
A STUDY OF PASSION, AGGRESSION, VULNERABILITY AND VANITY OF THOMAS HARDY'S FEMALE PROTAGONISTS

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abstract

It was uncommon for Victorian women to have access to recent active fictions that presented imaginatively challenging possibilities. Men were the ones who typically narrated stories about discoveries, journeys, jobs, and explorations. In the world of Wessex that Thomas Hardy created, the field of possibility is expanded, yet it is nevertheless thoroughly grounded in the realm of plausibility and possibility. Women hold a variety of jobs outside the house, some of which are more traditional than others. These jobs include teaching, negotiating the price of maize, acting as barmaids, inaugurating the telegraphic system, arranging public readings, and working as milkmaids. Women now leave their neighbourhoods unaccompanied, embark on businesses of their own choosing, and begin romantic relationships without male accompaniment. To put it another way, individuals have a hard time giving their life the vitality and energy they deserve. The most amazing reality is that they battle against all obstacles, a struggle in a world that, as Hardy notes in *The Return of the Native*, is not kind to women. In other words, they struggle in an environment that is not favourable to women. Hardy challenges the social and literary norms that, in Victorian England, contributed to the culturally-rooted induction of a sexual "amnesia" in women. These norms were particularly prevalent in Victorian literature. Women were kept ignorant of their own bodies from the time they were infants, so that puberty, defloration, and sexual activity might be experienced as a mystery to them. The women in Hardy's works toil and labour, and the physical reality of tiredness takes its toll on them just as much as it does on males. Hardy starts where the majority of Victorian novelists left off, with real, flesh-and-blood women; and he starts with radical verve: the Victorians argued that the soiled and soiling world of work was not a suitable place for noble womankind. Hardy begins with women who are real and begins with radical verve. This article tries to study the gamut of emotions and mindsets of the female characters viz. their passion, aggression, vulnerability and vanity in the backdrop of Victorian era.

keywords: *Passion, Aggression, vulnerability, vanity, Victorian era Novelists.*

Introduction

When we hear the name of Thomas Hardy, our minds immediately go to some of the most memorable female characters that he has portrayed in some of his popular novels. The most capable among them were oppressed by a patriarchal culture that relied on a double standard of morality to keep women confined to domestic chores. Hardy was dissatisfied with the prevalent Victorian ethos that thwarted the personal

longings and aspirations of women. As Richard C. Carpenter insightfully observes, "On many sensitive issues Hardy had firm opinions which ran against the Victorian current, particularly on sex and marriage." Hardy was dissatisfied with the relationships between the sexes in the Victorian times which were guided by the concept of female subordination by the males. This principle was prevalent throughout the community. Anti-woman policies permeated all aspects of the country's legal and social systems. Hardy uses his writings to vent his frustration with the repressive social structure of the time through the novels he has written. He was writing books at a time period in which the portrayal of women in fiction was almost always done in order to preserve the principles of patriarchy. Hardy was adamant that he would not succumb to these traditions, and he deplored the principles that were upheld by such an unequal society. Because of this, he projected deviant women who tried to break free of their stereotypical roles as the protagonists of his stories. He had the goal of altering the fundamental foundations of familial, sexual, and marital relationships, as well as the role of women in public life. To paraphrase what Anne Z. Mickelson has to say, "His methodology is usually inquisitive, occasionally speculative, frequently observant, and consistently sympathetic (Mickelson:1976,X). Informing us is Rosemarie Morgan: "Hardy enjoyed the companionship of women and had no doubts about the moral, intellectual, sexual, emotional, or psychic capabilities that they possessed. He was in complete agreement with the progressive feminists of his day who campaigned for women's rights to be at par with those of men " (Morgan: 1988 XI). Indeed, Hardy utilised the pen in order to investigate and conceptualise an alternative ethical framework to the present masculine dominance. He worked out the vision of an oppressed figure, typically a female figure, trapped in the structure of a patriarchal society and unable to escape it repeatedly "By doing this, he disobeyed the norm of feminine presentation and posed a threat to the established order, thereby threatening the very framework and basis upon which society is built.

