

Tragic Manifestations of the Living Souls in Thomas Hardy's *The Mayor of Casterbridge*

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ABSTRACT

The recurrent theme of woman has always been a dominant point in Hardy's novels. He believed in woman's great capabilities and tried to picture their misery under the yoke of the Victorian England which was aggressively dominated by the malicious man. Hardy's responsible worries over the inner pressures of mankind made him raise his disgruntled voice against the inhumane norms of life. *The Mayor of Casterbridge* stands as one of Hardy's most powerful and most popular novels in which Hardy reproaches the bitter truth of his age where men sell their wives in return for money. This study strives to become a bridge for precisely scrutinizing the helpless women of the novel one by one who are crushed by the male-dominant world, and the study further aims to be deeply involved in the miserable life of the protagonist, Henchard, who rises to a position of popularity and prosperity only to meet a bitter and crushing downfall.

Key Words: Manifestation, Victorian Age, male-dominant, plurality

1. INTRODUCTION

The study begins with a look at Hardy's immeasurable zest towards the suppressed women of the Victorian Age, which is proceeded by delving into the never-ending misery of the helpless women of the novel. Finally, the study comes to its end by showing how the protagonist, Henchard, oscillates between two devastating mental conditions of misery and guilt.

Those who are already familiar with Hardy's novels can easily guess what dominant impression is imparted in *The Mayor of Casterbridge*; it is the suffocating miasma of woman. Woman plays a crucial role in Hardy's adventures to an extent that he can be easily regarded as one of the finest male feminists on the stage of literature. He sees them, sympathizes and empathizes with them and never stops writing about their silenced cries. Disgusted by the prevailing conventions of Victorian England, Hardy portrays the misfortune of the poor classes of society. He seems to be deeply preoccupied with the belief that mankind is a puppet in the hands of fate and destiny, struggling to find a way out of it and would finally be annihilated by the cruel gods of the nature.

By the closing stage of the 19th century a group of famous, especially male novelists dedicated their pens to show the misery of the helpless women of the Victorian Era by looking sympathetically at their problems, among whom and at top of whom was Thomas Hardy. Hardy, who immortalized Wessex countryside through his writings and who showed the irresistible tragedy of pain in life, was one of the greatest novelists of 19th century in which prose flourished at its zenith. Hardy readily equipped himself with the tool of language to uncover the hidden spheres of his society, where woman's presence was not given the due importance. Hooti (2011) opines:

Hardy felt that it was very important to champion the cause of women because in his view, they were 'the weaker sex'. It was women who bore children and who were sacrificed to the double standards of morality. They were the ones who most likely got wrecked to pieces if anything went wrong morally. (630)

He worked tirelessly to convert the idea of the domination of man in the society to a more flexible and just atmosphere in which woman could as well find enough room for improvement and also have the opportunity to raise her voice of discontent to higher social and political institutions. Hooti & Mousaabad (2011) comment:

Hardy was far more modern than his era as his writing conveys that race, gender and culture must not be the pretexts to give birth to discrimination, and he strongly opposed any kinds of superiority and inferiority labels based on the physical power. (134)

He never ceased writing about the tormented woman of his age and was under the severe attack of the critics of his age as a consequence. This openness of speech eventually forced him to declare in 1897 that he would never write fiction again.

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Cox clarifies:

With the Publication of *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* in 1891, and even more with *Jude the Obscure* (1895), critical discussion became obscured by questions of morality and general philosophy of life. To many readers Hardy seemed at this point to be striking at the roots of conventional sexual morality and conventional religion, and in deploring his iconoclasm or welcoming him as a pioneer of enlightenment critics often allowed their literary judgments to become distorted. On Hardy himself the effect was to bewilder and to some extent to embitter him, and the lack of understanding with which he felt these books were received undoubtedly contributed something to his abandonment of novel-writing in favor of poetry. (2005: xiii)

2. THE SUPPRESSED WOMAN IN THE CLAWS OF THE MASCULINE WORLD

The woman stands equal to the man in creation and should enjoy the same rights as long as it is not the matter of physical differences, which may be the inevitable demand of the nature. It has been stated in *The Noble Koran* (Rodwell, 2005), "Who so doeth that which is right, whether male or female, if a believer, him will we surely quicken to a happy life, and recompense them with a reward meet for their best deeds" (Surra the Bee: 250).

