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The role of society and class in the novels of Thomas Hardy: A Feminist Perspective

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Abstract

This research paper explores how Thomas Hardy critically dealt with the issues of classes, gender and social injustice in Victorian England, positioning him as a realist novelist and proto-feminist thinker. The paper undertakes a close examination of his major works such as *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, *Jude the Obscure*, *the Mayor of Casterbridge*, *far from the Madding Crowd*, *the Return of the Native* among others to examine how Hardy expressed the life in the countryside, social mobility and deterministic forces of fate. Bathsheba Everdene, Sue Bridehead and Tess Durbeyfield are female characters in Hardy and thus encompass a broad range of femininity: independence and intellectual defiance on one end, victimhood and subjection on the other. His stories are always a critique of the patriarchal society, marriage laws that are restrictive and class differences that deny the individuals of all classes a sense of freedom particularly women. Not only is the work of Hardy a reflection of the cultural tensions of the nineteenth-century England, the industrialization, urban migration and rural decay, but it also foreshadows the feminist interests of the autonomy of women, social justice and the rebellion against oppression. Through questioning the interplay between class and gender, this paper will point to the perennial relevance of Hardy as a novelist who not only questioned the moralistic strictures and inequalities of Victorian society but also provided a profoundly sympathetic vision of the disenfranchised.

Keywords: Class hierarchy, feminism, gender roles, social realism, fate and free will, patriarchy, women's emancipation

1. Introduction

Thomas Hardy's oeuvre offers a poignant and often melancholic exploration of societal structures and class dynamics in late nineteenth-century England. Particularly within the rural community of his fictitious Wessex. In his writings on the social transformations of the Victorian period, including industrialization, urban migration, and the decline of the traditional agricultural system, Hardy elucidates the tensions between established customs and emerging social realities. His novels, *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, and *Far from the Madding Crowd*, depict a society where stringent class distinctions and inflexible social structures mostly dictate individuals' fates, allowing few opportunities for personal aspirations to flourish unimpeded. Hardy's protagonists often contend with the constraints of lineage, affluence, and societal perception, with women facing compounded

oppression due to both class and gender disparities. He imparts a profound feeling of reality and empathy towards the rural impoverished, the working classes, and the declining gentry, exposing the injustice of a system that marginalizes people without property or status. Hardy used class not just as an indicator of economic standing in his work but also as a measure of moral judgment, opportunity, social acceptability, and as a determinant of relationships, marriage possibilities, and personal identity. Unlike the satirical and socially constrained realm of Jane Austen, Hardy's perspective is mostly gloomy and fatalistic, suggesting that societal forces, combined with chance and human weakness, may overpower individual choice. Through his vivid characterizations and deep engagement with the social fabric of rural England, Hardy offers a robust critique of the class-bound society in which he resided, capable of constraining human potential and perpetuating

inequity.

In the Victorian era, some male authors starting writing about women, presenting diverse representations of feminist themes. Consequently, it is very pertinent and valuable to analyze the presentation of this theme in the principal works of Thomas Hardy. In a certain regard, Hardy may be seen as a forerunner of the feminist movement. This field has undergone significant research, although it still presents vast opportunities for more investigation. The fundamental aspects of feminism are present throughout Thomas Hardy's main books, which will be the subject of this research.

Hardy emerged as a prominent author of the 19th century. Through his literary creations, he portrayed his interpretation of men and women within a particular societal context. He was deeply critical of the conditions and treatment of women in Victorian society. He conveyed compassion for women in the Victorian era and the unjust treatment they suffered due to discriminatory marital legislation. He worked diligently to transform the patriarchal society and to effectuate the necessary reforms for the collective benefit of both women and men. Feminism emerged from the need for women to have autonomy over their preferred lifestyle. Feminists advocate for the recognition of women as autonomous beings rather than passive objects of male desire; They contend that women should not be regarded as inferior to male and they call for equal consideration and opportunities for women in education and work to ensure their economic independence.

In Victorian culture, men were seen as superior to women and rejected the notion of women as equal companions. Consequently, the need for women's freedom emerged. Mary Wollstonecraft, J.S. Mill, Simone de Beauvoir, and Andrea Dworkin championed the feminist movement focused on women's liberation.