It is hardly surprising that Hardy's female characters captured the attention of reviewers from the very beginning of his career. His previous detractors have shown that his figures were influenced by supernatural forces in some way. In the 1970s and 1980s, critics shifted their focus away from the cosmic indifference that was present in his books onto the role that social processes had in deciding the destinies of the characters, particularly the women. Some reviewers thought they could see Schopenhauer's influence on Hardy's female characters. According to Penny Boumelha, modern critics have taken one of these two approaches to Hardy's work: "Either they have accused Hardy of entrapment in traditional beliefs about women and their areas of activity or else they have commented on his unique interest in and compassion with women by pointing out a fundamental distinction in Thomas Hardy's portrayal of female and male characters. Virginia Woolf foresaw a key component that is emphasised in contemporary feminist criticism. Following the completion of her research on Hardy's female characters, Kathleen Rogers came to the conclusion that "these books reveal persistence of sexist beliefs even in so compassionate and enlightened a man as Hardy".

Patricia Ingham investigates Thomas Hardy's dissatisfaction with the inadequate literary and sexual representations that are readily available, which causes a conflict in the depiction of women between the ideal and the accepted form. During the 1940s and 1950s, with the growing influence of New Criticism and its insistence on the integrity of text, Hardy's treatment of gender was either silently accepted or praised as an integral part of the organically unified work of art. This occurred in conjunction with the expansion of New Criticism's sphere of influence. In this critical environment, at a time when the characters were seen as versions of real people, Hardy critics began focusing on intensely personal questions, such as whether or not Hardy had depicted realistic women, and whether or not Hardy's stories accurately portrayed the lives of

women in the nineteenth century "regardless of whether or not he appreciated them, liked them, or was honest with them". Irving Howe wrote in 1966 that Hardy has a unique talent "for crawling instinctively into the emotional lives of women." (Irving Howe: 1966, 109-108). In her book published in 1976 titled "Thomas Hardy's Men and Women: The Defeat of Nature", Anne Z. Mickelson makes the argument that "Hardy anticipates much of the thinking in the 1970's on men and women, especially on women", and that his approach to the role of women in society is 'often searching, sometimes speculative, frequently perceptive, and always compassionate. "

Rosalind Miles lauded Thomas Hardy for his ability to "bring his female characters so vividly to life as women before us," which was one of the reasons she chose to write about him. Miles also contends that Hardy's romantic involvement with a number of different ladies provided him with an exceptional knowledge of women in general and benefited him in depicting his realistic female characters in a way that was both empathetic and dynamic. Rosemarie Morgan, in her book titled "Women and Sexuality in the Novels of Thomas Hardy" (1988), describes how Hardy transcended the gender stereotypes of his time in order to create "active, assertive, self-determined women" and "their frustrating struggle to define themselves in a world that deny them the right to shape their own lives, control their own bodies, explore their own needs and express their own desires." The book "Thomas Hardy in Our Own Time," written by Robert Langbaum and published in 1995, positioned Hardy in the canon with George Eliot and D.H. Lawrence in terms of their research of the unconscious and sexuality. The book "Thomas Hardy and Women: Sexual Ideology and Narrative Form" (1982), written by Penny Boumelha, places a strong emphasis on the radical nature of Hardy's depiction of women. Boumeiha interpreted Hardy's female characters as cultural symbols and representations of traditional attitudes on women and gender. Boumeiha provided a historical examination of Victorian society in order to grasp the contemporary 'sexual ideology' as well as Hardy's use of it in his narratives. This was done so that the reader may better comprehend the relationship between the two. According to Boumeiha, "the radicalism of Hardy's image of women rests, not in their 'complexity, their realism, or their challenge to convention', but rather in their refusal to being reduced to a single and uniform ideological perspective. (Boumeiha: 1982,7). In her book "Thomas Hardy" (1990), Patricia Ingham makes the observation that in Hardy's early novels, "women begin, occasionally, to experience themselves as different from the models accepted by themselves as well as others, with a sense of enhanced, not diminished, self." Because of this, there is now a "new and problematic area" surrounding the feminine signifier, "which is hesitantly and variably mapped by each sex".