Victorian Age was rough on women; it would not allow them to breathe freedom outside the house and they were constrained to a mundane life at the dreadful four walls of home and were subject to the biased and strict rules of Victorian society. They were the ones who got wrecked as the result of the miasmatic conditions prevailing. Mill asserts:

After marriage, the man had anciently the power of life and death over his wife. She could invoke no law against him; he was her sole tribunal and law. For a long time he could repudiate her, but she had no corresponding power in regard to him. By the old laws of England, the husband was called the lord of the wife; he was literally regarded as her sovereign (1869: 37).

In fact, the never-ending drama of suffering of woman makes one feel that every effort for her emancipation from the malicious man seems to be drowned in a miasma of pessimism; though, the tongue cannot keep silent regarding her misery. This suppression evokes disgust and leads one into reconsidering his judgments on woman. In the age of silence, Hardy did this; indeed, he was a long unbiased observer of the biased orthodoxies existing in the society and he relentlessly strived to reawaken the sleeping conscience of the authorities to look upon the issues of woman with open arms. Hardy became a caring and sympathetic spectator of the marginalized woman, whose presence in the society was not needed by men.

Morgan comments on the Victorian era and Hardy's diction:

Victorian women were rarely offered fresh active fictions bearing imaginative possibilities of challenge, renewal and change. The tales of discovery, of travel, of work, of exploration, were men's stories where they were not the stories of fallen women.... In Hardy's Wessex world 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 systems, from working as milkmaids to organizing public readings. Women travel unaccompanied beyond the neighbourhood, embark upon enterprises of their own volition, initiate relationships. In other words, they struggle to shape their own lives with a vigor and energy and resilience that is, to the reader, the more remarkable for the fact that theirs is a struggle against all odds, a struggle in a world that, as Hardy says in *The Return of the Native*, is not friendly to women. (2006: xi)

A repulsive dominant custom in England in 19th century was the cruel wife-selling. Men who were leading a miserable life and needed money used to sell their wives as if they were goods. This social evil is expressed at the beginning of the novel, where the drunkard Henchard sells his wife to a sailor for five guineas. In the following quotation Henchard makes it completely clear to people around them that he is serious on the auction of his wife:

For my part I don't see why men who have got wives and don't want 'em, shouldn't get rid of 'em as these gipsy fellows do their old horses," said the man in the tent. "Why shouldn't they put 'em up and sell 'em by auction to men who are in need of such articles? Hey? Why, begad, I'd sell mine this minute if anybody would buy her! (2005: 7- henceforth Hardy)

Woman due to her sensitivity and lack of physical power is susceptible to the impending dangers of misuse by her male partners. She may be easily misused and she does not have the power to stand up against the malicious man and his unjust approaches towards her. Susan Henchard is a prey of this unjust precedent of Victorian Era and is completely helpless against the unfair domination of her husband:

Will anybody buy her?" said the man.

I wish somebody would," said she firmly. "Her present owner is not at all to her liking!"

"Nor you to mine," said he. "So we are agreed about that. Gentlemen, you hear? It's an agreement to

part. She shall take the girl if she wants to, and go her ways. I'll take my tools, and go my ways. 'Tis simple as Scripture history. Now then, stand up, Susan, and show yourself. (8)

The clarification of the point that woman is mostly ready to make great sacrifices to her beloved ones may be amiss. She accepts suffering only to let the burden be on her shoulders; as a matter of fact, she loves her beloved ones more than herself. Her heart's great capacity can endure more than that of man's can; she simply sees and keeps herself silent so that she does not hurt her family's emotions.

