



REPRESENTATION OF HARDY'S TESS AS A 'PURE WOMAN'

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ABSTRACT

The novel *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* by Thomas Hardy presents a powerful exploration of morality, social injustice, and gender inequality in Victorian society. The work portrays Tess Durbeyfield as a character whose life is shaped by poverty, social expectations, and tragic circumstances. Hardy's subtitle, "A Pure Woman Faithfully Presented," challenges the conventional Victorian belief that a woman's purity depends solely on her sexual innocence. Instead, Hardy emphasizes that true purity lies in a person's character, intentions, and moral integrity. Throughout the novel, Tess is depicted as an innocent and compassionate individual who becomes the victim of exploitation and social prejudice. Despite facing harsh judgments and suffering repeated misfortunes, she continues to display honesty, kindness, and emotional strength. The narrative also highlights the hypocrisy of Victorian society, which condemns Tess while ignoring the social and gender inequalities that contribute to her tragedy. Hardy further reinforces Tess's purity through symbolic connections with nature and through a sympathetic narrative voice that encourages readers to view her with compassion. Ultimately, the novel presents Tess as a tragic heroine whose moral dignity remains intact despite the suffering she endures. Hardy's portrayal invites readers to reconsider rigid moral standards and to adopt a more humane understanding of purity and justice in society.

KEYWORDS: Thomas Hardy, *Tess of The D'urbervilles*, Tess Durbeyfield, Victorian Morality, Purity, Social Injustice, Gender Inequality, Tragic Heroine, Narrative Sympathy, Moral Integrity

1. INTRODUCTION

Thomas Hardy is regarded as one of the most influential writers of late Victorian literature. Born in 1840 in Dorset, England, Hardy developed a deep connection with rural life, landscapes, and the social conditions of ordinary people. His works often reflect the struggles of individuals living in a society governed by rigid moral codes and social hierarchies. Hardy's novels are particularly known for their realistic portrayal of rural communities and the hardships faced by people who are trapped by poverty, social expectations, and fate. Through his writing, he challenged many of the accepted beliefs and traditions of Victorian society, especially those concerning morality, class distinctions, and gender roles. Hardy's literary contribution lies in his ability to combine powerful storytelling with deep social criticism, thereby presenting a vivid picture of human suffering and resilience. His novels such as *Far from the Madding Crowd*, *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, and *Jude the Obscure* explore themes of love, tragedy, social injustice, and the conflict between individual desires and societal norms. Among all his works, however, one novel stands out for its emotional depth and controversial subject matter—*Tess of the d'Urbervilles*.

Published in 1891, *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* is widely considered one of Hardy's greatest literary achievements and a significant work in English literature. The novel tells the tragic story of Tess Durbeyfield, a young woman from a poor rural family whose life is shaped by a series of unfortunate circumstances and social injustices. Through Tess's experiences, Hardy explores themes such as social inequality,

moral hypocrisy, gender discrimination, and the destructive effects of rigid moral standards. The novel is set in the fictional region of Wessex, which Hardy frequently used as the setting for many of his works. By presenting the life of a simple village girl who is judged harshly by society despite her innocence, Hardy draws attention to the unfair treatment of women and the double standards that existed during the Victorian period. The emotional intensity of the novel, combined with Hardy's sympathetic portrayal of Tess, has made the work a powerful critique of social conventions and a lasting contribution to the study of gender and morality in literature.

One of the most striking and controversial aspects of the novel is Hardy's subtitle, "A Pure Woman Faithfully Presented." This phrase appears directly on the title page of the book and immediately challenges the reader's understanding of the concept of purity. During the Victorian era, purity was usually defined in terms of a woman's sexual innocence and moral reputation. According to the dominant social values of the time, a woman who had lost her chastity—regardless of the circumstances—was often considered morally fallen and socially unacceptable. Hardy deliberately questioned this narrow definition of purity by presenting Tess as a character who remains morally innocent and virtuous despite the tragic events that affect her life. By describing Tess as a "pure woman," Hardy emphasizes that true purity lies not in outward social judgment but in a person's character, intentions, and inner morality. His portrayal suggests that Tess's kindness, honesty, and sense of responsibility make her morally superior to many of the people who judge and condemn her.