Recently, some Marxist critics have been analysing Hardy's female characters, and in doing so, they have included notions about gender in their discussions. Not only do female characters receive emphasis in these studies, but also the link between femininity and power. John Goode's study from 1988 illustrates how the narrative mode reveals the ideology that drives and moulds a piece of writing by focusing on the process through which it occurs. However, it is easy to see from the brief survey of Hardy's early criticism that Hardy's female characters cannot be analysed from a single dimension. Instead, an account of contemporary intellectual and ideological cross-currents is also required for a proper understanding of their complexity. This is because Hardy was writing during a time when these cross-currents were very prevalent. The ideologies that were prevalent in Victorian England are reflected in Hardy's female characters. They are products of that ideology. Thomas Hardy had a keen intellectual awareness of the dynamic social order that existed during his time. Clear proof of this may be seen in the way that the topics of his later works shift and evolve with time. His characters are appropriately formed by the numerous tensions and contradictions that are brought on by the transformation of modern civilization. Hardy was writing during a period when the so-

called "woman question" was already beginning to formulate its ideas. The growth of the feminist movement during the second half of the nineteenth century was already questioning established attitudes and assumptions surrounding femininity as well as the correct function and status of women in society at the time. Despite the fact that Hardy was not personally drawn to the feminist movement of his day, he had a strong affinity for it. Let's take a quick look back at these shifting intellectual ideas and discuss how they could have formed or impacted Hardy's mind.

As was said previously, Sarah Grand was the one who initially proposed the idea of the New Woman, which was meant to describe a woman who was powerful, independent, intellectual, bright, and opposed to the idealisation of women. A woman who defied the Victorian conventions that devalued women and relegated their place to the domestic realms was referred to as a "Victorian rebel," and the word was used to characterise such a lady. As a kind of literary protest against the position that women had in late Victorian society, the "New Woman" figure emerged as the primary protagonist of many of the books written during this time period. Their perspectives on the role of women in society, as they saw it, as it related to marriage, sexuality, domesticity, motherhood, freedom, and independence were mirrored in the books that they wrote. Diniejko noted in 2011 that "New Woman fiction dealt candidly with sex and marriage as well as women's yearning for independence and fulfilment." This is relevant to what we are talking about here. The notion that the house is a woman's sole suitable realm is challenged head-on in a number of New Woman books. The female authors exposed the flaws in the traditional marriages of the Victorian era, such as the condition of marriage that allowed for marital rape to be accepted, the practise of forced or coerced motherhood, and the double standard of sexual morality. Conventional marriage was seen as a demeaning and repressive institution by many of the female characters in New Woman novels. This was due to the fact that women were seen to be of lower social status and were frequently the targets of domestic abuse and other forms of danger.

According to George Drysdale (1861), who wrote "Marriage for New Woman was "one of the chief instruments in the degradation of women" and "it is the province of the female sex to depend upon man for support, and to attend merely to household cares and the rearing of children." Due to her "quivering anxieties and ante-marriage feelings," Sue Bridehead, the heroine of Thomas Hardy's 'Jude the Obscure', is characterised as a typical New Woman in the novel and it is said that what a woman shrinks from – in the early days of other marriage – she shakes down to with comfortable indifference in half -a-dozen years. Sue, who was married to Mr. Phillotson, expressed the agony of unsuccessful marriage to Jude. However, this is analogous to claiming that amputating a limb does not result in any suffering since, over the course of time, a person can become acclimated to the appearance and functionality of a prosthetic leg or arm (Hardy, 2003, p.264).

