

Treatment of Women, Religion and Morality of Victorian Society Exposed in Hardy's *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*

Biddut Kumar Dutta*
Md. Mansur Hoshain**

Abstract: A number of Victorian themes, including the oppression of women and function and significance of practiced religion and morality are addressed in the Victorian novel entitled *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* written by Thomas Hardy. The novel under this study examines the author's treatment of women, religion, and morality which does a brief analysis of his time span focusing on the late Victorian era's psychosexual complexities and how they treat the representation of women inside and outside of their home. This study also explores the influence of Hardy's views on religion and morality on his portrayals of female characters. It is evident that protagonist Tess is both a powerful lady and a victim of things she cannot control. Through the female characters and the morals of the era's inhabitants, Thomas Hardy was able to accurately portray Victorian society.

Keywords: Tess, Thomas Hardy, Victorian Society, Women, Religion, Morality.

Introduction

Tess of the D'Urbervilles written by Thomas Hardy is considered as a masterpiece of English literary canon. "It provides social criticism on various topics prominent in Victorian society, including the role of women, religion, and morals. Specifically, Hardy utilizes Tess's subjection to her parents, Alec d'Urberville, Angel Clare, and society to investigate the sexual double standard prevalent via the then religious practice of Victorian culture. As a representation of Victorian women, Tess is a strong heroine who overcomes many trials in her life; yet, these double standard seals Tess's destiny as the society she lives in prohibits her from effectively rising above her oppressors. Hardy also uses Tess's subjection and eventual destruction to mimic other parts of the society he attacks, such as the collapse of the rural morality

* Assistant Professor, Department of English, Prime University, Dhaka.

** Lecturer, English, Khatia Bondan Fazil Madrasa, Gazipur Sadar, Gazipur, Dhaka.

represented. So, we might say Hardy exposes the Victorian society of the time nakedly via the book *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*.

The Background of Victorian Life in the Novel

In 19th century, the British economy was the most powerful in the world, and it was an era that has been referred to as the Second English Renaissance because of its complexity. In addition, it marks the beginning of the modern era (Admin, 2016). The "Victorian era," which spanned from 1837 to 1901, is called after Queen Victoria. During the nineteenth century, colonization and industrialization had a significant impact on nineteenth-century English society. As a result of these two factors, Britain became the most powerful economic power of its day. Prosperity, empire building, and significant political change characterized the era. People laboring in their own homes or small workplaces increasingly gave way to the industrial system throughout this period. As a result, the social structure changed dramatically, enhancing the influence of businesses and tradespeople. Female and child labor were in high demand as a result of the industrial revolution, which necessitated long hours of work. During that time period, there were dissenting voices among authors and intellectuals. They gained certain privileges, but it was not enough to transform the working-class worldview. There was a dramatic shift in population from rural to urban regions in the eighteenth century. "People fled their homes in pursuit of better living circumstances for their families in the major cities. They worked long hours and lived in squalor. As a result, alcoholism and abuse were common in families since individuals believed that life had nothing to offer them" (Yuan-yuan and Rao, 2018).

Hardy's Treatment of Victorian Women in the Novel

Hardy's art of women characterization as not as much of bright and less capable shows the influence of patriarchal society from the very beginning of the story. The guys in Tess's life are portrayed as being superior to her. She kills Alec out of the blue, adding to her misery in the process. In addition, *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* features an unconventional lady. Tess's image is revolutionary. She's becoming more and more belligerent, and she's engaged in some anti-social behavior. Tess as a first female character in Wessex Tales intends to take action in contradiction of male character they detest.

On the other hand, "Tess is one of Hardy's most likable protagonists. Even though she is a "bad" woman in the view of Victorian society and herself, Hardy wrote the Chapter "Maiden No More" (Hardy, 2005) in such a manner focusing on winning the compassion of readers, following the tendency to improve women's rights"(Hameed

Shakury 2016). Another excellent fact of Tess's character is her strong feelings of identity and veracity, which convinces the reader to appreciate her by way of a female. Her encounters with Angel exhibit this conceit of her importance;

“Tess realizes that her confession may kill Angel, and she will surely lose his love. Though she does not want to lose him, her moral demons and her strong hopes drive her to confess” (Hardy, 2005)

Although his female characters have problems, Hardy treats them objectively, which makes them intriguing and possible. Tess is given a number of good qualities that provide this quality practically difficult for those who reads to dislike her— attracting the intentness of wayfarer who “would wonder if they would ever see her again” (Hardy, 2005).

