

**VARIED ASPECTS OF PURITY IN THE FICTIONAL HEROINS OF T  
HOMAS HARDY**

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**ABSTRACT**

*Thomas Hardy is universally acknowledged as a novelist whose pre-occupation with female characters and taboo issues of the time seemed against the decorum of the Victorians. Hardy's outspoken attitudes are tangible in his fictional prose where he valiantly tries to challenge the Victorian ideals of femininity. By creating non-conformist heroines, Hardy took the first step to move away from the conventionalized codes of the time particularly on behalf of femininity. In effect, Hardy valiantly tries to challenge the Victorian ideological discourse of femininity through highlighting on his fictional women's flaws which comes into conflict with the time's conception of a pure woman. This research paper critically studies the varied aspects of purity in the fictional heroine's of Thomas Hardy. Hardy was in pursuit of widening his audience eyes to observe the ruthless society injustice and inequality imposing on femininity. His outstanding attitudes are tangible in the novel where he valiantly tries to challenge the Victorian ideals of femininity through the characterization of his fictional heroine's and the focus upon their purity.*

**Key words:** Victorian women, Purity, Chastity, Innocence, Idolatry, Toil and Labour

**Introduction**

Victorian women rarely offer fresh active fictions bearing imaginative possibilities of challenge. The tales of discovery of travel, of work, of exploration were men's stories. In Hardy's Wessex world the sphere is broadened yet kept well within the range of plausibility and possibility. Women work outside the home in both conventional and unconventional occupations; from teaching to negotiating the price of corn, from serving as barmaids to inaugurating telegraphic system, from working as milk maids to organizing public readings. Women travel unaccompanied beyond the neighbourhood, embark upon enterprises of their own volition, and initiate relationships. In other words, they struggle to shape their lives with a vigour and energy. Hardy women toil and labour, the physical reality of depletion leaves woman as it leaves man

. Hardy begins are the majority of Victorian novelist left off, with real, flesh- and- blood women; and he begins with radical imagination or excitement: the soiled and soiling world of work was not, as Victorians argue a suitable place for noble womankind. In the same radical spirit, Hardy not only acknowledges to female volatile emotions, female sensations but he also treats them with the same devotion to physical detail as he gives to the male.

Hardy had a very distinct view of the institution and the implications that come along with it. He felt that it is absurd to force two people to vow to love each other forever and even if that do not happen, the couple is socially required against marriage, as he is against the idea that it is an irrevocable contract. He points out these women faces inequalities and their serious consequences for the sex.

A clear representation offers in the 19<sup>th</sup> century women in Jane Austen's novels. Austen refers these women focuses more upon their concern with marriage and society. Hardy resist Austen's socially accepted depiction of female with his radically independent heroine's. Hardy redefines the role of women in his novels, focusing on sexuality. Hardy threatens the Victorian model of women. In an age that placed a high value on reticence, self-restrained and certain feminine, qualities such as delicacy of health, a retiring disposition, a physical and intellectual timidity.

Hardy had largely pessimistic views on humanity. He saw man as doomed to a tragic fate from which there was no real possibility of escape, views arguably influenced by his own reception as a writer. Hardy was notoriously underappreciated during his life. Hardy's women with their admixture of qualities- transcending the stereotypes of Madonna and whore, much have confused many readers caught with mixed feelings of admiration and alarm. Indeed, for removing the paragon from her pedestal and for raising the fallen women from the gutter, for presenting humanly imperfect but lovable heroine's, Hardy is, charge with misrepresenting womankind. Hardy abhorred what he called the 'perfect women in fiction'. On the contrary, his heroine's best faculties are represented in the context of their less- than- perfect nature in a less- than – perfect world.

In Oxford English Dictionary meaning for purification is: Free from adulteration or contamination. Freedom from immorality, especially of a sexual nature: white is meant to represent purity and innocence.