The subtitle generated considerable controversy when the novel was first published because it directly challenged the moral attitudes of Victorian society. Many readers and critics were shocked by Hardy's claim that Tess could be described as a pure woman, especially after the traumatic incident involving Alec d'Urberville, which results in Tess's loss of social respectability. Victorian society tended to view such situations in rigid moral terms, often blaming the woman rather than recognizing the complexity of the circumstances. Hardy's sympathetic portrayal of Tess therefore appeared to question the moral authority of society itself. By presenting Tess as a victim of social injustice and male exploitation, Hardy exposed the hypocrisy of a culture that claimed to uphold morality while often ignoring compassion and fairness.

The controversy surrounding the idea of purity in the Victorian era forms an essential background for understanding Hardy's novel. During that period, strict expectations were placed upon women regarding behaviour, sexuality, and reputation. Women were expected to embody ideals of modesty, innocence, and obedience, and any deviation from these expectations could lead to severe social consequences. At the same time, men were often judged less harshly for similar actions, revealing a clear double standard in moral judgments. Hardy was deeply critical of this unequal system, and through Tess's tragic story he attempted to highlight the injustice faced by women who were condemned by society for circumstances beyond their control.

In this context, Tess of the d'Urbervilles can be seen as both a powerful literary work and a social critique. Hardy's representation of Tess challenges traditional definitions of morality and urges readers to reconsider the meaning of purity. Rather than accepting society's harsh judgments, Hardy invites readers to look beyond conventional standards and recognize the humanity, dignity, and moral strength of a character who suffers greatly but remains compassionate and sincere. Through this portrayal, Hardy not only created one of the most memorable heroines in English literature but also initiated an important discussion about gender, morality, and social justice that continues to be relevant even in modern times.

2. CONCEPT OF PURITY IN THE VICTORIAN AGE

The concept of purity occupied a central place in the moral and social framework of the Victorian period. Victorian society was strongly influenced by strict moral codes, religious beliefs, and deeply rooted cultural traditions that emphasized discipline, respectability, and social order. During this time, women were expected to embody ideals of modesty, innocence, obedience, and moral integrity. Purity was considered one of the most important virtues of a woman, and it was closely connected with her reputation and social status. A woman's honor was often judged by her adherence to these ideals, and maintaining a spotless reputation was seen as essential for her acceptance within society. Within this context, purity was not merely a personal quality but also a social expectation that determined a woman's value and respectability in the community.

In Victorian culture, women were often viewed as the moral

guardians of the family and society. They were expected to represent virtue and self-control, while men were generally given greater freedom in their social and personal lives. The prevailing ideology of the time portrayed women as delicate, passive, and morally superior beings whose primary responsibilities were centered around domestic life and family care. Marriage was regarded as the ultimate goal for most women, and their ability to secure a respectable marriage depended heavily on their reputation for purity. Any behavior that seemed to challenge this expectation could result in severe criticism, social exclusion, and even lifelong stigma. Thus, the social and moral expectations imposed on women were not only strict but also deeply unequal when compared with the freedoms allowed to men.

The rigid standards of chastity and morality imposed on women created a system in which female virtue was narrowly defined by sexual innocence. A woman was expected to remain completely chaste before marriage and faithful afterward, and any deviation from this standard was treated as a serious moral failure. Importantly, these standards rarely considered the circumstances surrounding a woman's actions. Even when a woman was a victim of coercion, manipulation, or exploitation, society often judged her harshly and regarded her as morally fallen. The concept of the "fallen woman" became a powerful social label during the Victorian era, and once a woman was associated with such a reputation, it was extremely difficult for her to regain social acceptance. This rigid moral system reflected the broader patriarchal structure of Victorian society, where male authority and social norms determined how women's behavior was interpreted and judged.

Because of these strict standards, society frequently judged a woman's character almost entirely on the basis of her sexual purity rather than her personal qualities or moral intentions. Traits such as kindness, honesty, compassion, and responsibility were often overshadowed by the emphasis placed on chastity. As a result, women who experienced misfortune or victimization could still be condemned by society regardless of their innocence. This approach created a deeply unfair moral framework in which women were held responsible for circumstances that were often beyond their control. The judgment of society was therefore not always based on justice or compassion but on rigid traditions that prioritized reputation over truth.

