



Women in Thomas Hardy's Selected Poems: Emma as an Example

Mahmood Abdulelah Abdulmunem

Southern Technical University Technical Medical Institute, Department of Pharmacy Technologies, Basra, Iraq

* Corresponding Author: **Mahmood Abdulelah Abdulmunem**

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Abstract

Thomas Hardy's attitude toward women in his literature and personal life is debated among scholars and readers. It's important to note that Hardy's views and portrayal of women were complex and evolved over his lifetime. Thus, writing a paper on the portrayal of women in Thomas Hardy's poems sounds interesting. The paper will briefly introduce Thomas Hardy and his significance as a poet. Provides an overview of the portrayal of women in Hardy's poems. Looks at the historical and societal context and discusses the Victorian era and its societal norms regarding gender roles and expectations. It will discuss the emotional and psychological complexities that Hardy assigns to his female protagonists. It evaluates Hardy's poems as vehicles for social commentary on gender roles, expectations, and injustices. It will consider the broader implications of his work on gender dynamics in Victorian Society. Moreover, the paper explores the portrayal of women in Hardy's poetry and analyzes their roles, characteristics, and associated themes. It will highlight societal norms, gender roles, and expectations of women during that time. Explain how these factors might have shaped Hardy's depiction of women. Identify common women-related themes in Hardy's poems (e.g., love, loss, nature, social constraints). Analyse specific poems that exemplify these themes and their connection to women.

Keywords: Victorian era, Psychoanalytic theory, Female characters, Gender equality

Introduction

Thomas Hardy is a renowned poet known for his poignant and evocative works. He, a prominent English novelist and poet of the Victorian era, often delved into the complexities of human relationships and the societal constraints faced by individuals, particularly women. It is not accurate to categorize Hardy as strictly emotional "with" or "against" women. Instead, his works and life experiences suggest a nuanced and critical perspective on the roles and challenges faced by women in his time. His literature often serves as a reflection of the societal norms and constraints that women endured during the 19th and early 20th centuries. This article examines the different types of women depicted in Hardy's poems (e.g., rural women, tragic heroines, unconventional women). It will analyze the characterization of women and their roles in men. It will discuss how Hardy's portrayal of women reflects or challenges the societal norms of his time. It is intended to explore instances where Hardy's female characters demonstrate empowerment or agency. It will discuss how these portrayals may challenge the prevailing gender expectations of the Victorian era. Analyze the significance of such portrayals and their implications for Hardy's views on gender equality. Provide an overview of the critical reception of Hardy's portrayal of women in his poetry. Discuss any contemporary perspectives or feminist interpretations of his work. Present a balanced analysis of the strengths and limitations of his depiction of women. The essay adopts the Psychoanalytic Theory, which Sigmund pioneers Freud explores the psychological motivations, desires, and conflicts of characters and delves into the inner world of Hardy's female characters, their desires, repressions, and struggles within the constraints of the Society they inhabit. In general, the theory helps to explore the unconscious mind and its influence on human behavior.

Applying psychoanalytic theory to the analysis of Hardy's poems can provide insights into his female characters' psychological motivations and desires and explore their repressed emotions, conflicts, and how their inner world shapes their actions and relationships. Hardy was very committed to many things, but one of the things he was committed to for the whole of his Life was Education and learning. He never stopped learning. He truly believed that learning is for life.

The Journey of Thomas Hardy was absolutely incredible. It took him as a novelist and poet, and he later became much loved in both spheres. Therefore, he made a remarkable Journey, born on the 2nd of June 1840, and that Journey took him from his birth in a humble Cottage to two funerals, one in London in Westminster Abby and the other in his home Village. He was a Dorchester man. Dorchester blood ran in his veins. He loved Dorchester. It was his country, and that's where he wanted to be buried; however, by the time he died on the 11th of January in 1928, he was famous not only in Britain but all over the world, and the public acclamation of him was such that they demanded that he have a funeral in London so a compromise was reached a surgeon came in and removed Hardy's heart and his heart was buried in at Michael's Church very near High Bach Hampton his home Village and the rest of Hardy's body was cremated and buried in poet's Corner in Westminster Abby. He had a vast national funeral, and a measure of his status at the time of his death was that the pole bearers of his coffin were the prime minister, the opposition leader, the leading scholars and academics of the day, and fellow authors.

Hardy was intensely private and destroyed many of his letters and notebooks. He left us a new name for the area where he was born, bred, and grew up: Wessex. He took that name from the Old Anglo-Saxon Kingdom before England was unified as one Kingdom, and he grew up with stories of working-class rebellion and working-class pressure for a better way of life. He was sympathetic to the working class calls. So, the working class rebellion and struggle for a better way of life was very much bred into him. He saw the countryside economy changing from agricultural to Mechanical, so from agriculture to mechanization and industrialization, he was concerned about the deskilling of rural workers, and 100-plus years later, some of these concerns are still around today.