Sue was a unique example of a Victorian lady due to the fact that she rejected the traditional position of a Victorian woman and was opposed to the institution of early marriage. Despite the fact that Sue was finally allowed to escape her horrible marriage to Mr. Phillotson, she steadfastly refused to get into another marriage ceremony with her lover Jude. Her conviction that marriage is an "iron compact" that stifles the natural tenderness between a man and a woman is one of the primary reasons she does not intend to get married (Hardy, 2003, p. 307). Sue went even further with her stance on marriage and considered it to be a symbol of the degrading of women. "I have been looking at the marriage service in the Prayer book, and it seems to me very humiliating that a giver-away should be required at all," Sue said. "The bridegroom is the one who, according to the ritual as it is recorded there, selects me of his own free choice and pleasure;

nevertheless, I do not pick him. Someone hands me over to him like a she-ass or a she-goat or any other type of domestic animal." (Hardy, 2003, p. 220)

Tess, the protagonist in Thomas Hardy's novel *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, is portrayed as an honest and naive young woman who is corrupted and brought down by Alec D'Urbervilles, a manipulative and self-centered man who is responsible for Tess's downfall. Alec D'Urbervilles is the cause of Tess's downfall. Hardy's Tess and Gaskell's Ruth both defied the restrictions placed on them by their town and went against the norms of the Victorian era; nonetheless, their society vilified them both and held them responsible for their actions (Cunningham, 1978, p. 29-31). The American author Kate Chopin's work 'The Awakening' deals with the depiction of Edna, a Victorian woman who defies the traditional role that is expected of her in Victorian society, which is to be a devoted wife and a doting mother. In the novel, Edna's awakening was a gradual process, beginning with her unwillingness to follow her husband, which caused him annoyance. Chopin described her in these words: *"She became aware that her will had suddenly become fiery, obstinate, and resistant. At that precise time, there was nothing else she could have done but refuse and put up a fight. She pondered whether or not her husband had ever talked to her in such a manner before, as well as whether or not she had ever obeyed his demand. Naturally, she acknowledged that she did; she recalled doing so. But she was unable to understand why or how she should have succumbed, despite the fact that she felt as she did at the time."* (Chopin, 1995, p. 55).

Women and the law in Victorian England

Coverture was a legal practise that was common in Victorian England and served as the basis for the laws that pertained to married women at the time. It was decreed that "by marriage, the husband and wife become one person in the eyes of the law: that is to say, the very being or legal existence of the woman is suspended throughout the duration of her marriage..." After becoming married, a lady legally gave up her individual rights.

Property

The control of a woman's real property and the income from a woman's real property, that is, property held in the form of freehold land, would pass to her husband upon marriage under common law, even though he could not dispose of it without her consent. This only applied to property that was held in the form of freehold land. Her private assets, such as money from earnings or investments, as well as personal possessions like jewellery, were completely under her husband's authority when they were transferred to him.

Divorce

Before the Divorce and Matrimonial Causes Act was passed in 1857, the only way to get a divorce in England was through a laborious and time-consuming process. It required the husband to file a lawsuit against another man for 'criminal talk,' and after that, the couple can proceed with an ecclesiastical divorce, which does not allow for the right to remarry. The Divorce Act of 1857 was enacted with the intention of facilitating the divorce of men of middling fortune from their spouses. A woman could be granted a divorce on the simple grounds of her adultery (her adultery threatened her husband's ability to pass his property on to his male heirs), whereas a woman had to prove that her adultery had been made worse by her husband's desertion (for a period of two years), or by cruelty, rape, sodomy, incest, or bigamy. However, the wife was

unable to file a claim for damages against the adulterous third person on her husband's behalf. There was no mechanism for a divorce that was mutually agreed upon.