Hardy effectively illustrated women's vulnerable circumstances by challenging established societal conventions. He serves as a pioneer, guiding the newly developing ladies towards their independence from a rigorously traditional, indifferent, and unsympathetic society. In his stories, he depicts women who are both docile and vain, alongside others who are ambitious and independent, defying stringent moral rules and societal structures.

Given that love does not have the same significance for both genders, Hardy indicates that it leads to profound misconceptions that create a divide between them. For a woman, love is not only devotion but also an unreserved total immersion of body and spirit. Confined inside her own realm and subjected to male authority, love becomes into a mechanism for affirming her value. Consequently, Hardy notes that women are attracted to a man's vigor, wealth, sophistication, and social status.

Hardy's female characters exhibit a remarkable diversity and breadth. All the female characters are differentiated from one another. Hardy is consistently aware of personality variations, nuanced distinctions, and social hierarchies. Tess has a hint of animalism shown in her body. Conversely, she exhibits a pronounced 'sexlessness' via her desire for marriage devoid of physical intimacy. Duffin properly questions how one may address these two opposing kinds with equal empathy, comprehension, and conviction. Likewise, Elizabeth, Jane, Sue, and Ethelberta exhibit

distinct differences from each other. Sue is a unique amalgamation of heart and intellect; Ethelberta epitomizes detached, analytical reasoning, even in matters of affection; Elizabeth-Jane represents a distinct archetype, a contemplative philosopher, and is the only female character in Hardy's works with a sense of honor. Consequently, there exists a considerable diversity in Hardy's portrayal of female characters, which this research aims to examine.

2. Thomas Hardy: A Resounding Advocate Against Class, Gender, And Social Injustice

Comprehending the social conditions of England throughout the late Eighteenth and early Nineteenth Century is crucial, as they offered an appropriate context for a perceptive author such as Thomas Hardy. His writings and characters not only incited much controversy but also functioned as a powerful critique of the irrational, unethical, perverse, and insensitive aspects of contemporary social practices and beliefs.

England saw the repercussions of Industrialization, leading to rampant and unprecedented immigration from around the globe, which contributed to severe poverty and unstable social and political situations in the nation. A pronounced separation existed between the elite and middling classes. The exploitation of the lower class continued unabated. A multitude of offenses against women were recorded throughout different regions of the country. Social inequality and political instability were pervasive, disproportionately affecting women. The title of his initial work, *The Poor Man and the Lady*, explicitly signified his critique of class disparities and societal inequities. Despite his connections to both the lower class and the aristocracy, he experienced a sense of alienation from both groups. He could no longer identify with the working class, and while establishing new connections inside elite circles, he never fully adopted the attitudes and views of the upper classes. Hardy contends in *Jude the Obscure* that to have a favorable opportunity of becoming a notable figure in one's nation, an individual must be as unemotional as a fish and as self-serving as a pig.

Hardy incorporates thematic elements into his works by crafting characters that somewhat mirror his own experiences. The characters believe their abilities cannot be completely realized and cultivated inside the environment of their origin. Motivated by a profound desire and quest for self-discovery, these folks seek to enhance their skills in a social domain that transcends their own. Stephen Smith in *A Pair of Blue Eyes*, Clym Yeobright in *The Return of the Native*, Grace Melbury in *The Woodlanders*, and Jude in *Jude the Obscure* serve as exemplars of such characters. Hardy's oeuvre exemplifies the severity of social mobility, the irrationality of class distinctions, and the futility of completely dissociating from one's origins in the quest for advancement within the social hierarchy. The inequitable treatment of Tess and her family illustrates not only her individual plight but also signifies the pervasive societal bias and insufficient support aimed at the lower and middle classes. Hardy's novels feature numerous classic female characters situated in Wessex, including Bathsheba in *Far from the Madding Crowd*, Eustacia in *Return of the Native*, Tess in *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, Sue in *Jude the Obscure*, and Lucetta in *The Mayor of Casterbridge*. Despite their

markedly diverse personalities, these women share commonalities: they continually grapple with adapting to their environments, endure adverse conditions, and strive to transcend their situations, finally confronting failure. Such heroes reveal the truly lamentable social, political, and economic conditions of the contemporary middle class. Thus, they are not individuals; rather, they are universal.

