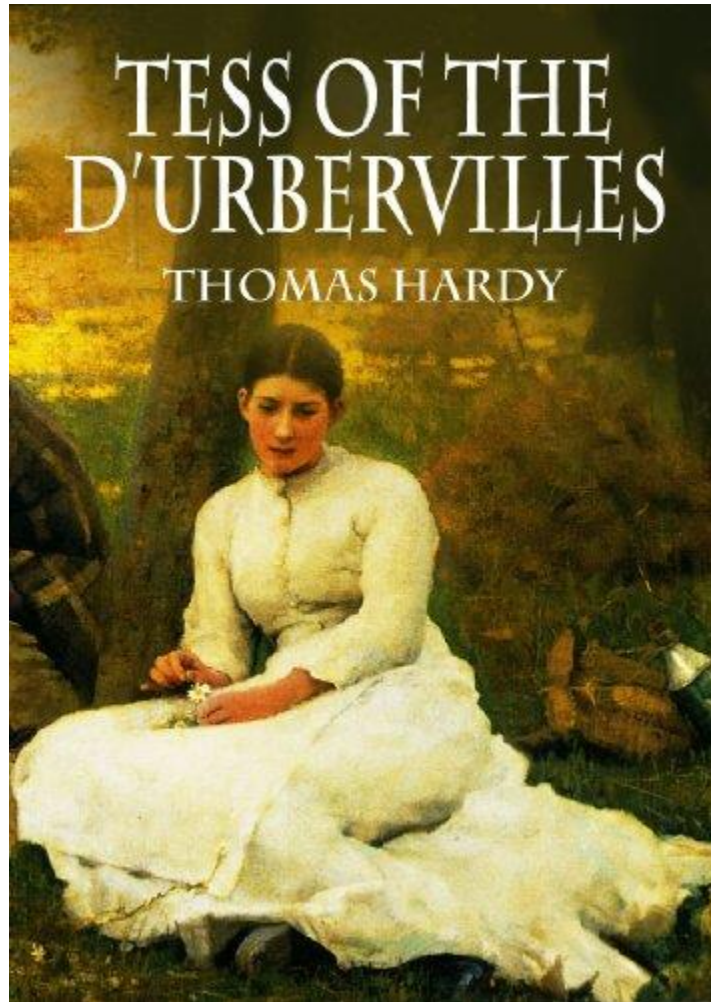


Identity Crisis: Invoking the image 'TESS' in Thomas Hardy Poetry

D. Sathish Kumar



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Abstract

This paper discusses the identity crisis in Thomas Hardy poetry, invoking the identity of Tess in his poetry. Identity crisis is the major problem in the works of Thomas Hardy so that his writing became more controversial and created problem by the treatment of female character in

his works. This paper shows how the obstacles and the inner conflicts that the poet himself encounters in his own process of portraying the female character in his works and also publishing it. His first passion of writing is poetry, but he never published any of his poetry in 19th century though he was a writer of the Victorian period, but he was discussed as a modern poet because of the themes shared in his poetry and also the publication of his poetry in the twentieth century. Tess is the model of Victorian idea of women to Thomas Hardy, his portrayal of female characters in his poetry is modeled upon his famous character Tess. Accordingly, this paper shows that Hardy's heroines deviate from the prevalent Victorian ideal of women not only in his novel but also in his poetry. Therefore, this paper shows the crucial aspects of Identity crisis in Hardy's authorial point of view on portraying woman in his poetry by taking some of his poem to substantiate it.

Introduction

Literature brings out the unfold idea into an action, that the idea changes into a character in literature. One can discuss a simple idea in a novel, poetry, drama, arts, paintings etc... but the same idea became a pattern for the writers. The idea may be a symbol or images in their writings. The repetition of one particular idea in different works by a writer is a pattern, that pattern became a style in his/her writings. When one looks up closely, the literary works can find a pattern in every century followed by the writers of the literature. The ultimate thing in literature is a perfect presentation of idea in its forms. All the writers of the literature have their own style of writing and presenting their ideas. The style and manner of portrayal differs from one writer to other and also one century to the other century according to their culture, tradition and religion. But the style differs from the pattern because the pattern is something which discuss the beauties of a particular writer's work. Every century writers have their own way of discussing the literature and the same was followed by the writers of their contemporary means then it becomes a pattern of that era. Likewise, the nineteenth century writers have a particular style of portraying the characters in their works. The whole nineteenth century writers discussed only the female wrongdoing in their works. Writers like Lord Tennyson, Charles Dickens, Elizabeth Gaskell, Ellen wood, and George Eliot.