As Hardy says in the first paragraph of the novel, “phases of her childhood lurked in her aspect still. As she walked along to-day, for all her bouncing handsome womanliness, you could sometimes see her twelfth year in her cheeks, or her ninth sparkle from her eyes: and even her fifth would flit over the curves of her mouth now and then” (Hardy, 2005). The reader's affection and attention are drawn to Tess because of this excellent start to the novel's leading lady. With these good traits, Hardy conveys to his readers the steadfastness of Tess's determination and devotion as she refuses to let others disparage her family or reputation, such as when she tells her classmates, “Look here; I won't walk another inch of the way with you, if you make any jokes about him.” (Hardy, 2005). Finally, Tess's acknowledgment of guilt, compliance with her family's desires, and resolve to establish her excellent character.

No matter how much Hardy admired women, he permitted characters like Tess to suffer and die tragically because he had his own ideas about what women really like and how they should live. When he presents women as powerless, he often causes them to fail or be severely impeded in their quest for freedom. He reveals them as the victims of their habits.

To garner the reader's compassion, he portrays Tess as a victim in various ways. When she tries to be honest with her husband, she seems a victim, and he dismisses her. Only Tess, in Hardy's tale, has the trait of self-sacrificing behavior. According to him, she has beautiful qualities, spiritual purity, and physical attractiveness, which he describes on the front page of the novel's Wessex edition. He presents her as a helpless victim in a world that constantly manipulates and manipulates her. He

seemed to be saying that even nature is responsible for her demise. Despite her overall goodness, she lacks the tenacity to stand up for herself in the face of adversity. Tess decides to face the pain and anguish of her breakup with Angel and not tell anybody about it so as not to put any responsibility on him. She uproots her life and sets out on her own to make a go of it. It is only when she discovers the injured pheasants that she can bear her grief with relative comfort. "Poor darlings --- to suppose me the most miserable being on earth in sight o' such misery as yours!" (Hardy, 2005).

Alec's desire for Tess kept him returning until he had her for a short time. Despite their initial physical attraction, Tess and Angel eventually fall in love for reasons other than physical attraction. Tess's affection for Angel has taken on an almost asexual quality since he left for Brazil. Like every Victorian heroine, Tess's love for Angel is shown through her unwavering loyalty and self-denial. She regards him as if he were a divine being, and she worships him as such.

Tess murders Alec to show she loves Angel and not her pervert. Tess' moral sense is destroyed when she learns Angel has been replaced, and she stabs and murders Alec to show her love for Angel and not her pervert. "I couldn't take you not loving me," I said after killing him. "Now that I've slain him, say it, lovely spouse!" (Hardy, 2005).

Self-sacrifice is common in Hardy's female characters. This trait is to blame for Tess's woes. She has a serious demeanor and a proclivity toward obsessive behavior. She has a hard time living since she's too open to the world around her. Due to her intense love for one guy, she is unable to stand on her own two feet. She also is ultimately devastated by the world's expectations of reasonable categories and proprieties despite her uniqueness and cleverness, which is what ultimately, brings her to an end.

Hardy's Treatment of Religion in the Novel

Tess of the d'Urbervilles addresses yet another Victorian issue, or rather, a number of issues. Some intellectuals, though, were agnostics or atheists, according to Maria Antonietta Struzziero in her essay "Dualism & Dualities - The Victorian Age, he said. "Most people went to Mass at least once a week since religion was still seen as a crucial aspect of life, and they had a special interest in religious stories and conversations" (Struzziero). Intellectually, Hardy was a well-known opponent of established religion. As stated in Darwin's book *The Origin of Species*, he was also

troubled by Darwin's belief that “this new scientific explanation of the beginnings of life on Earth would reduce man's place as God's most valued creation”(Struzziero).

“Concern for humanity is shown by Hardy's depiction of a home previously occupied by people, his reference to its demise and his comment that the fowls behave as if the place belongs to them.

Hardy also pondered the ramifications of a lack of supernatural intervention in human events, in addition to pondering about the position of people as animals.” (Anon., 2015) A heavenly entity could not have prevented Alec from impregnating Tess, which Hardy laments throughout the moment.

“However, others may argue that Tess never saw her guardian angel. Where did she find the source of her faith? Perhaps, like the other deity referred to in the sarcastic Tish bite, he was speaking, pursuing, on the move, or asleep and not to be awakened, just as the ironic Tish bite suggested.,” (Hardy, 2005)

At one-point, Hardy asserts on the location of a stronger force, disillusioned by the powerlessness of divinity to avoid the tragedy. These human-like behaviors, such as searching, traveling, and relaxing, generate an undesirable impression of a celestial creature. “Well, we must make the best of it, I think,” the mother writes after learning that her daughter is pregnant with Alec. It all comes down to pleasing God in the end!” (Hardy, 2005) A lustful parvenu's affliction of a young girl is surely a reward for a despicable God, writes literary critic Anthony Domestico in his analysis of the novel. “Our job is to discard this too simplistic plea to nature as an description for the terrible anguish that was endured by Tess, yet,” he writes in his analysis of the novel.