The initial works of this astute artist received a largely tepid response from British intellectuals, primarily owing to their pessimism and unconventionality, which incited complaints and inquiry around premarital sex and the portrayal of women. They were perceived as a symptom of a pathological mindset. Numerous publications of his faced heightened condemnation from the Victorian populace for their frank portrayal of sexuality and were frequently deemed indecent. They encountered substantial criticism for their perceived attack on the institution of marriage by developing concepts like Erotlepsy. Thomas Hardy's novels serve as incisive critiques of the societal constraints that hindered individual lives in the 19th century. As a Victorian Realist novelist, Hardy examines the societal constraints of the Victorian status quo, asserting that these laws hinder the lives of all persons and ultimately lead to dissatisfaction. In *Two on a Tower*, Hardy endeavors to challenge societal norms by crafting a narrative of love that transcends class divisions within the framework of social structure. We are compelled to contemplate the abandonment of established norms on love. Nineteenth-century society mandates certain customs, and social pressure guarantees obedience. Over time, a segment of the populace recognized the novelist's exceptional abilities. The artist's goal was acknowledged in relation to the profound psychology of mysticism.

The social position of women during Hardy's era was really deplorable. Hardy opposed their exploitation and strongly objected to the many horrors inflicted against them in a male-dominated society. Tess's murder of Alec subverts the prevailing masculine supremacy, marking a significant moment in Thomas Hardy's work when a woman boldly confronts a man. This action inevitably results in more oppression of women by males, shown by the arrest of Tess at Stonehenge by a contingent of male police officers. However, for a brief period, the conventional dynamic of subservient women yielding to dominating males is disrupted, making Tess's action somewhat heroic. Consequently, it is unsurprising that Tess's actions incited significant controversy and undermined the whole male-dominated, upper-class notion of British respectability.

Consequently, it is commonly recognized that Hardy significantly influences both the elite and the conscientious individuals of his time and subsequent generations. Modern culture remains hesitant to confront the principles he espoused throughout his lifetime. The characters he crafted, especially the female ones, have successfully confronted traditional taboos and become role models for the public. In his controversial work *Jude the Obscure*, the author critiques the archaic and detrimental divorce rules, and while facing significant resistance mostly from the urban elite, he swiftly emerged as a formidable advocate for women's rights. Many female characters in Thomas Hardy's novels clearly illustrate a common Victorian image of women: the virtuous, submissive housewife or the

rebellious, independent idealist. Hardy does not depict how women should be, but rather how societal restraints force women to conform to the dominant paradigm. Hardy transitions from tacitly questioning society in *The Return of the Native* and *The Woodlanders* to clearly denouncing gender stereotypes and marriage in *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* and *Jude the Obscure*. In summation, perceiving Thomas Hardy not alone as a novelist and poet, but also as a prominent crusader against social injustice, would constitute the most appropriate acknowledgment of his contributions to the intellectual domain.

3. Thomas Hardy's Analysis of Human Nature and Society

Hardy's upbringing in a humble setting profoundly shaped his literary perspective. His writings, characterized by a blend of realism and fatalism, urge readers to explore the intricacies of human emotions, societal dynamics, and the tension between tradition and modernity. In the 19th century, England experienced significant transformations due to industry, urbanization, and modifications in societal traditions. Hardy's oeuvre encompasses works such as "*Tess of the d'Urbervilles*," "*Far from the Madding Crowd*," and "*Jude the Obscure*," together with many poems and short stories, provides a perspective that amplifies and examines these transformations. His settings, often pastoral and picturesque, serve as microcosms of broader social transformations, allowing readers to observe the impact of growth on individuals and communities. The interplay between fate and free will is a recurring motif in Hardy's works. Characters frequently become ensnared in circumstances beyond their influence, leading to catastrophic outcomes. This subject encapsulates Hardy's belief in the deterministic nature of existence, a perspective that contested the prevailing optimism of his era. Furthermore, his complex portrayal of women and their struggles within a patriarchal culture underscores his engagement with gender dynamics and the limitations imposed by cultural norms. This study aims to examine the various facets of Thomas Hardy's literary body of work, illuminating his creative methods, thematic concerns, and the socio-cultural milieu that influenced his storytelling. This research aims to emphasize Hardy's lasting significance and his position as a literary luminary by analyzing his examination of human nature, society, and their junction, which still resonates with contemporary readers. This study will analyze selected works to illustrate Hardy's portrayal of the human experience functions as a lens for analyzing the complexities of the Victorian era and subsequent periods. The literature of each era mirrors its culture, embodying the complexities of human nature, social dynamics, and the interplay between tradition and change. Thomas Hardy is distinguished in English literature for his substantial contributions that encapsulate the essence of the Victorian era while also tackling timeless themes that captivate readers. Hardy's analysis of human nature and society is a multifaceted undertaking that uncovers the intricate aspects of the human experience, interwoven with the evolving cultural norms and ideals.

