while he had himself dove into eight and forty hours dispersal with a woman. Hardy's novels raised contentions over the profound quality, old traditions and customs, the premise of ethical quality the status of ladies and the old origination of marriage and other social issues of principal significance.

Ian Gregor's understanding of the novel is worth our attention: It seems, almost ostentatiously, to be "about" so many things a malevolent universe, an outworn system of education, the rigidity of the marriage laws. In this connection, Willian R. Goetz's observation is worth quoting.

In *Jude the Obscure* the natural law initially seems to be prior to the social law, which must be interpreted either as an "enunciation" or a deformation of it. By the end of the novel, these two laws are threatening to collapse into one; or rather they become two versions of a system of determinism that governs human fate.

Hardy's novels particularly his significant novels *Far From the Madding Crowd*, *The Return of the Native*, *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, *The Wood Landers* and *Jude the Obscure* fall into this classification. It has been observed that in *Jude the Obscure* social traditions and conventional convictions of the Christian church are sharply condoned. Tess languishes over, she disregards the social tradition by getting to be mother in her womanhood. The greater part of the wretchedness, says Hardy, had been produced by her routine perspective and not by her inborn sensations. So also Sue and Jude dismiss social traditions and customary religion and live respectively as spouse and husband without legitimizing their marriage.

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Hardy has never been an ethical evangelist in the design of Samuel Richardson or Thackeray or George Bernard Shaw. He has over and over pronounced that his novels are just 'a progression of impressions' about existence. We ought not to

overlook the way Hardy's novels accomplish their constrain and essentialness with regards to uncertainty, wariness and vacillation of state of mind.

It is the well known fact of Hardy's worry of life that hoists him to the rank of an extraordinary and genuine craftsman. The profound quality of the novel as a type of workmanship must be judged by how far it is honest to the existential clashes and strains of life. What's more, Hardy demonstrates this interminable clash amongst man and the universe, Strong is all the while possessed with the ethical quality of the individual self and additionally that of society, Solid detests socially problematic inclinations of independence and in addition nonsensical social courses of action which demolish the bona fide person. In this manner we may contend that his novels are a concurrent festival.

From one perspective he demonstrates his saints and courageous women bursting out of the built up traditions of society to make themselves, to stay consistent with their own characteristic selves. They are cruelly rebuffed for their fair activities. In the greater part of Hardy's significant novels a definitive catastrophe of his saints and courageous women is brought on by the social laws and traditions which decline to take into account the true person.

In Hardy's novels society rejects and even disappoints credible people when they decline to acclimate. He demonstrates that it is a somewhat troublesome errand to stay credible and keep on enjoying social acknowledgement. Consequently, the persecution of the true may prompt outrageous response and even to frantiness. This is the thing that happens to Hardy's real courageous women like Eustacia and Tess. In death, Tess departs to her valid self from the inauthenticities of her social world. The greater part of Hardy's real characters are obliterated by manmade social laws. The requests of society confine singular potential outcomes. To some degree this example is the very substance of western custom.

Following Hardy's novels is a confounding knowledge. In his novels he has fictionalized the key existential clashes of man with the enigmatic universe and the social world. The contentions and strains that definitely go to the truth of human presence are the central centre of his inventive work. He is an explainer of man's sufferings and infinite distance, Strong was entirely mindful of an emergency, a risk, a fracture and estrangement that were going on in the nineteenth century. Like Shakespeare Hardy demonstrates a consciousness of the unfeeling mindlessness of the states of human life.

Most of Hardy's great characters are archetypal. They are engaged into a dual struggle against the forces of the universe and the irrational elements in social traditions. Each of his major characters embodies within himself the totality of human nature. His characters transcend time and place. They are essentially true to life. Judged against the scenario of postmodern approach to life, Hardy assumes greater relevance in his particularly intense respect for cultural and individual specificities. In his novels Hardy critically examines the possibility of happiness in both rural and urban contexts. He loved his Wessex-a metaphor for rural life- for its simplicity and natural forms of living. He did not believe in Modernism's optimism about achieving a unified destiny for mankind. Hardy's division, especially in his last two novels, show that no simple solutions are possible to the crisis of

mankind. In his refusal to take side with any particular form of life as the ultimate, he remains relevant to the postmodern condition which refuses to accept any fixed formulas about life. In *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* and *Jude the Obscure*, Hardy protests the intransigent Victorian social and moral systems. Though he lived in both the Victorian and the modern world, he was far in advance of his time as *Jude* and *Sue* were Hardy's novels are fundamentally recognition of the 'voices' of rural England, its virtues and enduring humanity. Modernism failed in the cultivation of the fundamental human virtues of concern and kindness for others. Two World Wars bear witness to this truth. And postmodernism gropes in the ocean of indeterminacy and uncertainty. His greatness consists in bringing to light the wealth of a life of the marginalized, common people. But Hardy thought and wrote about them more effectively than any English novelist. In rustic life Hardy found, as did Wordsworth, the real emotions and feelings of humanity. Hardy's works have some influence upon and affinities with writers such as John Cowper Powys, John Fowles, William Faulkner, Ibsen, Zola and Dreiser. All these writers base the details of their narratives on ordinary life. Their works present the helpless subordination of the individual to peripheral forces. Like Hardy, they too are sympathetic to the individual whose individuality are recognized. Hardy does not seem to believe that 'self identity is constituted within the gaze of the other.' For him the individual weighs more than society. But in their passionate quest for authentic existence, Hardy's heroes and heroines are ruined by society.

