

1 Hardy as a Social Reformer

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6 **Abstract**

7 The following research paper is an attempt to discuss Thomas Hardy, a novelist of the
8 Victorian era, as a social reformer. Many critics and researchers of his novels, consider him a
9 pessimist, who paints a darker picture of life. In this picture, man is portrayed as a tragic
10 figure, clutched in the cruel grips of fate as well as society. The present paper gives arguments
11 of critics, and interprets Hardy's novels in the way, so that we may present him as a social
12 reformer. It throws light on two of the major novels of Hardy, ?TESS OF THE
13 DURBERVILLES? and ?THE MAYOR OF CASTERBRIDGE?.

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15 **Index terms**— Victorian era, social reformer, TESS OF THE DURBERVILLES.

16 I. Literature Review literary critics and scholars took their pen on Thomas Hardy, and wrote about him,
17 according to their own perceptive. If we categorize these scholars according to their age, it would not go wrong
18 to say that the critics of the Victorian age, under the yoke of social conventions, regarded Hardy as a pessimist.
19 In their views Hardy himself suffered from tragic life, and his reading of Greek Tragedies, resulted in reflecting
20 a gloomy picture of life in his works. With the passage of time, as modern age emerged with its multiplicity,
21 almost in every field of life, broadened the intellectual vistas, and thus, interpretations of Hardy's works took
22 new dimensions. One thing is confirmed that the broadened views opened the close windows of mind and let
23 the fresh air come in the intellectual field. The result was that the modern critics spent their energies to show
24 Hardy as a realist. This research paper steps forward to discuss Hardy as a social reformer. Society is a collective
25 form of human beings, and Hardy takes his character as an individual, who can take his better part in improving
26 this universe. He pinpoints the inner drawbacks of his characters and want them to be reformed. No doubt,
27 impersonal forces come forward to hurdle in the way of his characters, but they must bring their inner capacities
28 forward to face these hurdles. Such a person cannot be called a pessimist, rather he is a reformer and optimist,
29 who waits for the silver lining to emerge, and it can be emerged, he says, if his characters face the opposing
30 external and internal forces bravely, when the dark clouds are prevailing in their lives.

31 **1 II. Introduction**

32 Hardy (1840-1928), a well known novelist, opened his eye among the Wessex. The conditions of life prevailing in
33 his surroundings were hard. Besides like his father, he was an emotional and secluded person. Among his school
34 mates, he was not too much popular, and spent most of his time meditating. This meditation reflected in his
35 novels, which depict life in terms of tragedy. However, the flame of love for humanity kept burning in his heart,
36 and he thought that how they can bring improvements in their life .

37 **2 III. Interpretation**

38 Hardy in his novels, presents his characters in the way, suffering both at the hands of ironist God and conservative
39 custom-holders of society. These forces influence their life so deeply that they get no way, but to see life caught
40 badly is a blind alley. In STEWART(1976) words " Hardy is content with the single march of a protagonist to
41 his doom -the great ineluctable fatality of things, announcing loudly by means of a series of sensational set pieces
42 en route".

43 Hinting at the decisive forces in his characters tragic life M.H ABRAM (1987) points out that it is cruel
44 destiny, circumstances or imposed cruelty on one another, which lead them to tragic ending. Such type of views,

3 IV. CONCLUSION

45 makeHardy's readers think that he is a pessimist. Tracing the reasons of his pessimism, they consider certain
46 formative influences, responsible for Hardy is pessimism i.e his heredity, surroundings, emotional nature and his
47 reading of the classical works. As F. ??ANNING(1912) says that tragicly is a nuclear arround which Hardy 's
48 novels revolve and seeds of this tragedy lies in his deep emotional nature.

49 But his meditation on human tragedy led him to think that what is inside man, through which he can play
50 his role and make this universe a happy place to live. It is right that he thinks fate as an indifferent force, and
51 in the words of E.MFOSTER ??1927), fate in Hardy's novels works above his characters' not through them. To
52 emphasize the point, he presents his characters caught in the web of coincidences, and these chances change the
53 whole pattern of their life and leave them wailing. Hardy seems to be putting a question on his characters that
54 what is the advantage of this weiling ?