Thomas Hardy

Thomas Hardy led a double life in literature in the first half of his literary career he was a greatest Victorian novelist, but he abandoned writing fiction in 1896, particularly after the publication of the two novels *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* and *Jude the Obscure*. He reinvented him as a poet which was his first passion of writing, he has written above 900 poems and all his poems were published in the twentieth-century, so he is called as a Victorian novelist and twentieth century poet. Hardy emerges as one of the most compelling voices in modern poetry.

Tess and Jude

Thomas Hardy created several heroines among them TESS and JUDE are the powerful heroines because they both were not just a character they both were the ideology of women which is invoked by Hardy from his poetry. Actually, they both were characters of Hardy's poetry later he transformed it into a novel character but he never stated the name of these women

in his poetry because of identity crisis. Though the poems were written before the publication of these novels, but he published it after TESS and JUDE novels.

Hardy has identity crisis on himself for introducing the idea of women of his ideal society Wessex to the readers. He started writing poetry around 1860s. His first passion of writing is poetry, as a young man he could not make enough money to live on by writing poetry, so he decided to write novels at the same time he has written poetry. His poetry foreshadows the themes used in his later fictions. The story of every novel written by him is a sequence of events which he shared in his poetry but when publishing his poetry, he totally avoids mentioning the names of the real character portrayed in his novels because of the outburst of criticism over the publication of his works. He had a bitter experience of invoking the female characters in his novel from the beginning itself, so his first work *The Poor man and the lady* was rejected by the numerous publishers, because of handling of female character in that and it is very critical of Victorian society.

No one wanted to publish his early poems because of its subject matter. He keep on writing verse during the three decades in which he worked as a novelist, always considering himself primarily a poet. Some of the poems resemble the events discussed in his novels. He has taken many plots for his novels from his poems not from other sources. Hardy projected his idea of woman in his works were based on the character Tess but in his poetry he never mentioned her name because of identity crisis. Tess is not only a character produced by hardy it is an idea of Victorian woman to him based on this particular woman he has created many female characters such as Elfride, Sue, Fancy, Lucetta, etc.

Victorian Society and Victorian Writers

Victorian ideal society not wanted the writers to discuss/reflect the Victorian society in their writing instead they wanted the writers to teach some morals to the woman those who are all falling in a wrong way through their characters. Only few writers started discussing the treatment sex, marriage, family life, religion and customs. The Victorian readers started searching the meaning of life not only in the society but also in the writings of literature, which makes Hardy to faces the identity crisis in projecting his own views in his works. He portrayed the character Tess as a pure woman, but the society rejected that notion. He tried his level best to discuss a meaningful culture by portraying the identity of Tess in his works to the meaningless society. During the half of the nineteenth century in 1859 *Origin of Species* published by Charles Darwin. Darwin's book introduced the scientific theory that populations evolve over the course of generations through a process of natural selection.

Impact of Darwin's Ideas

Hardy adapted Darwin's ideas to his later fiction showing characters to be at the mercy of their environment, heredity and adaptability rather than more in control of fate. His novel, *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* depicts a ruthless Darwinian world in which protagonists fail to survive because they cannot adapt to the changing social environment it is not the character adapted the environment it is the novelist who accepted the social changes in the society.

He portrayed the idea of Tess in his novels as well as in his poetry. He showed Tess as pure woman in his novel because of that he faced some many controversies and criticism to projecting the identity of Victorian women. By portraying that he argues that the purity is not in the flesh, he teaches that the purity is in the heart and mind of the human beings. In one of the interview he states that his ideal character Tess is mentally pure not physically.

Woman Should Not Be Made Man's Property

Hardy's idea is that a woman should not be made man's property and marriage is nothing but an institution which gave the men, the right to subjugate their women. Hardy portrayed the strength of female mostly in all his works with the idea of Tess in mind, it is an identity crisis of Hardy discuss the nature/name of Tess in his poetry. It is an evident that whatever he discusses in the novel *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* the events were discussed in his poetry written before the novel but the poems were published after the not only the publication of the novel but he never named the women discussed in his poetry if analyze some poems like *We Field Women*, *Beyond the Last Lamp*, *A Maiden's Pledge*, *The Ruined Maid*, *The Subaltern* etc... in these poems the female characters resembles the identity of Tess, the poem stories were discussed as an events took place in the novel *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*. These are the obstacles and the inner conflicts that the poet himself encounters in his own process of portraying the female characters. Hardy faces the identity crisis in authorial point of view on portraying woman in his poetry.