The protest against unbearable human conditions; they challenge the basis of prescribed social morality without any success. They succumb to public opinion and the 'human compact.' So in Hardy's novels there is a consistent confrontation between the individual conscience and social conscience. The illustration of this division is one of the themes of Wessex novels. Hardy's disapproval of any attempt to shape the world in the image of the privileged is evident in all his novels, especially in *Jude the Obscure* and *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*. The Victorian attempt to interpret reality in a centralist mode is called in question. Victorian England was not quite different from its colonizers outside the country, where they suppressed the other for their difference. But in the twentieth century we find an inversion of many of the western paradigms of thought. And by the time we come to the postmodern world, the distinction of centre and periphery becomes more and more blurred. Many of the Victorian social and moral perceptions which Hardy questioned are today deconstructed or dismantled as incongruous. Hardy's novels are indictments of Victorian moral domination and modern trust in rationality and its ability to arrive at the truth. He tried in his own way to critique the overriding categories of ethical and social classification of his time. It would not be wrong to illustrate Hardy as a 'Victorian postmodernist.'

According to Terry Eagleton, we are simultaneously and inextricably modernists and traditionalists- always in and out of time Q simultaneously. The Victorian society had witnessed a deep cultural crisis-transition from the traditional to the modern which offered no real solutions to the basic problems of life. This anxiety is evident in Hardy's novels more than in any other novelists of his time. To quote Frederick R.Kari:

Although Hardy's roots, like George Eliot's were solidly within a nineteenth century intellectual framework—a pre-Freudian world of Darwin, Spenser, and Huxley nevertheless, his characters and plots move in a sphere unknown to his contemporaries, an area no other Victorian excepting Dickens in some of his minor characters had attempted to define.

When we speak of morality in Hardy, we do not mean that Hardy wrote his novels to prove any notion or to convey any moral lesson. Meanings are not single, but multiple. Besides, they are devoid of any 'metaphysics of presence'. They are historical and social constructs. Any approach to life that does not respect pluralism in all walks of life is against the very nature of man. Hardy objected to the arbitrary construction of historical and cultural realities. He admired rural culture and resented unreasonable importation of rationality into it. Man is engaged into a battle against the universal order and society. And in these conflicts it is the latter which destroys the individual. Hardy is opposed to the suppression of the natural in man. In his novels all the major characters are destroyed by the mechanical and legalistic aspects of society. They are defeated or ruined by the false social world. All the major characters of Hardy are defeated or killed for their authentic selfhood, for their difference. With relentless courage Hardy has tried to communicate that life cannot be reduced to a system of mere rationalistic ideas. An individual's existence is unique and distinct. He is responsible for his actions and life. He exists authentically in so far as he strives to realize values that are really his own. Beyond a certain point Hardy's authentic characters refuse to be shaped by the artificial social and moral laws. They transcend all categorization. In its essence Hardy's novels capture the existential truth that the very fact of communal existence point to a confrontation with that which is other than itself. Hardy is fundamentally a celebrant of the uniqueness of individual life. He castigates the individual only when there is a rebellion against the values embodied in a cultural community. He has always seen a traditional, cultural community as a true representative of the natural world. It is the artificially constructed which is opposed to the cultural self of his characters. According to him the social world is an irrational historical construct. It tries to alienate man from his natural self. Therefore, it should go. In Hardy, there is no division when it comes to a confrontation between the authentic individual and the inauthentic social world. He dismisses society's intransigent attitude as irrational. His novels are a record of this perennial conflict and dilemma encountered by humanity. But Hardy's ultimate approach to these existential problems is informed by a deep insight into and understanding of the natural of human existence. Individual authenticity and moral conscience are recognized by him in so far as they conform to what he believes to be the laws of nature. It does not let the individual undermine certain moral laws if that leads to chaos in society. Similarly, society is castigated for its intransigent attitude towards genuine, authentic individuals. When individual selfhood is in danger of being submerged in some impersonal kind of collectivism he champions the legitimate right of the individual. Hardy lets the individual stand out as the unique person he is. He does not believe in any supreme power that establishes values or sets an ideal towards which all must strive. The only ideal he values is the ideal of the incomprehensible, primal morality of

natural. The struggle to free oneself from the tyranny of society is one of the obvious themes of Hardy's novels. Unless the individual frees himself from the crowd, he cannot be fully himself. Hardy believes that the individual and society are indissolubly bound together. His novels are an eloquent reminder of this truth. They reveal the inevitable interpenetration of the individual and his social world. They are rooted in the common experience of humanity. Hardy is simultaneously a celebrant of age old forms of traditional living and a discerning critic of the irrational elements of social conventions that restrict human freedom or diminish human dignity. His much acclaimed cultural imagination has been able to accommodate individual specificity and authenticity of existence. Hardy's postmodern tendency lies basically in his particular concern for the uniqueness of the individual subject and an acknowledgement of the plurality of human nature. In the contemporary world the conditions of life are changing so fast. Consequently, there is a continuous search to find solutions to the problems of living. Hardy's suggestions to look inward rather than outward seems to have relevance in our time of cultural crisis. The apparent contradictions and inconsistencies in his novels suggest not a lack of intellectual integrity or emotional balance; rather it is the sincerity of a mind in search of a meaningful and happy life. That he has refused to subscribe to any particular system is the mark of his greatness as a true artist. It is a view which resists all forms of universalism. Hardy's view of life is tentative and transitory. His art selected and gave imaginative shape to various and sometimes conflicting experiences. Hence, his ambivalence taken together. His major novels from *Tess* to *Jude* the obscure constitute a prophetic and intuitive understanding.

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