Therefore, the divorce that was given to Jude and Sue in *Jude the Obscure* would have been illegitimate due to the fact that neither of them had committed adultery. Furthermore, Jude and Sue would have been in violation of the law for enabling it to be presumed that they had committed adultery. The Matrimonial Causes Act of 1878 made it possible to get a judicial separation at a lower expense, but it did away with the opportunity to remarry. This Act offered maintenance to the woman divorced from her husband. The Victorian culture had very traditional "views on marriage" and ideas on the role that women should play in everyday life. The vast majority of women viewed marriage as a natural and unchangeable institution. The Matrimonial Causes Act of 1923 made the grounds for divorce more equitable by enabling a woman to file a divorce petition based on her husband's unfaithful behaviour.

Hardy appeared smack dab in the centre of this strictly enforced social norm. He held a very particular perspective on the organisation and all of the repercussions that were associated with it. He was of the opinion that it was illogical to demand that a man and a woman take an oath to love each other till the end of time even if society demanded that the pair remain together even if the oath was broken. Hardy was opposed to the notion that marriage was an irrevocable commitment more than he was opposed to the institution of marriage itself. He makes the observation that *Tess of the D'urbervilles* is written about the injustices that women experience and the terrible effects that these injustices have for the sex life. Both *Sense and Sensibility* and *Wuthering Heights* explore the complexities of gender roles in the context of romantic relationships; however, whereas *Sense and Sensibility* tackles the complete range of gender concerns, the latter looks at the gendered system as a challenge for both male and female lovers. The characters of Jane Austen's female protagonists provide an accurate portrayal of women living in the 19th century. Austen forbids these ladies from engaging in any form of sexual activity and instead concentrates on their concerns over marriage and society. With his fiercely independent heroines, Hardy challenges the socially acceptable portrayal of women that Austen presents in her novels. In his works, Hardy reimagines the function of women by concentrating on their sexuality. Hardy's unconventional portrayal of the sexual feminine poses a challenge to the traditional Victorian concept of women since it places more emphasis on the physical aspects of femininity. In an era that put a high value on reticence, self-restraint, and certain feminine features such as delicacy of health, a retiring temperament, a physical and intellectual shyness, and so forth, these characteristics were considered to be of great importance. Hardy's ladies, with their admixture of attributes — which transcend the categories of Madonna and whore — must have bewildered a great number of readers, who must have been trapped between sentiments of adoration and worry. In point of fact, Hardy was accused of misrepresenting womankind due to the fact that she dethroned the ideal woman from her perch atop the pedestal and rescued the broken woman from her position in the gutter. She also presented humanly flawed characters who were nonetheless loved. Hardy detested the concept that he referred to as the "ideal lady in literature." On the other hand, the most admirable aspects of his heroines are depicted within the framework of their flawed personalities and the imperfect environment in which they live. The "prosaic reality" in *Far From the Madding Crowd*, in which two aspiring farmers rise to prosperity but only the female contender is denied legal rights and privileges, constitutes a primary motif that modulates into a dominant theme in the darker work of *Jude the Obscure*. Hardy was heading in an entirely new and distinct route. In the beginning of his career, he had studied the work of Charles Fourier, during which he took notes and produced diagrams.