Woman is not a creature to be looked upon as a helpless being but as the heart of the family, whose great sacrifices for the sake of family ensure the safety and future of the family. Man should take it for granted that her suffering is not less than his; if she does not work outside the house, it will not necessarily mean she has no other preoccupations. Schopenhauer explains:

One need only look at a woman's shape to discover that she is not intended for either too much mental or too much physical work. She pays the debt of life not by what she does but by what she suffers_ by the pains of child-bearing, care for the child, and by subjection to man, to whom she should be a patient and cheerful companion. The greatest sorrows and joys or great exhibition of strength are not assigned to her; her life should flow more quietly, more gently, and less obtrusively than man's, without her being essentially happier or unhappier. (2005: 67)

Susan's return to her ex-husband and expressing her reason to him that her return is only due to the fact that she is there to deliver their daughter to Henchard to flourish her as he is a man of fortune:

I am quite in your hands, Michael," she said meekly. I came here for the sake of Elizabeth; for myself, if you tell me to leave again to-morrow morning, and never come near you more, I am content to go. (Hardy: 72)

Therefore, Susan may be the woman to be most pitied in the novel, for her life has long been long a troubled one. Her marriage at a very young age and her selling in her youth has paved the path for her everlasting misery. Mallet opines:

It is true that Susan is a rather pathetic fallen woman, 'poor' and 'meek' being the adjectives most frequently applied to her, and that her irregular liaison is whitewashed by Henchard's assertion that her simplicity in considering herself bound to Newson makes him 'feel [her] an innocent woman', as well as by Newson's own insistence that 'She was as guiltless o' wrong-doing in that particular as a saint in the clouds' The Victorian myth of the sexually fallen woman did not, however, make such nice distinctions: fallen was fallen, and the shame was ineradicable even if the woman were innocent. (2002: 68)

Getting stuck in a love triangle at some time but finding out that you have made a mistake by doing so is a tormenting experience. Lucetta once admired Henchard and they had a close intimacy, but after a short time on her arrival to Casterbridge, she falls in love with Henchard's rival, Farfrae. Henchard's awareness of this emotion drives him crazy and he threatens her that he will expose all her love letters once sent to him, unless she marries him, which pushes her to an unwilling submission: "Will you, or will you not, marry me?" "If you—wish it, I must agree!" "You say yes?" "I do." (197)

A fear of notoriety and disgrace forces her to accept something, which is far beyond the will of her heart. This feeling of notoriety chases her and she is unconsciously placed in a world of never-ending fear that speeds up the pace to psychological self-destruction.

After sometime, Lucetta helplessly begs Henchard to meet her and put an end to the saga of exposure:

Is it anything I have done that has pulled you down like that?

It is all your doing," said she. "I have no other grief. My happiness would be secure enough but for your threats. O Michael! don't wreck me like this! You might think that you have done enough! When I came here I was a young woman; now I am rapidly becoming an old one. Neither my husband, nor any other man will regard me with interest long. (251)

The apprehensions and sufferings of Elizabeth are also too much, but as a matter of focus, she may be out of the spotlight. Here, Elizabeth's indignation and misery are to be discussed as a conclusion to the topic of woman's misery in the novel.

She is born in a poor family. When she grows up, she comes to know that Henchard, who once told her that he was her real father, indeed, is not her father. Tragically, her lover marries another woman. She struggles with the world outside; it means that due to the fact that she flourished in a poor family, she could not enjoy the appropriate education as others did. Consequently, now as a grown-up girl she does not have the expected social stature which, is solely a strong reason why she loses the competition to Lucetta over Farfrae. Her loneliness has made her life barren and the loss of her mother adds more bitterness to her taste of life. As a woman in a male-dominant society, she cannot participate in social activities to avoid the heavy burden of loneliness. As a result, she has free time to contemplate on life and its unfairness to an extent that may repel her from all the empty promises and, possibly, a happy future.

3. OSCILLATION BETWEEN MISERY AND GUILT

Although Henchard's sins cannot be overlooked, his constant misery in life is a subject that should not be or cannot be overlooked either. After deviating from the normal course of life, his life becomes unbearable and he cannot see a future for himself under the present conditions. As a matter of fact, we may have encountered the same sense in some stages of our lives, when we lose the balance of our lives because of continuous defeats. Henchard is a slave to his greed and jealousy; he cannot stand back to see he is overrun by his rival, Farfrae. And in the end, he is regretful for all his mischief; as a result, he is oscillating between two tragic states namely misery and guilt.