In *The Old Testament*, the basic sense of the Hebrew word for purity is probably an emptying out or being clean. The verb appears about forty times, most occurrences with an eth

ical, moral, or forensic sense. Purity is opposed to being guilty. It stands over against such conduct or attitudes as unfaithfulness to God's covenant ( [Hosea 8:1](#) ), rebellion against God's law (v. 1), and idolatry (vv. 4-6, 11). Purity consists of "clean hand" ( [Gen 20:5](#) ), innocence ( [Psalm 26:6](#) ; [73:13](#) ).

Purity is related to guiltless, blameless, or innocent behavior. In Exodus 23:7, an innocent person is portrayed as someone who is righteous as measured by the demands of the law. Purity is not a cultic term; in fact, it does not appear in the rules for holiness detailed in Leviticus. Yet the idea of purity does surface in a number of instances. Before they can engage in any cultic or ceremonial activity, God's people must be consecrated or had to sanctify themselves ( [Exodus 19:10](#) [Exodus 19:14](#) ; [Joshua 7:13](#) ; [1 Sam 16:5](#) ; [Job 1:5](#) ).

In *The New Testament*, there is little emphasis on ritual purity. Rather, the focus is on moral purity or purification: chastity ( [2 Cor 11:2](#) ; [Titus 2:5](#) ); innocence in one's attitude toward members of the church ( [2 Cor 7:11](#) ); and moral purity or uprightness ( [Php 4:8](#) ; [1 Tim 5:22](#) ; [1 Peter 3:2](#) ; [1 John 1:3](#) ). Purity is associated with understanding, patience and kindness ( [2 Cor 6:6](#) ); speech, life, love, and faith ( [1 Tim 4:12](#) ); and reverence ( [1 Peter 3:2](#) ).

Hardy's philosophy of life , Must bring into account the role and function of chance, co-incidence and accident in a noble of Hardy, we should certainly look into Hardy's pessimistic cum tragic vision of life .To Hardy 'happiness is but an occasional episode in a general drama of pain'. Fatalism and its predominating influence on human life are the other factors that lead Hardy to conclude that life is summation of chance, co-incidence and accident. Irony of fate, situation and environment as expounded in Greek tragedies recur in Hardy's novel. Hardy's penetrative vision could read the heart-beat of fate and there by him did not find any surety and security in man's life.

*The Return of the Native* in particular and the other novels in general exhibit the concept of fatalism through the instrument of fate, - as chance, co-incidence and accident. The major characters of '*The Return of the Native*', - we may mention Eustacia and Wildeve and with some extent the minor characters, like Thomasin and Mrs. Yeobright, simply become the prey of Egdon who symbolizes first of all fate of Greek tragedy and secondly 'nature incarnate'.

"She had calculated to such a degree on the probability of success that she had represented Paris, and not badmouth, to her grandfather as in all likelihood th

eir future home. Her hopes were bound up in this dream.” (The Return of the Native 4.1.4)

The word choice here styles Eustacia as a sort of gambler against fate and the universe. She ‘calculates’ the odds and banks on the ‘probability’ of going to Paris eventually. Eustacia should have taken a static class. Egdon, the fate of puts traps on the ways of the aforesaid characters that show sense, intellect feeling, whim or disgust of their own. The devices chance, co-incident and accident in this novel are in the hands of Egdon just as the rope or string remains in the invisible hand of the puppet dancing master who at this will alters, moves, and shifts these puppets in a stage. Life is a stage and fate controls, guides, and moves human beings as she wills. And understudy of Hardy’s novel *The Return of the Native* presents before us the following chances, co-incident and accident.

“To Eustacia the situation seemed such a mockery of her hopes that death appeared the only door of relief if the satire of heaven should go much further.” (The Return to the Native 4.3.17)

Heaven or fate is kind of a punk here. Eustacia seems to think the entire universe is “mocking” her and she responds in typical melodramatic fashion, hoping for “death” she really should have just consider getting better sense of human and reasoning her priorities, but then this book would not be all that dramatic. Expect the characters, - Eustacia, and Wild eve all other characters are rustics. They are the product of Egdon .These two characters are foreigners. Clym, - the hero of the novel is sin to the soil.