Within this cultural environment, Thomas Hardy presented a powerful challenge to the conventional understanding of purity through his novel Tess of the d'Urbervilles. Hardy questioned the assumption that purity could be defined solely in terms of a woman's physical or sexual status. Instead, he suggested that true purity should be understood as a reflection of a person's inner character, sincerity, and moral integrity. Through the character of Tess Durbeyfield, Hardy portrays a young woman who remains compassionate, honest, and morally sensitive despite the tragic events that shape her life. Tess's experiences expose the cruelty and hypocrisy of a society that judges her harshly while ignoring the injustice she has suffered.

By presenting Tess as a fundamentally innocent and dignified individual, Hardy directly challenged the rigid moral standards of Victorian society. He encourages readers to reconsider whether societal definitions of purity are fair or humane. Tess's character demonstrates that moral worth cannot be reduced to a single social standard but must be understood through a broader appreciation of human experience and personal virtue. Through this portrayal, Hardy not only criticizes the restrictive values of his time but also raises important questions about justice, compassion, and the true meaning of moral purity.

3. CHARACTERIZATION OF TESS

3.1 Tess as an Innocent and Natural Woman

In the novel *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, Thomas Hardy presents Tess Durbeyfield as a character who embodies innocence, simplicity, and a deep connection with nature. From the beginning of the novel, Tess is portrayed as a young woman whose personality is marked by purity of heart and sincerity. She is not influenced by selfish motives or social ambition but instead lives a simple and humble life in a rural environment. Her character reflects the natural goodness that Hardy believed existed within ordinary people, particularly those living close to the land. Tess's simplicity is evident in her gentle behaviour, modest lifestyle, and genuine concern for the well-being of others. She does not possess the cunning or manipulation often associated with morally questionable characters; instead, she approaches life with honesty and emotional sincerity.

Hardy frequently associates Tess with the natural world, using vivid descriptions of landscapes and rural settings to emphasize her innocence and purity. Tess is closely connected to the countryside, fields, and seasons that surround her life in rural England. This strong relationship with nature symbolizes her natural goodness and moral integrity. Unlike the artificial standards of society, nature in the novel represents harmony, honesty, and truth. Tess's presence in natural settings highlights her role as a figure who belongs to the pure and uncorrupted world of nature rather than the harsh and judgmental society that later condemns her. Hardy's descriptions of her working in fields, walking through green landscapes, and interacting peacefully with animals reinforce the idea that Tess possesses an innate purity that is deeply connected with the natural environment.

In addition to her natural innocence, Tess is also characterized by her remarkable kindness and compassion toward others. She consistently demonstrates empathy and concern for the people around her, especially her family members. Tess grows up in a poor household where financial difficulties are a constant struggle, and she often feels a strong responsibility to support and protect her family. When her parents face economic hardship, Tess willingly accepts the burden of helping them, even though it requires her to leave home and work under difficult circumstances. Her decision to seek employment in order to assist her family reflects her selflessness and sense of duty. Rather than complaining about her situation, Tess quietly accepts responsibility and tries to improve the conditions of those she loves.

Tess's honesty is another important aspect of her character. She is truthful and sincere in her actions and relationships, even when honesty causes her personal suffering. She does not attempt to hide behind deception or false appearances, which distinguishes her from many other characters in the novel who are influenced by social expectations and hypocrisy. Tess's moral strength lies in her willingness to confront the truth about her life, regardless of the consequences. This honesty highlights her strong sense of personal integrity and reinforces Hardy's portrayal of her as a morally pure individual.

Furthermore, Tess's compassion extends beyond her immediate family and reveals her deep emotional sensitivity. She often shows kindness toward strangers and animals, reflecting a gentle and nurturing personality. Hardy presents these qualities as evidence of Tess's genuine goodness, suggesting that her moral worth cannot be measured by society's narrow standards. Despite the hardships she experiences, Tess continues to display empathy and generosity, demonstrating the resilience of her character.

Through these qualities—simplicity, connection with nature, honesty, and compassion—Hardy creates a powerful image of Tess as an innocent and natural woman. Her character represents the idea that true purity lies in a person's intentions and moral character rather than in the rigid social judgments imposed by society. By emphasizing Tess's goodness and humanity, Hardy encourages readers to view her not as someone defined by unfortunate circumstances but as a deeply virtuous individual whose inner purity remains intact despite the tragedies she faces.