We are enchained by the heavy burden of our stricken-conscience the moment we realize that we have done a wrong; this tragic sense may lead to self-disgust and isolation as we gradually get used to it more and more. Henchard's downfall is highly affected because of his wrong deeds and his incessant preoccupations that chase him wherever he is. In the moment of his encounter with his old and more successful rival, he brings up the past:

I have heard that you think of emigrating, Mr. Henchard," he said. "Is it true? I have a real reason for asking."

Henchard withheld his answer for several instants, and then said, "Yes; it is true. I am going where you were going to a few years ago, when I prevented you and got you to bide here. 'Tis turn and turn about, isn't it! Do ye mind how we stood like this in the Chalk Walk when I persuaded 'ee to stay? You then stood without a chattel to your name, and I was the master of the house in Corn Street. But now I stand without a stick or a rag, and the master of that house is you."

Yes, yes; that's so! It's the way o' the warld," said Farfrae. (226)

Hardy's peculiar style of using cosmic irony is again expressed in the selected novel. Here, Henchard is dominated by a more powerful hand, called destiny. Indeed, he makes terrible mistakes in his life, but the question is whether he deserves this much torment or not. Due to the fact that wrong deeds are inevitable ingredients of mankind, we may hurt others' feelings and turn their lives into a living hell. Henchard has committed so many wrong deeds in his life, but now he is repentant and is trying to give birth to a fresh look to his life. However, his remorse does not serve him well and he finally meets annihilation.

Sense of distrust happens as a result of former actions. It truly makes it inevitable that even in case of a change in attitude in the future the same presupposition will be adopted by people around us. Here, Henchard has repented from his past deeds and is trying to get away from the negative notions fixed upon him, but he is just not believed anymore:

I know what you think," deprecated Henchard running after, almost bowed down with despair as he perceived the image of unscrupulous villainy that he assumed in his former friend's eyes. "But I am not what you think!" he cried hoarsely. "Believe me, Farfrae; I have come entirely on your own and your wife's account. She is in danger. I know no more; and they want you to come...O Farfrae! don't mistrust me_ I am a wretched man; but my heart is true to you still!. (287)

When one is alone, he is attacked by all his apprehensions and has enough time to be preoccupied with his wrong deeds. Henchard has been a target of these ill feelings. He is simply regretting all his past because then he was a man of fortune and had a high chance to marry his long-awaited Lucetta, but, ultimately, the whole thing turned out to be a dreadful nightmare. Now all that makes him happy is the presence of his step-daughter, who is herself a cause of suffering to him. She is not aware that he is not her real father and if she finds out, maybe all this kindness will turn into hatred and separation:

Father, it is so kind of you to get this nice breakfast with your own hands, and I idly asleep the while."

I do it everyday," he replied. "You have left me; everybody has left me; how should I live but by my own hands."

You are very lonely, are you not?

Ay child _ to a degree that you know nothing of! It is my own fault. You are the only one who has been near me for weeks. And you will come no more.

Why do you say that? Indeed I will, if you would like to see me. (296)

This quotation gives a vivid picture of Henchard's apprehension; he is worried that Elizabeth's real father, Newson, may show up again and would lead to the split between them. In fact, his act of lying to Newson could be justified, for he is in such a state that only the presence of his step-daughter can be a relief to his wretched soul. This has been his sole reason for concealing the truth to him. In the end, when the nightmare comes true to Henchard, he leaves Elizabeth and finds himself moving on the gloomy road of loneliness.

4. CONCLUSION

Man and woman complement each other; their lives reach their own dead-ends only if they try to disrupt this norm of nature.

This study attempted to show how life becomes suffocating to the individuals if they try to wrong others. Henchard's out of thinking action on selling his wife led to a more disturbing life than he had expected to

experience by being alone. This study meant to narrow down the matter of time in Hardy's *The Mayor of Casterbridge* in order to show how a fundamental piece of nature was misused and was psychologically tormented in 19th century. It also attempted to be deeply involved in the miserable and guilty life of Henchard, who continuously suffered and was forced into a life of hallucination, which eventually brought forth a gloomy demise as a tragic consequence.

It would be favorable to conclude the study on the matter of woman, which is dominant in the novel, with a comment from Khalil Gibran, "Out of the sensitive heart of a woman comes forth the happiness of mankind, and in the sentiments of her noble spirit are born the sentiments of their spirits." (qtd. in Bushrui, 2003: 109).

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