55 We suffer, because we are alive, and as alive persons we would come across chances and coincidences, but
56 what forces are with us ? what can we do with ourselves? What forces are going against us ? The social
57 conventions, especially those of the Victorian era, make his sensitive mind upset . He urges his characters not
58 to be pressed under these norms. JOHN GOODE ??1988) asserts that Hardy, instead of approving the social
59 mores, interrogates that why these norms and even he rejects them. This rejection makes the respectable figures
60 of society annoyed, and that is why, they regard Hardy as a pessimist. RICHARD TAUFKRICH with DIE
61 ROMANKUNST VON (1912) says that although Hardy considers life, a womb of pains and sufferings, yet he is
62 not pessimist, and those who regard him thus, they do this because of their inner biases.

63 Let take his novels and compare them with Greek tragedies, which presented human being, as a puppet
64 in the Grand hand of fate, and these tragedies ended, in leaving thier characters, being suffered. Hardy
65 does not do so. We can find element of hope in the ending of 'TESS OF THE DURBERVILLES' is not
66 merely sport of the immortal forces, rather it is mainly because of her failure to overgrow social conventions.
67 PATRICIA INGHAM(1989) says that tragedy of Tess is the result of her inner conflicts between individuality and
68 conventionality. Hardy shows this conflict, when Tess after her rape says, "Perhaps, of all things, a lie on this
69 thing would do the most good to me now; but I have honour enough left little as 'tis, not to tell that lie."(P.89).
70 Ythroughout her life she cannot come out of this conflict and finally, she is hanged. SPIVEY throws light on this
71 fact and according to him, tragedy in hardy's novels emerged when a romantic hero fails in his life attempt to
72 reach a higher spiritual state. On the other hand, development is shown in the character of Angel. Angel at one
73 time leaves Tess by saying that forgiveness did not apply to all cases. At that time, he is typically a traditional
74 person, but with the passage of time, he realizes his fault and comes back, although it is too late for Tess. Hardy
75 presents Angel as a reformed person now, and in other words, gives him a second life with Lizalu. Hardy thinks
76 that it is future, for which we should strive and struggle.

77 Then there is Henchard in "THE MAYOR OF CASTERBRIDGE", he feels himself helpless before his past
78 because he cannot change it, but he tries his best to change his future, he declares: "Judge me by my future
79 works"(HANCHARD CH.ll). He feels repentance on his past deeds, and wants to reform him that he says, "Yes,
80 it is, but it is not by what it is, in this life, but by what appears, that you are judged" (HENCHARD. CH.25).
81 Tragic happenings linger in his novels but still there is hope, hope in the sense that he wants his characters to be
82 reformed. Through their reformation, he wants them to share their part to make this universe, a happy place.

83 For the purpose of reformation, Hardy goes deep into psyche of his characters, and tries to locate where
84 the drawbacks of their personality lie. BUTLER(1980) asserts that "Hardy wants always to go deeper and he
85 is prepared to face anything". This going into inner psyche makes his fictions, especially "THE MAYOR OF
86 CASTERBRIDGE", like Shakespearean tragedies. Whether it is Tess or Henchard, the failure of the both is of
87 internal characteristics likethat of the KING LEAR or MACBETH. However difference lies between Shakespearean
88 tragedies and those of the Hardy. AsREHDER(1977) says that "For Shakespeare, tragedies end in death, comedies
89 end in marriage. For Hardy some tragedies begin in marriage and every comedy contains a tragedy."

90 3 IV. Conclusion

91 It is true that the overall concept presented in Hardy's novels, is tragic. But being tragic, they cannot be regarded
92 as pessimistic. His novels depict life, prevailing in the Victorian age, and it is the life crushed under the burden
93 of conventions. Hardy raises his finger to these norms and wants them to reform, but the followers of these
94 conventions become upset and calls him a pessimist. Indeed, an in depth study of his novels and their characters
95 reveal the fact that he presents a pessimistic life, which he found in his age and urges his characters to reform
96 themselves.¹

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