3.2 Tess as a Victim of Circumstances

In *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, Thomas Hardy portrays Tess Durbeyfield not as a woman who deliberately chooses wrongdoing, but as a tragic figure whose life is shaped by circumstances beyond her control. Hardy carefully constructs Tess's story in such a way that readers understand the social and economic pressures that influence her decisions. Rather than presenting Tess as morally weak or responsible for her misfortunes, Hardy emphasizes the powerful external forces—poverty, social expectations, and exploitation—that gradually lead to the tragic events of her life. Through this portrayal, Tess becomes a symbol of how individuals, particularly women in Victorian society, could become victims of harsh social conditions.

One of the most important circumstances that shapes Tess's life is her family's poverty. Tess grows up in a poor rural household where financial difficulties are a constant reality. Her parents struggle to provide for their children, and their economic situation leaves the family vulnerable to hardship. When Tess's father learns about their supposed connection to a noble family, the d'Urbervilles, her parents see an opportunity to improve their social and financial condition. As a result, Tess is encouraged to visit the wealthy household in hopes that this connection might bring some benefit to the family. Tess herself does not seek wealth or social advancement; however, her strong sense of duty toward her family leads her to accept

the responsibility. Her decision to leave home and seek work is therefore not motivated by personal ambition but by her desire to support her parents and siblings. Hardy presents this moment as the beginning of Tess's tragic journey, demonstrating how economic hardship forces her into situations that ultimately place her in danger.

Another crucial factor in Tess's tragic fate is the manipulation and exploitation she experiences at the hands of Alec d'Urberville. Alec represents the power imbalance that existed between men and women in Victorian society. As a wealthy and socially influential man, he possesses both authority and freedom, while Tess, as a poor young woman, lacks the social protection and power to resist him effectively. Alec's behaviour toward Tess is marked by persistent attention and manipulation, and he gradually places her in a vulnerable position. Eventually, Tess becomes the victim of his exploitation, an event that dramatically changes the course of her life. Hardy makes it clear that Tess does not willingly participate in this situation; rather, she is overpowered by circumstances and by Alec's misuse of his social position. Through this portrayal, Hardy highlights the injustice of a society that often blamed women for actions in which they had little or no control.

Despite being a victim, Tess suffers the harsh judgment of society, which tends to interpret her situation according to rigid moral standards. Victorian society often labelled women who lost their sexual purity as morally fallen, regardless of whether they were victims of exploitation. As a result, Tess carries the burden of shame and social condemnation even though she is not responsible for the events that caused her suffering. Hardy strongly criticizes this unjust moral framework by presenting Tess as a fundamentally innocent character whose kindness, honesty, and compassion remain unchanged despite her tragic experiences. By doing so, he challenges the idea that moral guilt should be assigned solely based on social reputation.

Through Tess's story, Hardy encourages readers to recognize the difference between moral wrongdoing and unfortunate circumstances. Tess's life illustrates how social pressures, economic hardship, and male dominance can combine to destroy the life of an innocent individual. Her suffering is not the result of personal immorality but rather the consequence of a society that fails to protect the vulnerable and instead condemns them. In this way, Hardy portrays Tess as a victim of circumstances rather than a morally guilty character. This perspective reinforces the novel's central argument that true moral judgment should consider compassion, understanding, and the complexity of human experience rather than relying on rigid and unfair social standards.

3.3 Tess's Moral Strength and Integrity

In *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, Thomas Hardy portrays Tess Durbeyfield as a character who possesses remarkable moral strength and integrity despite the hardships she experiences. Although Tess faces numerous tragedies and social judgments, she consistently demonstrates honesty, emotional sensitivity, and a strong moral conscience. Hardy presents Tess not merely as a passive victim of circumstances but as a woman whose

inner strength and dignity remain intact even in the face of suffering. Her actions and decisions throughout the novel reveal a deep commitment to truth and moral responsibility, which forms an important aspect of Hardy's portrayal of her as a "pure woman."