“The fate have not been kind to you, Eustacia Yeobright”

“I have nothing to thank them for.” (The Return to the Native 4.6.18-19)

The idea that fate has it in for Eustacia runs through the book, though it’s mainly brought up by Eustacia herself. In this case, Damon points it out to her, and future solidifies the similarities between these two characters. Eustacia desire to be a big city girl falls bad in the relationship with Clym so she goes back to Doman who offers her to take her to Paris after he inherits a bunch of money. So Eustacia raises her attitudes and wishes to break the moralities of Victorian society. Her purity or innocence is stoles by her own intellectual thoughts.

*Mayor of Casterbridge* novel in general exhibit the concept of search for fulfillment i

n relationship. Major character Susan, Elizabeth- Jane, Lucetta all the three female characters sketched in a different background by Hardy. Hardy is a person who shows the characteristic feature of an exact Victorian woman in varied corner with realistic Victorian era's atmosphere.

“For my part I don't see why men who have got wives, and don't want 'em, shoul'dn't get rid of 'em as these gipsy fellows do their old horses.”(Mayor of Casterbridge 1.30)

The man takes things a little far when he makes a comparison between wives and 'old horses.' Susan role played as a proper respectable and innocent wife of Michael Henchard. Susan was a silent woman and fulfilled the desire of her husband without any hesitation. When she come to know that she of stolen for five guineas to a sailor, she accepted the fate and Susan herself left her husband Henchard, thinking that it was an loyal agreement and that she was legally belonged to the sailor. Here poverty and Carelessness carried over by man forced woman to fed up and accept the fatal situation for the rest of her life, until she got the death news of Newson (sailor). By this way her innocence fades away from her.

“Seizing the sailor's arm with her right hand, and mounting the little girl on her left, she went out of the tent, sobbing bitterly, and apparently without a thought that she was not strictly bound to go with the man who had paid for her.” ( Mayor of Casterbridge 1.80)

Susan's innocence is important: she doesn't realize that the 'wife sale' that just took place isn't legally binding. After all, you couldn't just buy and sell people like slaves in 19th century England. But Susan doesn't understand this. If she did, her departure with the sailor would be like running away with someone to commit adultery. Since Susan thinks the marriage has been legally and morally transferred, she is innocent of any intentional wrongdoing.

Elizabeth- Jane is a young girl who develops crush on Donald Farfrae. She is searching for the fulfillment in relationship She give up her likeness for Donald when she is aware of Donald and Lucetta's marriage however finally Lucetta dies. Though Lucetta played minor role all over the play, she played the role of impurity in the name of revenge towards Henchard. Lucetta was innocent and ignorant, when she falls in love with Henchard. However, her innocence changes into cunningness while finding the unfair situation of herself with Henchard. S

o that she flirt Donald and get settle with him even thought she was aware of Elizabeth's crush on Donald, When Lucetta's affair with Henchard revealed by some careless messenger Lucetta suffered from scarred and this leads her to die in pathetic condition. Loss of purity, Marital affair, gossips. All these situations carefully sketched by Hardy to show the actual Victorian society.

“It was an odd sequence that out of all this wronging of social law came that flower of nature, Elizabeth. Part of his wish to wash his hands of life arose from his perceptions of its contraries inconsistencies – of Nature's jaunty readiness to support bad social principles.”(Mayor of Casterbridge 44.8)

This is a funny way of describing the wife sale – it was a ‘wronging of social law.’ Note that the narrator doesn't call marriage a ‘moral’ or ‘religious’ law. It's purely a social institution.