- **Contextualization Hardy's Perspective:** Born in rural Dorset, England, Hardy was nurtured in an environment that significantly influenced his literary sensibility. The

idyllic landscape and traditional way of life in his village contrasted sharply with the disturbances brought about by industrialization, urban development, and changing social structures. In the 19th century, as England underwent transformation, Hardy's works reflected the tensions between the past and the present, the country and the urban, and the individual and the collective.

- **Fate and Free Will:** Integral to Hardy's exploration of human nature is the persistent discourse on fate vs free will. In his literary works, such as "Tess of the d'Urbervilles," "The Mayor of Casterbridge," and "Jude the Obscure," he examines the susceptibility of human agency to inexorable fate. Characters frequently become ensnared in circumstances beyond their influence, leading to disastrous occurrences that challenge conventional notions of human autonomy. This deterministic viewpoint, emblematic of Hardy's literary philosophy, starkly opposed the prevailing optimism of his era.
- **The Role of Society and Social Change:** Hardy's narratives are intricately linked to societal dynamics, functioning as both a backdrop and a catalyst. He skillfully portrays the social transformations of his era, highlighting the tensions between tradition and advancement. In "Far from the Madding Crowd," he explores the challenges faced by an independent and determined woman inside a patriarchal culture. This piece, with others like "Under the Greenwood Tree" and "The Woodlanders," offers a framework for examining evolving gender roles, societal hierarchies, and the deterioration of rural life.
- **The Tragic Heroine and Social Realism:** Hardy's portrayal of women, particularly his tragic heroines, serves as a significant critique of the limitations imposed on individuals, especially women, by societal standards. Characters like Tess in "Tess of the d'Urbervilles" and Bathsheba in "Far from the Madding Crowd" grapple with their ambitions and societal conventions, frequently trapped in a cycle of adversity. These characters, emblematic of Hardy's deep compassion for the marginalized, underscore the challenges faced by women in a society that constrained their aspirations and independence.
- **Analysis of Themes:** A significant thematic aspect in Hardy's oeuvre is the interplay between fate and free will. His protagonists frequently grapple with ostensibly preset occurrences, culminating in their inevitable downfall. This notion is emphasized in texts such as "Tess of the d'Urbervilles," where Tess's tragic fate is inextricably connected to her environment, illustrating the deterministic forces that shape human life. This fatalistic perspective contested the prevailing optimism of the Victorian era and exposed the harsh realities individuals faced in a world undergoing substantial transformation. Gender roles and the constraints imposed by patriarchy are a recurring motif in Hardy's literature. Characters such as Bathsheba Everdene in "Far from the Madding Crowd" and Sue Bridehead in "Jude the Obscure" challenge societal expectations and constraints, exemplifying Hardy's keen insight into the restrictions placed on women

within a patriarchal society. His analysis of gender dynamics enriches his characters and underscores his engagement with crucial social issues of his time.

- **Creative Techniques:** Hardy's innovative approaches further augment his analysis of human nature and society. His stunning portrayals of Wessex's pastoral landscapes serve as metaphorical backdrops for human emotions and experiences. The natural setting frequently reflects the emotional turmoil of his characters, exacerbating their struggles and psychological conflicts. Furthermore, his narrative structures, characterized by intricate plots and multifaceted characters, captivate readers, promoting empathy and contemplation regarding his creations.
- **Cultural and Socio-historical Context:** Hardy's oeuvre is intrinsically linked to the cultural and socio-historical milieu of his era. The tension between tradition and progress, rural and urban, and antiquity and modernity is apparent in his narratives. He rigorously analyzes the decline of rural values and the impact of industrialization on communities, providing an astute examination of the changes that reshaped Victorian culture. This contextual comprehension enriches his analysis of human nature within the broader sociocultural framework.