One of the clearest examples of Tess's moral integrity is her honesty in revealing her past to Angel Clare. When Tess develops a relationship with Angel and eventually agrees to marry him, she feels a strong moral obligation to tell him about the tragic incident involving Alec d'Urberville. Tess understands that this confession could damage their relationship, yet she believes that honesty is essential for a truthful and respectful marriage. Before the wedding, she even writes a letter explaining her past, hoping that Angel will understand her situation and accept her despite the unfortunate events she has experienced. Unfortunately, the letter fails to reach Angel, and Tess later confesses the truth to him directly after their marriage. Her willingness to reveal this painful part of her life demonstrates her sincerity and courage. Instead of hiding the truth to protect herself, Tess chooses honesty, reflecting the depth of her moral character.

Another important aspect of Tess's moral strength is her profound sense of guilt, even though she is essentially innocent of wrongdoing. Despite being a victim of exploitation, Tess internalizes society's harsh judgments and feels deep shame about the events that occurred in her past. This emotional burden shows the strength of her conscience and her sensitivity toward moral values. Tess constantly reflects on her experiences and questions her own worth, even though the circumstances were beyond her control. Hardy uses this inner conflict to emphasize the injustice of the moral standards imposed by society. Tess's guilt is not the result of actual moral failure but rather the consequence of a social environment that unfairly condemns women who experience misfortune. Her emotional suffering therefore highlights the cruelty of a society that forces innocent individuals to bear the weight of moral blame.

Furthermore, Tess's endurance and courage throughout her suffering reveal the depth of her moral resilience. Throughout the novel, she faces repeated hardships, including social rejection, poverty, and emotional betrayal. Despite these challenges, Tess continues to demonstrate patience, determination, and compassion toward others. She does not become bitter or vengeful; instead, she tries to endure her difficulties with quiet dignity. Even when life becomes extremely difficult, Tess continues to work hard, support her family, and maintain her sense of moral responsibility. Her strength lies not in dramatic acts of rebellion but in her ability to endure suffering while preserving her humanity and kindness.

Through Tess's honesty, sense of guilt, and endurance, Hardy presents her as a character whose moral integrity remains unbroken despite the tragedies she experiences. These qualities reinforce the novel's central argument that true purity and goodness are determined by a person's inner character rather than by society's rigid moral judgments. Tess's life may be filled with suffering, but her moral strength and sincerity reveal

a deep and enduring purity that challenges the conventional values of Victorian society.

4. HARDY'S CRITICISM OF SOCIAL MORALITY

In *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, Thomas Hardy presents a powerful criticism of the moral standards that dominated Victorian society. Through the tragic experiences of Tess Durbeyfield, Hardy exposes the hypocrisy, injustice, and rigid moral codes that governed social judgment during the Victorian era. At a time when society placed great importance on outward respectability and strict moral conduct, Hardy questioned whether these standards were truly fair or humane. By portraying Tess as a morally sincere and compassionate individual who is nevertheless condemned by society, Hardy highlights the gap between genuine moral character and the superficial judgments imposed by social conventions.

One of the central aspects of Hardy's critique is the hypocrisy of Victorian society in its treatment of Tess. Although Tess is essentially innocent and becomes a victim of exploitation, society quickly labels her as morally fallen. People judge her harshly without considering the circumstances that led to her situation. Victorian society often claimed to uphold values such as morality, purity, and virtue, yet it frequently ignored compassion and justice when evaluating the lives of individuals, particularly women. Hardy demonstrates how society's moral standards were applied selectively and unfairly. While Tess suffers lifelong shame for an incident in which she had little control, the man responsible for her suffering, Alec d'Urberville, does not face the same level of social condemnation. This unequal treatment reveals the hypocrisy of a moral system that claims to protect virtue while allowing powerful individuals to escape accountability.

Hardy also emphasizes the contrast between Tess's true morality and the rigid moral codes imposed by society. Throughout the novel, Tess consistently demonstrates qualities such as kindness, honesty, compassion, and a strong sense of responsibility toward her family. She is sincere in her relationships and often sacrifices her own happiness for the well-being of others. These qualities suggest that Tess possesses genuine moral integrity. However, Victorian society measures morality primarily through strict rules regarding sexual behaviour and reputation. Because Tess has lost her social status as a "pure" woman, society refuses to recognize her inner goodness. This contrast between Tess's personal virtue and society's narrow definition of morality reveals the limitations of the social standards of the time. Hardy suggests that morality should be judged by a person's intentions, actions, and character rather than by rigid conventions that fail to consider individual circumstances.