Hardy was also concerned with the role that religion played in nineteenth-century England. At this point, Tess was asked on whether or not Sorrow's baptism. Then she replied him that was enough for her saved baby Sorrow of going to Hell. It was her first outbreak on Christian dogma:

And now, sir, can you answer me this—will it be exactly the same for him as if you had christened him? she said with a serious tone. ... However, the girl's dignity and the odd compassion in her voice worked together to stir up his nobler instincts, or more precisely, those that remained in him after ten years of trying to graft technical conviction onto genuine doubt. Within him, a battle took place between the man and the ecclesiastic, with the man winning. He assured her, “My beloved child, everything will be the same”. (Hardy, 2005)

In another manner, Hardy makes advantage of Alec d'Urberville's weakened religious ideas after a chance encounter with Tess. "Until I ran across you again, I thought I was on the path to at least social salvation!" Alec reflects on the moment when he realized he'd lost his religious beliefs. Up until then, I had been as strong as a man could be (Hardy, 2005). He is aware that his encounter with Tess led him to abandon his religious faith. After meeting Tess again, he renounced his religious convictions, believing that he was "as staunch as a man could be" (Hardy, 2005).

Hardy's Treatment of Victorian Morality

Hardy had to often defend his heroine against the two-facedness and dual standards of Victorian society. She was thus characterized by him as "a simple corpse going with the water to her death" at the time (Overview of Thomas Hardy n.d.). Regarding Tess, Pinton claims that she is "the victim of chance—of her physical and temperamental genealogy; of the situation she was born into and everything else that determines her life." She could not be held accountable for her actions since she was "a pure lady," according to Hardy.

The reader gets their first look at Tess and Angel's romance in *The Rally*, the third book in the series. Although she has lost her infant son, Alec, Tess is unwavering in her desire to go on with her life. Her first job is as a milkmaid at Talbothays Dairy.

Tess meets with Angel Clare again there but she doesn't know they've previously met. When she first meets him, he can't help but fall in love with her. He calls her "a visionary essence of woman" and a "virginal and youthful daughter of nature" (Hardy, 2005).

Trantridge had a profound effect on Tess's relationship with her boyfriend, Angel. Fearful of her background, she believes herself to be a less pure woman than others. The reason for her first rejection of Angel's marriage proposal is because "it's for your benefit in fact," she tells him. I must be doing this just for your advantage, right? "I don't want to give myself the enormous pleasure of pledging to be yours in that way—because—because I am SURE I ought not to," she said, expressing the guilt that Victorian society placed on her (Hardy, 2005). As soon as she learns about Alec's illustrious family, the decision of whether or not to inform Angel about it weighs heavily on her. Alec is not revealed to him until she informs him she is a descendant of the genuine D'Urbervilles and accepts his marriage proposal. Because "no girl would be such a fool," "That was so long ago and not your fault in the least," her mother writes back, urging her not to tell her boyfriend anything about

her past problems (Hardy, 2005). Terrorizing her throughout the narrative is a Victorian society's strict code of morality, which makes Tess fear that her love for Angel would be rejected if he learns she is an "immoral" woman.

"Tess tells Angel the truth about Alec on their wedding night, which concludes *The Consequence*, in the hope that he would be able to forgive. Theoretically, as Tess puts it, their sin is the same. He says that he didn't really love the person he believed she was, but the idea that Angel had of Tess as virginal and pure comes apart in this scene. Despite his dislike of his traditional family, it's impossible to miss Angel's adherence to convention" (Zakić 2018). To put it another way, since Angel's major interest is his reputation, the double standards applicable to female characters into play. The narrator says:

He saw her as a kind of imposter—a guilty lady posing as an innocent one. When she first saw it, her white face was covered in terror; her cheeks were floppy, and her mouth nearly looked like a little round hole. He went closer anticipating her to collapse as she faltered due to the horrifying feeling of his observation of her.
(Hardy, 2005)

Tess kills Alec in the belief that her history, which had prevented her from having a happy life with him, would be erased in an effort to get over her unwillingness to accept reality. She assures Angel in her last moments that everything "is as it should be" even if she is about to die for murder because she still loves him. "An angel, I am almost joyful—happy!" There was no way this joy could have lasted. It was too much for me to take in at once. "I've had enough, and now I'm going to die so that you don't have to look down on me anymore!" (Hardy, 2005).

Conclusion

It can be concluded that Hardy correctly captured the Victorian era via his work *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, which deals with a variety of present-day societal issues, such as including the oppression of female and function along with significance of practiced religion and morality, in *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*. The novel, *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, by Thomas Hardy is a brief analysis of Hardy's time period, focusing on the late Victorian era's psychosexual complexities and how they affected women's representations. It is also showed the exploration of the influence of Hardy's views on religion and morality on his portrayals of female characters. Thomas Hardy was able to portray logically Victorian society through the female characters and the morals of the era's inhabitants.

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