Thomas Hardy's exploration of human nature and society transcends the constraints of his Victorian epoch, resonating with contemporary readers who face similar issues and dilemmas. His literary legacy lies in his ability to examine the human condition with steadfast realism, while simultaneously analyzing the evolving societal landscape. His works, marked by a blend of sorrow and intelligence, endure as timeless relics that illuminate the intricacies of the human experience and society's dynamic terrain. Readers of Hardy's works undertake a significant exploration of human emotion, social turmoil, and the persistent challenge of aligning personal ambitions with the limitations imposed by destiny and tradition. Thomas Hardy's artistic legacy demonstrates his ability to capture the intricacies of human nature and society amid a time of considerable transformation. His books explore issues of destiny, free choice, gender relations, and social upheaval, providing readers with a comprehensive perspective on the problems and ambiguities of the Victorian age. His innovative methods and contextual insight augment his contributions, reinforcing his status as a literary titan whose concepts endure beyond generations. Readers interacting with Hardy's works are urged to explore both historical backgrounds and the enduring complexities of the human condition.

4. Analyzing Social Class and Gender Roles in the Principal Novels of Thomas Hardy

Tess of the d'Urbervilles, published in 1891 Tess is widely recognized as Hardy's masterpiece. It narrates the story of an extraordinarily beautiful girl named Tess. For an extended period, everything proceeds smoothly. One day, her father, John Durbeyfield, discovers from an individual that he is a scion of the noble d'Urbervilles. He starts to envision lofty aspirations. His spouse, Joan, believes that Tess will get a favorable match. They send Tess to the

affluent d'Urbervilles, anticipating that she can get a favorable position at her chicken farm while pregnant. She arrives home discontented. However, she encounters the lady's son, Alec d'Urberville, who seduces her and compels her. Eventually, she delivers a kid. She must confront several challenges as a result of it. She is hired as a dairy maid at Talbothay's farm. The infant dies. She meets Angel Clare, the offspring of a cleric. He adores her, and they both resolve to wed. Prior to the marriage ceremony, Tess composes a letter to Angel disclosing details of her prior life. However, he does not get that letter. Tess discovers it concealed under the carpet in his room. Upon their marriage, Angel reveals his secret to her and inquires whether she has any of her own. She recounts her previous existence to him. Angel abandons her. However, with her father's demise, she must confront several challenges. She is employed at many farms. She is once again enticed by Alec, and her financial destitution forces her to submit to a malevolent individual that she detests. However, she yearns to encounter Angel, who arrives too tardily. Upon discovering her with Alec, he returns dejected. She kills Alec and surpasses Angel. The same morning, she is apprehended and condemned to death. A virtuous lady fulfills her obligation to the societal code.

Jude the Obscure, published in 1895 According to Hardy, *Jude the Obscure* narrates a lethal conflict fought with ancient Apostolic fervor between the corporeal and the spiritual. The attributes that constitute *Jude the Obscure* include sensuousness, absence of character, and deficiency of discernment. Jude Fawley is a peasant from South Wessex. In his formative years, he quenches his need for knowledge by practicing as a stonemason. He continues to adore Arabella Donn, described as a "mere female animal," and marries her. Her unpredictable disposition leads her to abandon him, prompting him to dedicate his whole life to the church. To this goal, he restarts his studies. Prior to his ordination as a priest, he once again gets enamored, developing romantic feelings for his cousin, Sue Bridehead, a young educator. However, she weds an aged schoolmaster named Phillotson. Jude attempts to suppress his feelings for Sue but is unsuccessful. He lingers around her and influences her positively. Sue abandons her aged husband and departs for Jude. Jude's guilty conscience prevents him from entering the Church and donning the priestly vestments. Both individuals have divorced from their respective wives and are now eligible to marry each other; nevertheless, Sue is apprehensive due to societal censure. The pair descends the slope. Their offspring perish due to a horrible destiny. Haunted by her troubles and tormented by guilt, Sue returns to her husband, Phillotson. Jude succumbs to alcoholism and meets a tragic end.