Another important element of Hardy's criticism is his exposure of patriarchal norms and gender inequality within Victorian society. The social structure of the time placed men in positions of authority and power while expecting women to remain submissive and obedient. As a result, women often faced stricter moral expectations and harsher social consequences for actions that were tolerated or ignored in men. Tess's experiences clearly illustrate this imbalance. While she carries the burden of

social condemnation, male characters retain their freedom and social acceptance despite their involvement in the same events. Even Angel Clare, who initially appears more compassionate and progressive than other characters, ultimately struggles to overcome the moral prejudices of his society when he reacts harshly to Tess's confession about her past. His response demonstrates how deeply the patriarchal values of Victorian culture had shaped individual attitudes and judgments.

Through this portrayal, Hardy challenges the authority of the social and moral codes that dominated his time. He invites readers to question whether a society that condemns an innocent woman while excusing male wrongdoing can truly claim to uphold justice or morality. By revealing the injustice and hypocrisy embedded in Victorian social norms, Hardy encourages a more compassionate and humane understanding of morality. His portrayal of Tess not only criticizes the gender inequality of his era but also raises broader questions about how societies define virtue, judge individuals, and treat those who suffer misfortune.

5. SYMBOLISM AND NATURE IN PORTRAYING TESS'S PURITY

In *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, Thomas Hardy makes extensive use of nature imagery and symbolism to emphasize the purity and innocence of Tess Durbeyfield. Hardy was deeply influenced by the natural environment of rural England, and in many of his works, nature plays an important role in shaping the emotional and moral atmosphere of the story. In this novel, nature is not merely a background setting but an essential symbolic element that reflects Tess's character and inner life. Through vivid descriptions of landscapes, fields, seasons, and natural beauty, Hardy highlights Tess's natural goodness and contrasts it with the harsh and judgmental nature of human society.

One of the most striking aspects of Hardy's narrative is his use of nature imagery to represent Tess's innocence. Throughout the novel, Tess is frequently depicted in natural surroundings such as green fields, forests, valleys, and farmland. These images create a sense of harmony between Tess and the natural world, suggesting that she belongs to a realm that is pure, simple, and untouched by corruption. Hardy often describes Tess using imagery associated with freshness, beauty, and vitality, which reinforces the idea that she embodies natural purity. For instance, scenes in which Tess works in the fields or walks through rural landscapes emphasize her connection with the earth and the rhythms of nature. This association strengthens Hardy's argument that Tess's true identity is rooted in innocence and sincerity rather than in the social labels imposed upon her. Tess's close relationship with natural landscapes and rural life further reinforces her portrayal as a pure and authentic character. Unlike many individuals in society who are influenced by artificial social rules and ambitions, Tess lives in close contact with the natural environment. Her daily life involves agricultural work, caring for animals, and moving through the countryside that surrounds her village. Hardy often portrays rural life as a place where human beings exist in harmony with nature, free from the hypocrisy and rigid moral judgments of urban society. Tess's presence in this rural environment symbolizes her

genuine and uncorrupted nature. She appears most comfortable and peaceful when she is surrounded by fields, forests, and open landscapes, which reflect her simple and honest personality.

Nature in the novel also serves as a reflection of Tess's inner emotions and moral condition. Hardy frequently uses changes in seasons, weather, and natural settings to mirror Tess's psychological state. When Tess experiences moments of happiness or hope, the natural environment is often described as bright, fertile, and full of life. Conversely, when she faces sorrow or despair, the landscapes around her become darker, colder, or more oppressive. This symbolic relationship between Tess and the natural world allows Hardy to express her emotional experiences in a powerful and poetic way. Nature seems to respond to Tess's feelings, as if it shares in her joys and sufferings.

At the same time, Hardy uses the contrast between nature and society to highlight the injustice faced by Tess. While nature appears accepting and harmonious, society remains rigid, judgmental, and unforgiving. The natural world does not condemn Tess for the events that occur in her life, but human society harshly judges her according to strict moral codes. This contrast strengthens Hardy's portrayal of Tess as a fundamentally pure individual whose innocence is recognized by the natural world even when society refuses to acknowledge it.