Hardy held strong beliefs that the liberal feminist idealisation of marriage should be rejected. The lone antimarriage crusader, as symbolised in Sue Bridehead, emerges late on the scene in Hardy's novels; but, she is latent in earlier forms of Hardy's more dissident and rebellious female characters like Sue Bridehead. Although Bathsheba's views on marriage are more equivocal than Sue's, they originate from a common philosophy and a common feminine awareness that vehemently rejects the idea that marriage ought to be the overt aim of a woman's sexuality. Sue and Bathsheba both share this viewpoint. However, critical opinion does not support Hardy because, from the perspective of the critics, he would shake up the community, the social order, and the status quo. These disruptive women appear to destabilise more universes than just their own, and Hardy strongly supports them despite this fact. Hardy's position has not changed despite the fact that Elfride has been embroiled in contentious sexual encounters with Knight and Sue has been outraged by the idea that a married woman could be seen as the property of a man. Mid- to late-Victorian medical theorists maintained the belief that any serious discussion of female sexuality should be appropriately limited to medical journals, where it would be handled in terms of malfunction and filed under the title of pathological condition. It would be another around twenty years before he would feel comfortable publicly declaring himself to be an opponent of the league of medical theorists, an opponent of the prevalent sexual ethic, and an opponent of the sexual double standard in Tess. Hardy lamented the lack of options available to him in *Candour of English Fiction* (1890), in which he argued against the Victorian literary traditions of the day. He was only able to choose between two paths. Either he gave his characters 'the bogus appearance of them being in conformity with societal norms and regulations' or 'by leaving them alone to act as they will, he must bring the thunders of respectability down on his head.' One of these explanations is correct. Cytherea Graye, his first heroine from *Desperate Remedies*, is not lured into any type of "defiance" in any of the story's events. On the contrary, she is a fabrication that adheres strictly to all the norms. She is unique in the Hardy canon due to the traditional ordinariness of her character. "The Pair of Blue Eyes" is the first of his "misrepresentations" of women and the first in his series of unorthodox and sensual heroines. She is also known as the "thunderbolt" in the line. Elfride Swancourt is not a stereotypical Victorian maiden who is looking for her identity to be bestowed upon her by a man through the institution of marriage, with its concomitant bestowal of the man's name, identity, economic position, and social prestige. Elfride is becoming more conscious of her own psychosexual needs, which has prompted her to recognise that her sexual development, exploration, and knowledge are of major significance to her maturation and fulfilment as a person. If we are drawn to her, connect with her, and have sympathy for her, it is not so much because she is attempting to win the affection of a decent guy as it is because she is powerful and weak, courageous and scared, headstrong and fragile; she is completely human, and we feel compassion for her. Because Hardy also cares for her, he finds himself in a difficult situation. For the reason that, in accordance with the prevalent notions, her intellectual and moral seriousness ought to be undone by her sexual allure. Not only is woman the sexual aggressor, in contrast to the male, but she is also the one who dictates the tempo of the interaction. According to what we are informed, Stephen is not manly enough for her, and Elfride's perception of Knight's obsessiveness raises the question of his sexual viability in her head. This inverted order of responsibilities flagrantly disobeyed established norms and flagrantly went against the cultural canons of morality.

Once more, in "The Return of the Native," Eustacia mixes the virility of a man with the allure of a woman's beauty. Hardy invents a woman who defies convention by giving her the desires of a passionate love and the autonomy of a man, which pits them against one other. Her ardent obsession with gaining affection not from a single partner but from a number of other people is not only in opposition to the moral rules, but it is also subversive. 'Eustacia Vye was the raw material of a divinity'. She had the passions and instincts which make

a model goddess, that is, those which make not quite a model woman. Shallow, sensuous, high-strung, a typical 'decadent', she is keenly aware that she is a victim of the perverse dispensation of things. Circumstances have put her in the wrong place; juxtaposition with the heath is the bane of her existence, and by that token everything is wrong. "How I have tried and tried to be a splendid woman, and how destiny has been against me! I do not deserve my lot!" She cries in a frenzy of bitter revolt, "O cruelty of putting me into this ill conceived world! I was capable of much; but I have been injured and blasted and crushed by things beyond my control." She is a Shelleyan creation, in her quarrel with the stern realities and her joy in 'what seems'. Tess experiences a conflict that is quite similar. Tess achieves personal growth and advancement as a result of her opposition to the Victorian ideal. This intense sexuality ultimately leads to her being shut off from the rest of society as well as to her passing away. Giving Tess the subtitle "A Pure Woman" was most likely the most daunting rejection of the "Victorian dichotomy" that Hardy could have made. Because Tess is carrying a child outside of wedlock, it was generally agreed that she could not be considered "pure," despite the fact that this one term generated a major uproar. Tess is deemed "pure" by Hardy on the grounds that she has moral consistency, which is a challenge to the concept of feminine chastity. Hardy's heroines are distinct from the traditional concept of the Victorian heroine in that they are self-sufficient and powerful. Hardy's impassioned heroines serve as an example of a new type of characterisation for women since they combine sensuality and male attributes. Another illustration may be found in *Jude the Obscure*. In light of the fact that Sue resides with Jude and gives birth to his children despite the fact that the two of them are not married to one other, traditional prejudice would label her as "depraved." In point of fact, she is a really decent person who is very diligent and even has a high-minded attitude.