In the prominent novel of Thomas Hardy *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* added the subtitle, *A Pure Woman*, at the last moment. It has created problems for readers and critics ever since the novel's appearance. The title offends many on moral grounds, for whom Tess is a ‘ruined,’ immoral woman. Others are puzzled intellectually; what is Hardy's basis for calling her pure is that:

“I still maintain that her innate purity remained intact to the very last; though I frankly own that a certain outward purity left her on her last fall. I regarded her then as being in the hands of circumstances, not morally responsible, a mere corpse drifting with the current to her end.” (Tess of the D'Urbervilles 145)

The subtitle has been defended in various ways. One of the most common defenses is the suggestion that Hardy is showing that the traditional Christian view equating virtue and purity with virginity is wrong. Another common explanation of the subtitle is that Hardy distinguishes between the act and the intention; this is a distinction Angel Clare finally makes in the novel. Or is it possible that Tess is pure in her character as Apostolic Charity, that her soul remains unstained regardless of what happens to her body? Irving Howe offers a more subtle explanation:

“She comes to represent a spiritualized transcendence of chastity. She dies three times, to live again:--first with Alec D'Urbervilles, then with Angel Clare, and lastly with Alec again. Absolute victim of her wretched circumstances, she is ultimately beyond their stain. She embodies a feeling for the inviolability of

the person, as it brings the absolute of charity nearer to the warming Christian virtue of charity. Through dialectic of negation, Tess reaches purity of spirit even as she fails to satisfy the standards of the world.” (Tess of the D’Urbervilles 228)

However goes on to suggest that our compassion for Tess weakens our judgment, so that finally we do not care to judge Tess at all. This interpretation dismisses the whole question of her purity derives from her victimization:

“She is the victim of chance--of heredity, physical and temperamental; of the position she was born into, and all the other factors that impinge on her life. She could not be held responsible for them; she was, in Hardy’s words, ‘a pure woman.’” (Tess of the D’Urbervilles 238)

For Angel, Tess’s purity, which he equates with virginity, is the crucial issue. After her confession, Tess looks so ‘absolutely pure’ that a stupefied Angel urges her to lie, to tell him her confession is not true. He is able, at this point, to see only the external, not her soul. Ironically, the passage about the virtuous woman which his father reads from Proverbs makes no reference to virginity; instead, it identifies qualities and behavior which would fit Tess. To make this point, Hardy omits some of the text, though the Reverend Clare would certainly have read the passage in its entirety. Hardy comments on Angel’s judgment of Tess’s purity:

“No prophet had told him, and he was not prophet enough to tell himself, that essentially this young wife of his was as deserving of the praise of King Lemuel as any other woman endowed with the same dislike of evil, her moral value having to be reckoned not by achievement but by tendency.... In considering what Tess was not, he overlooked what she was, and forgot that the defective can be more than the entire.” (Tess of the d’Urbervilles 267)

A well-traveled, open-minded stranger persuades Angel that he judged Tess too harshly and that his concept of purity was too rigid. How convincing is Angel’s change, which is summarized in a page or so? Are other influences than the stranger working to change Angel? After his rejection of Tess on their honeymoon, he wonders briefly whether he has judged and treated her unfairly. Would his disappointment in Brazil and the suffering he experienced and observed there throw a softer light on Tess’s confession? Would their long separation give his love for her the opportunity to assert itself? And so he returns to England and to Tess. Ironically it is the fleshly sensualist Alec, not the intellectual, spiritual Angel, who never doubts Tess’s purity,



“I never despised you; if I had I should not love you now! Why I did not despise you was on account of your being unsmirched in spite of all; you withdrew yourself from me so quickly and resolutely when you saw the situation; you did not remain at my pleasure...” (Tess of the d’Urbervilles 326-7).

*Jude the Obscure* is the last novel of Hardy. This novel deals with the issues of 1896’s Victorian woman especially Hardy’s heroine’s no longer fettered to domestic sphere; Existential quest search for fulfillment in romantic relationship and marital relationship. Major fictional heroine’s of this play Arabella Donn and Sue, these two women portrayed genuinely to show the fictional Victorian women flaws which come into conflict with the time conception of pure women.