Through the symbolic use of nature and landscape, Hardy deepens the reader's understanding of Tess's character and moral purity. The recurring imagery of fields, seasons, and rural life reinforces the idea that Tess represents a natural and uncorrupted form of humanity. By associating Tess so closely with nature, Hardy suggests that her purity is inherent and genuine, existing beyond the narrow and often unjust moral standards of the society in which she lives.

6. TRAGIC DIMENSION OF TESS'S CHARACTER

In *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, Thomas Hardy presents Tess Durbeyfield as a deeply tragic figure whose life is shaped by suffering, injustice, and unavoidable circumstances. The novel reflects many characteristics of classical tragedy, where a central character faces continuous misfortune despite possessing admirable qualities. Tess is not portrayed as a flawed or immoral individual; instead, she is a sensitive, kind, and morally sincere woman who becomes trapped in a series of unfortunate events. Hardy uses Tess's tragic story to highlight the cruelty of social norms and the powerful role that fate can play in determining human destiny.

Tess can be understood as a tragic heroine because her life embodies the conflict between personal innocence and the harsh realities of society. Like the heroines of classical tragedy, Tess possesses noble qualities such as honesty, compassion, and emotional depth. However, these virtues do not protect her from suffering. From the beginning of the novel, her life is influenced by circumstances beyond her control, including her family's poverty, her parents' misguided ambitions, and the rigid moral codes of Victorian society. These forces place

Tess in situations that gradually lead to emotional pain, social rejection, and personal loss. Her tragedy lies in the fact that despite her goodness and sincerity, she is unable to escape the consequences of events that were never truly her fault.

Another important aspect of the tragic dimension in Tess's character is the sense of inevitability that surrounds her fate. Throughout the novel, Hardy creates the impression that Tess's life is guided by a combination of chance, destiny, and social injustice. Small incidents, such as her father's discovery of their supposed noble ancestry, eventually lead to major turning points that shape her future. These seemingly minor events set into motion a chain of circumstances that ultimately bring suffering into Tess's life. Hardy's portrayal suggests that individuals are often powerless against the forces of fate and the rigid structures of society. Tess repeatedly attempts to rebuild her life and find happiness, yet each attempt is overshadowed by the weight of past events and social prejudice.

Social injustice also plays a significant role in intensifying the tragic nature of Tess's life. Victorian society judges Tess according to strict moral standards that fail to consider the reality of her experiences. Although she is a victim of exploitation and manipulation, society views her as morally fallen and denies her the opportunity for redemption. The harsh judgments of society isolate Tess and prevent her from achieving the happiness she deserves. Hardy uses this injustice to criticize the moral hypocrisy of the social system, emphasizing how innocent individuals can be destroyed by rigid traditions and unequal power structures.

The tragic events that shape Tess's life ultimately reinforce Hardy's central argument that she remains morally pure despite her suffering. Even as she faces rejection, hardship, and emotional pain, Tess continues to display qualities such as compassion, honesty, and selflessness. Her suffering does not corrupt her character or diminish her sense of humanity. Instead, it reveals the strength of her moral integrity. Hardy portrays Tess as a woman whose inner goodness remains intact even in the most difficult circumstances. In this sense, her tragedy does not represent moral failure but rather the failure of society to recognize and protect genuine virtue.

Through the tragic dimension of Tess's character, Hardy creates a powerful critique of social injustice and rigid moral values. Tess's life illustrates how an innocent individual can become the victim of circumstances, fate, and societal prejudice. At the same time, her enduring moral strength reinforces Hardy's portrayal of her as a "pure woman." Despite the suffering she experiences, Tess remains a symbol of compassion, dignity, and emotional sincerity, making her one of the most memorable tragic heroines in English literature.

7. HARDY'S NARRATIVE SYMPATHY TOWARD TESS

In *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, Thomas Hardy demonstrates a deep narrative sympathy toward Tess Durbeyfield. Throughout the novel, the narrator adopts a compassionate and understanding tone when describing Tess's experiences and emotions. This

sympathetic narrative voice plays an important role in shaping the reader's perception of Tess. Rather than presenting her as a morally flawed individual, Hardy consistently portrays her as a sensitive, innocent, and dignified woman who becomes the victim of social injustice and unfortunate circumstances. The narrator's tone often reflects sadness and concern for Tess's suffering, which helps readers recognize the unfairness of the situations she faces.