The Mayor of Casterbridge, released in 1886 Impaired by drink, Michael Henchard, a grass cutter, sells his wife and child to Newson for five guineas. Upon the cessation of wine's effects and his return to lucidity, he experiences profound remorse. He commits to abstaining from alcohol for a minimum of twenty years. Purity must thrive. His diligence and integrity yield rewards, leading to his wealth and subsequent election as Mayor of Casterbridge. Once Newson travels to foreign territories and is absent for an extended period. He is presumed deceased. After eighteen years, Henchard's spouse and their daughter, Elizabeth Jane,

reappear in his life. Henchard believes that Elizabeth is his daughter; however, she is really Newson's. The turmoil in the narrative arises from Henchard's misguided actions, whereas Donald Farfrae proved to be a competent business partner despite their differing temperaments. Henchard engages in a dispute with him. He enters the competition after his separation and outperforms Henchard in business. Following the demise of his wife, Henchard discovers the truth about his daughter. In his wife's absence, he had fallen in love with Lucetta and was on the verge of marriage when his wife returned. He proposes to her once again, but she is captivated by Farfrae, who at that time had more wealth than Henchard. In exasperation, Henchard resumes drinking. The revelation of his wife's selling results in his resignation as Mayor. The stepdaughter is his only source of solace, and he lives with her; nonetheless, Newson arrives to assert his claim over her. Henchard experiences increasing alone and desolation in the cabin on Egdon Heath. The romantic narrative of Lucetta and Henchard becomes public upon her marriage. She sees no alternative except to succumb to death in a paroxysm of hysteria. Newson consents to the union of Farfrae and Elizabeth, resulting in their marriage. Henchard returns to Casterbridge, completely shunned, and subsequently dies after seeing Elizabeth's wedding, when he is treated poorly by her. He returns very despondent and subsequently dies after a while.

The Return of the Native (1878) The story takes place on the barren Egdon Heath close to Wareham in Dorset. The narrative revolves on two young women: Thomasin Yeobright, characterized by her gentleness and selflessness, and Eustacia Vye, who is correspondingly selfish and capricious. Thomasin Yeobright is adored by the modest reddleman Diggory Venn, although she is enamored with Damon Wildeve, an engineer who subsequently becomes a publican, leading her to decline Venn's proposal. Damon Wildeve embodies the archetype of a chivalrous guy. As he cannot be satisfied with one, he has two beloveds, Thomasin and Eustacia. Thomasin entreats him, and he weds her. Thomasin Yeobright has a cousin who is a diamond merchant in Paris. Harboring a profound perception of life that "All is vanity," he returns to his beloved homeland, Figdon, to assume the position of a schoolmaster. He has really liked his life and has experienced both highs and lows. Consequently, he aspires to lead a virtuous life, during which he becomes enamored with Eustacia Vye, who, in the expectation of his return to Paris, marries him. Eustacia's aspirations are irrevocably dashed when Clym's vision deteriorates, rendering him unable of fulfilling his role as a schoolmaster, and leading him to become a fur cutter on the heath. Clym discovers his wife's relationship with Damon, who presents herself as a devoted spouse at home but is a passionate lover outside of it. The disparities between Clym and Eustacia culminate in her elopement with Damon Wildeve; but, during their escape, Fate exacts retribution, resulting in their drowning. Clym attributes the deaths of his mother and wife on himself and, in an effort to atone for his transgressions, renounces all material possessions to become a preacher; meanwhile, Diggory Venn continues to harbor affection for Thomasin. His unwavering and selfless love is reciprocated with Thomas, the widow of Wild Eve, and they are united.

Far from the Madding Crowd (1874) Two strands run

parallel to construct the narrative of this work. A stark juxtaposition between altruistic love and passionate, unethical love is shown. Gabriel Oak, a destitute shepherd, becomes enamored with the whimsical but beautiful virgin Bathsheba, the owner of a substantial estate. For many years, Bathsheba is unaware of Gabriel Oak's dedicated devotion for her. The modest Gabriel rescues her from several challenges on multiple times. Sergeant Troy is an exceptionally intelligent and valiant young soldier. He seduces Fanny Robbin and then abandons her to perish during childbirth. Following her death, he secures Bathsheba's affection by demonstrating his swordsmanship. He weds her and mistreats her severely. The middle-aged guy, Farmer Boldwood, was profoundly enamored with Bathsheba. Her rejection of his proposition occurred. The individual remains entirely silent. The sergeant's maltreatment provoked his fury, leading Boldwood to murder him. Subsequently, he descended into madness. Meanwhile, Bathsheba had recognized the altruistic and devoted nature of her supporter, Gabriel Oak. As a result, they are united in the bonds of holy marriage.