Arabella who seduced Jude Flauley to get an intimate romantic relationship to fulfill her romantic desire, and married Jude to push him into darkness, As like all man he is an ordinary guy about to make terrible mistake that he found a wrong girl for his life. When, Arabella decides to leave for Australia. She is strong and even not worried to go away from Jude. As per the norms of 1896’s Victorian women they are not supposed to take any decision without her family or married woman husband’s concern, here the case with Arabella is totally different, she gone away from Jude and settled in Australia. There she married another guy and starts her new life.

“She seemed to get further and further away from him with her strange ways and curious unconsciousness of gender.”(Jude the Obscure 3.4.42)

In this one little sentence, there is a whole lot to be said about gender. It’s not that Sue views women as somehow superior to men exactly, or that she sees men and women as two opposing forces. She just does not acknowledge gender roles. Her actions are not determined by the fact that she is a woman; they are determined by who she is as a person. Gender has nothing to do with it. Of course, this kind of blows Jude’s mind and freaks him out a little. By the way Jude also falls for Sue.

However Sue has no intimate feeling for Jude at first. She married to Philliston and she really cannot stand behind around him. In this way Sue feels her husband and goes to Jude. These episodes are the best to screen the weakness in the minds of woman over their life. Actually they don’t know that they need actually in their life. Struggling to find the right for them, What Happens at last? “You are as enslaved to the social code as any woman I know.” (Jude the Obscure 4.5.63)



This is a bold statement by Jude, and there is some truth to it. For all of Sue's independent drive and contrary take on institutions like marriage and religion, she is not completely free from her time. There are instances throughout the book where she is highly concerned with what others might think. Arabella came back to Jude to collapse the relationship between Jude and Sue by giving her child to Jude saying that it's our child. However Jude and Sue accepted that child and even Sue allows that child to call her 'Mother'. Subtle here is Jude and Sue is not at all happy with it Especially Jude LFT (Life Father Time). Finally Arabella tries and got success of re- marrying Jude and Sue goes back to Philloston. The fallen characteristics feature of woman focuses deeply to showcases the real mistakes committed by Victorian woman. They are not mature enough to handle the situation of real life and life ended up with distractions. Searching for something, what they really lost on their first hand.

In the ultimate analysis we say that Thomas Hardy spotlighting the constitutional significance of purity, the Victorians put no place for a fallen woman in society generally. A clear distinction between a fallen women and a respectable one, In the Victorian patriarchal and they were expelled from the respectable English society of the day. In effect, Women were debarred to experience any experience out of wedlock. Subsequently a woman who lost her virginity or was suspected to lose was blemished as either ruined or fallen woman and unquestionably known as a serious menace posted to the morality of the society and those who were still pure. In reality, in Victorian polite society a fallen woman was stigmatized and socially degraded and left behind without any familial and financial connections disregarding the fact that whether it is done consciously or unconsciously. Hardy touches the Victorian sensibility on the traditional accepted view on femininity that purity and virginity go hand in hand. Sexual and criminal guilt are glaringly obvious can be titled as a pure woman. Where in support of his creation of non- conformist heroin, in his preface to the novel, Thomas Hardy stands up for his heroin. In all these four plays Hardy portrayed his Woman as a simple rural and very young, middle aged. It's the age for fashion era as well as corruption may or may not occur in the conscience of man as well as woman, and will remains with tragic notions at last. Hardy fictional heroin's are pure, elegant, innocence, simple as per the Victorian society concern. Later the way women get corrupted over different reason and desires glimpses in their soul. However woman is not able to accept her faults or adultery. Since, woman is ready to argue and to assert the reason for their actual situation in different dimension of their so called "Victorian society" and "male domination". Role of "purity" carry over into impurity actually by the means of evoked intellectual.

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