We Field-Women

The poem is directly related to the novel *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* (1891) in its subject matter. The poem is related to Hardy's heroine and her friends from the novel *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*.

The poem is written as if spoken by one of the Field-Women working on the land through the seasons. She immediately refers to the farm where she is working. Flintcomb-Ash is the farm in Hardy's novel, *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*. This is the place where Tess suffers so much with the hard manual labour. She had to survive the deadly winter also. Hardy describes it as 'the heavy and coarse pursuits' which she liked. She worked on the arable land, work of such roughness, indeed as she would never have deliberately volunteered for. It seems as if the poem is spoken by one of Tess's friends.

This poem has a direct reference to the novel *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*. In chapter 42 Tess, separated from her husband Angel Clare, trying to find work and travelling to where her friend Marion is staying, first she inquired for lighter kinds of employment and applied next for the less light, till beginning with the dairy and poultry attendance. That she liked best, she ended with the heavy coarse pursuits which she like least work on farm land, work of such roughness, indeed as she never has deliberately volunteered for. 'Eventually she reaches Flint Comb Ash and joins with her friend Marion who is working as "swede-hacking", one of the toughest jobs of all. There was not a tree within sight anything but fallow and turnips everywhere in the large field.

How it rained
When we went to Flintcomb-Ash,

And could not stand upon the hill
Trimming Swedes for the slicing-mill.

The work is hard, physical manual work and most of it is done out of doors. The woman who is speaking describes how they all soaked through when they worked trimming the Swedes. These lines describe the workers about how they faced the hard situations. They worked hard even in the pouring rain.

Wet washed through us – splash, splash, splash:
How it rained!

The woman speaking describes how they all got soaked through when they worked trimming the Swedes.

The alliterated word ‘wet washed’ emphasize how wet they got as does the relentless, continuous, repetitive ‘plash, plash, plash’ of the pouring rain. Hardy gives us a sound of the rain, too with the onomatopoeic ‘sh’ sounds in ‘washed’ and ‘plash’. It is the authentic voice of the Dorset field women with limited vocabulary.

How it snowed
When we crossed from Flintcomb-Ash
To the Wheat Barn for drawing reed,
Since we could nowise chop a swede.
Flakes in each doorway & casement-sash;
How it snowed!

Each stanza explains the different climates and the difficulties of the farm workers. When snow comes and further works in the field in impossible. The women moved to the wheat-barn for ‘reed-drawing’. The worker changes the work according to the climatic condition and season. In this season they started preparing straw for roof thatching, as a work for this whole climate or season. Their work is hard physical manual work and most of it done out of doors only. They work only according to the season and each season had different works to do.

How it shone
When we went from Flintcomb-Ash
To start at dairy work once more
In the laughing meads, with cows threescore,
And pails, & songs, & love – too rash;
How it shone!

This stanza describes seasonal variations and the dairy works. This stanza gives a vivid description about the work done in the summer season. And there is a description about the farm and also their work in the farm. This poem ends blissfully.

The exclamations which start and end in each of the verse emphasize the effect of the weather on the workers. ‘How it rained!’, ‘How it snowed!’, ‘How it shone’. The weather dictates what work can be done. When the Swedes are frozen to cut with a billhook, the women

move into the barn to work on the thatching straw. But even inside the great barn, the snowflakes fill the doorways and casement sashes and the women are hardly protected from the bitter weather. Summer is the only season of enjoyment for the workers; it is the happy days for them because this is the only season they work outside comfortably without any natural problem. It is the only season they enjoy their life.

There is a feeling that the field women are imprisoned in this cycle of work, autumn, winter and summer. Every year they won't escape from all the seasonal problems. There is no progress between the beginning and ending of each stanza.

Conclusion

This study makes everyone to understand how Hardy struggled to portray his characters in his poetry as well as in his novels. The poems have a space for interpretation and deepened analysis of certain fact of Hardy's characters which is discussed in his novels. The poems clearly show how the image of Tess haunts Thomas Hardy throughout his writing career. Naturally this gets reflected in his poetry also. There are many other poems which hint at the character of Tess. But the poem We Field Woman directly hint at the incidents narrated in the novel Tess. The poems seem to have been written by Hardy to express his feelings about the Victorian Fallen Woman. These ideas do not appear in the poems. The novel readers may not accept these radical ideas. That is why Hardy wrote these ideas through his poetry.

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D. Sathish Kumar
Assistant Professor of English
Theivanai Ammal College for Women
Villupuram
Tamilnadu
India

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D. Sathish Kumar

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