When reading a book like *Tess* or *Jude*, the reader is given the opportunity to analyse all of the information that pertains to a highly complicated case. and the so-called police of Victorian prudishness consistently referred to Hardy's handling of sexual impulses as spectacular, violent, pagan, and animalistic in their assessments. The fact that he not only provided an exceptionally vivid account of female needs but also treated his heroines with sympathy goes against the zeitgeist. This is the aspect of his writing that is the most unsettling. This laodiceanism in Hardy's heroine is a conflict on a psychological level: the struggle is between conforming to Victorian conventions and living a free life. When seen through the lens of sexology, the interpretation of Hardy's works that was done by Havelock Ellis is of the utmost importance. It is a new branch of the scientific discipline that focuses on the psychosexual interpretation of events that took place in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. In 1893, Ellis positioned Hardy's writings in the feminine tradition of novel writing represented by authors like as Jane Austen, Charlotte Bronte, and George Eliot. The reasoning behind this placement was Ellis's "idea of love as the one business of life." Ellis is of the opinion that Hardy's heroines are more "instinct guided" than they are concerned with concerns of morality. He observes, "The heroines in Mr. Hardy's stories have a tendency to give in to the pressures of their situations, and their actions are constrained by the impulses they follow. They are seldom really that awful. It would appear that this trait of theirs, which prevents them from achieving a very high degree of goodness, is also the identical trait that prevents them from ever achieving a particularly high level of evil. They have an inherent self-respect and a purity that comes naturally to them.... Even Eustacia Vye does not have a hint of uncleanness about her. One is obligated to press home the point that these ladies are guided by their instincts".

CONCLUSION

It is generally agreed that *Tess* is Hardy's sad masterpiece and that it is also his most ambitious work. The reader understands that this is not "a straightforward seduction narrative" because he sees Tess as an innocent young woman who is driven by her emotions rather than a virgin who is concerned about maintaining her chastity. She is a naïve dairymaid who works in an area that is rich in agricultural resources and peaceful because she finds a fulfilling rhythm of life in the simple things that she does. At the conclusion of the book, Angel is seen walking hand in hand with Tess's younger sister, whom the author refers to as "a spiritualized picture of Tess." However, Eustecia Vye, of "The Return of The Native" is passionate, vibrant, free minded and ambitious, but her ambitions are thwarted when after marrying with the Paris returned Clym, she is confined to live at Egden Heath. "The reader may indeed feel sure that a marriage such as Clym and Eustecia's, nay, such ignorance of realities and such flimsy aspirations as Eustecia's, spill disaster. Nothing they can do will liberate them or provide a happy or worthy existence. Hence their history consists of painful stresses rather than of actions, tension between them and their environment, tension between each other." The most amazing reality is that not only in *Tess*, *Jude* or *Return of the Native*, to name a few novels by Hardy, women are portrayed battling against obstacles; they struggle in a world that, as Hardy notes in *The Return of the Native*, is not kind to women. In other words, they struggle in an environment that is not favourable to them. Hardy challenges the social and literary norms that, in Victorian England, contributed to the culturally-rooted induction of a sexual "amnesia" in women.

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