A Pair of Blue Eyes: The characters in this narrative journey around the northern coastline of Cornwall. This narrative details the romantic relationship between a young architect, Stephen Smith, and Elfride Swancourt, the daughter of a clergyman. Stephen Smith arrived in Endlestow to restore a church tower and became enamored with the blue-eyed, attractive daughter of the rector. The elderly priest is first inclined to combine them; then, upon discovering that the architect hails from a disreputable family, his disposition shifts to firm opposition. Love is oblivious and indifferent to everybody. Both elope to marry, but their attempt is unsuccessful as the girl shows incapability of securing his riches. In love. She oscillates. Stephen finds employment in India. He visits that location to in his absence, Henry Knight assumes his role and starts to court Elfride. He is a literary scholar. He was a friend and benefactor of Stephen. Subsequently, Knight rescues Elfride, culminating in their engagement. The Knight venerates virginity and scorns weakness of character. He refrains from kissing any woman and desires that his wife remains undisturbed. A lady who saw Elfride's elopement with Stephen, motivated by a personal vendetta, recounts her narrative to Knight. The knight exhibits no clemency. He terminates the engagement and harbors animosity against Elfride in his heart. Elfride, whose heart is brutally shattered, can do nothing but weep. Upon Stephen's return from India and seeing that Elfride still single, he hastens to her, since he still has affection for her. Knight becomes aware of the truth behind the elopement. He now seeks forgiveness and hastens to Elfride. The train transporting them both is also carrying the body of Elfride, who had taken her own life.

Under the Greenwood Tree (1872) This story is an exquisite portrayal of rural life. Nature manifests with all her allure. This is Hardy's first successful book. The narrative unfolds in the community of Mellstock. Dick Dewy is the offspring of an impoverished itinerant merchant who spent his whole life without establishing himself in a singular vocation. Fancy Day is an educator. Both individuals develop romantic feelings for one another. These youthful lovers confront all the ramifications often imposed by society or by Fate. Having surmounted all obstacles, both are joyfully

united in matrimony. The interplay of bitterness and sweetness throughout the story makes it very engaging. The engaging discourse of the Mellstock musicians has a lasting impact on the readers' brains. Fancy Day was captivated by a vicar just once throughout her engagement to Dick. However, she quickly regains her composure and refrains from disclosing the vicar's desires. The work has instances of immaturity; nonetheless, the compelling aspects and the idyllic features it presents are undeniable.

The Woodlanders principally explores Grace Melbury's endeavor to cultivate her ideal housewife persona, sacrificing her relationship with Winterbourne, the man her father first selected for her to wed. Her acquiescence to societal norms and paternal pressures leads to a decline in her happiness and an overwhelming sense of remorse. Felice Charmond embodies the archetypal seductress, ultimately resulting in her demise and eliciting feelings in the reader that contrast with the norms of conventional Victorian society.

5. Conclusion

The novels of Thomas Hardy continue to be a powerful commentary of the strict hierarchies, repressive gender roles and hypocrisies of the Victorian social order, and a distinctive mixture of social commentary, realism and early feminist ideas. By means of such heroines as Tess, Bathsheba, Sue, Eustacia, and Grace, Hardy does not only depict the efforts of women to escape the double binds of class and patriarchy, but he also unveils the tragic outcomes of the culture that does not grant women the autonomy and equality they deserve. His stories highlight the futility of human ambitions in a deterministic world where fate, chance, and social convention tend to overwhelm the will of the individual, but they also testify to the strength, intricacy, and dignity of those on the margins of society in terms of class and gender. In questioning conventional ideas about marriage, sexuality, morality, and social mobility, Hardy not only underlines himself as a realist writer, but also as a reformist who foreshadows subsequent feminist criticism. His humane, but uncompromising, depiction of human suffering makes visible the points of contact between personal tragedy and systemic injustice, and makes him a timeless figure, both as a literary figure and as a moral voice. Finally, the work of Hardy goes beyond the Victorian era, and is timeless, relevant through the ages, of the human condition and its limitations as a product of class, society and gender.

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