The compassionate tone of the narration is evident in the way Hardy carefully describes Tess's feelings, thoughts, and struggles. He frequently highlights her emotional vulnerability and moral sincerity, allowing readers to understand her inner conflict and pain. Hardy does not judge Tess harshly; instead, he emphasizes her humanity and the emotional burdens she carries throughout her life. By presenting Tess's experiences from a sympathetic perspective, Hardy encourages readers to look beyond the rigid moral judgments of Victorian society and see Tess as a complex and deeply human character. The narrative voice often appears to defend Tess against social criticism, suggesting that the real injustice lies not in her actions but in the harsh standards imposed by society.

Hardy's narrative approach also reveals his deliberate effort to influence readers to sympathize with Tess. Through detailed descriptions and emotional storytelling, he invites readers to share in Tess's joys, hopes, and sorrows. By revealing the circumstances that shape her decisions, Hardy ensures that readers understand the reasons behind her actions. This technique allows readers to develop empathy for Tess and recognize that her life is shaped largely by forces beyond her control. Hardy carefully contrasts Tess's genuine kindness and moral integrity with the harsh reactions of other characters, which further strengthens the reader's sympathy toward her. As the story progresses, readers become increasingly aware that Tess deserves compassion rather than condemnation.

Furthermore, Hardy consistently presents Tess as a misunderstood and wronged woman whose true character is overlooked by society. Victorian social norms tend to define Tess according to her reputation rather than her personal qualities. As a result, many people in the novel judge her without understanding the circumstances that led to her suffering. Hardy challenges these judgments by revealing Tess's true nature—her honesty, compassion, and sense of responsibility. By doing so, he exposes the unfairness of a society that condemns individuals without recognizing their humanity.

Through his sympathetic narrative voice, Hardy transforms Tess into a powerful symbol of innocence and injustice. The reader is encouraged to see Tess not as a fallen woman but as a victim of social prejudice and moral hypocrisy. Hardy's portrayal highlights the difference between society's harsh judgments and the reality of Tess's character. By guiding readers to sympathize with Tess, Hardy strengthens his broader criticism of Victorian moral values and reinforces the central idea that true purity lies in inner goodness rather than in the rigid standards imposed by society.

8. CONCLUSION

Thomas Hardy's portrayal of Tess Durbeyfield in *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* presents a powerful redefinition of the concept of purity. Through the character of Tess, Hardy challenges the rigid moral standards of Victorian society and questions the fairness of judging a woman's character solely on the basis of social reputation and sexual purity. Throughout the novel, Tess is depicted as a woman of deep compassion, honesty, and moral sincerity. Her life is shaped by circumstances beyond her control, including poverty, exploitation, and the harsh judgments of society. Despite these challenges, Tess consistently demonstrates inner strength, kindness, and a strong sense of responsibility toward others.

Hardy's narrative emphasizes that Tess is not morally guilty but rather a victim of social injustice and patriarchal norms. Victorian society often imposed strict expectations on women while allowing men greater freedom and forgiveness. Tess's tragic experiences reveal the hypocrisy of such a system, where an innocent woman bears the burden of shame while those responsible for her suffering escape serious consequences. By portraying Tess as a "pure woman," Hardy encourages readers to reconsider traditional definitions of morality and to recognize that true purity lies in a person's intentions, character, and humanity rather than in rigid social conventions.

The novel also highlights the tragic nature of Tess's life, showing how fate, social prejudice, and economic hardship combine to shape her destiny. Even in the face of repeated suffering, Tess remains emotionally sincere and morally resilient. Hardy's sympathetic narrative voice invites readers to understand her struggles and to view her with compassion rather than judgment. Through this portrayal, Tess emerges as one of the most memorable tragic heroines in English literature, representing the conflict between individual innocence and the oppressive structures of society.

Ultimately, Hardy's representation of Tess serves as both a literary achievement and a social critique. By exposing the limitations and injustices of Victorian moral values, Hardy urges readers to adopt a more humane and compassionate perspective when judging others. The character of Tess continues to resonate with modern audiences because her story raises timeless questions about morality, gender inequality, and the role of society in shaping individual lives. In presenting Tess as a "pure woman faithfully presented," Hardy not only defends her dignity but also challenges readers to rethink the meaning of purity and justice in human society.

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