2. Discussion

Thomas Hardy then and now 160 years ago, Dorset, where Hardy was born, was one of the poorest counties in England, but he loved his home county passionately. Of course, today, we can see the links between some of Hardy's concerns that I've mentioned and some of the topics that he brought into his books, industrial unrest amongst the workers, economic problems bringing about an utterly new way of working completely new jobs some jobs disappearing forever some jobs changing bringing disruption to people's lives hardship and changes in working practices all of this Hardy grew up with because of course the latter part of the 19th Century that was no different to when Hardy was born these were still the concerns and they are still concerns today.

Hardy heard tales at his mother's knee, as they say, of the working classes, local folklore, and local Legends, and he was deeply interested in the lives of rural folk. Still, he was no misery or killjoy to anyone who thinks that Hardy's books

concentrate on the miserable and dull side of life, which is very wrong. Yes, certainly, some of them are harrowing to read in places. Still, Hardy is a writer who brings us joy, pleasure, and enjoyment of everyday things. He loved the world, and he loved nature. He loved animals, the sea, and the sky. He drew pleasure from life. Later in life, he wrote a poem called *Great Things*, and in the poem, he says, "Music is great, dancing is great, horse riding is great, nature is great, cider drinking is great," so Hardy always stresses the good things in life as well dancing, singing, drinking, horse riding, enjoying yourself and music above all he was passionate about music.

He recognizes a class-ridden system, injustice, sadness, and disadvantage and acknowledges it, but he doesn't succumb to these things. He addressed some of the sacred cows of the 19th Century in his work and letters to fellow authors, but he also talked about what was going on in Hardy's Life in the 1890s and the early 1900s. So, this paper will look at what he was doing between the 1890s and his death in 1928 obviously, not every aspect will be discussed in this paper, but some of the important ones will be highlighted.

Thus, in the 1890s, Hardy married Emma and lived in a house he designed. He was formerly an architect in his early life, studied architecture, became an architectural draftsman, and went into becoming an architect. This was an up-and-coming profession then because wealthy Victorians were having houses built and houses altered by the 1890s. He's established he's written some of his best-known works, such as "A Pair of Blue Eyes," in which he mentions the criminalization of poor people for simply being poor. Now, this was very topical at the time because, in the 1880s, it was beginning to be felt that if you were poor, you were unemployed, it was somehow your fault, so in 1886, he wrote "The Mayor of Casterbridge," where he talks about criminalizing people. After all, they're out of work, or they're poor, and we might think. In "Tests of the Derails," an outstanding success book of 1891, he addresses things like illegitimate intimacy and people living together before they married. He's tackling tough topics for Victorian authors to tackle while retaining a readership. "Jude the Obscure," he wrote in 1895, tackles everything mentioned and a few more. So, by this point, the elder Statesman of English literature is. He was the voice of the coming Century in the 1890s into the 1900s. So briefly, where did it begin? Well, with his mother? Indeed, his father was a stone Mason and Builder, and his parents were forced to get married. When his mother became pregnant, she was a maid in a local house.

Thomas was their first child, and they would have three more children the following year. A daughter named Mary was born in 1851, another son Henry was born, and a couple of years later, Catherine was born. Mother was a formidable lady, and she was passionate about Education. She was widely read. As I've said, she worked as a humble maid but believed firmly in Education for her eldest son and all four children. She also believed that none of them should marry but that they should stay together and look after each other. He was quite a frail child but an intelligent child. He absorbed all the stories his mother told him and learned to read and write very quickly, and his parents scrimped and saved to pay for a good education for all four of their children. He promptly outgrew the school, and his mother insisted that he be sent the three miles to Mr. L's Academy in Dorchester, so every day, 10-year-old Tommy walked three miles into

Dorchester and three miles back again at the end of the day. At school, his passion for Education matched his mother's. Only enough money was available to pay for his Education until he was 16, but Hardy made the most of his time at the school; he learned Latin, Greek, and mathematics, so he had a real passion for Education. At 16, he left school and was apprenticed to an architect in Dorchester as an architectural draftsman. He worked hard at his profession. In fact, he would win medals for his architectural drawings, and after about five years working in Dorchester, he was ambitious to move on, so he took himself to London, where Thomas Hardy worked. While working, he started to write stories he was passionate about reading and passionate about writing and poetry. At this stage in his life is his first love, and the stories he begins to create center around what he knows, stories of rural working folk and their lives in Wessex as Wessex was a partly real, partly dream country, but his love of Dorchester was constant and remained with him for the whole of his life. Further on, in 1860s London Hardy encounters a busy bustling city he called it a city of four million people with eight million eyes he hated it it's noisy it's polluted it's dirty and Hardy can't abide rubbing shoulders with people in crowds all his life he would have a phobia about being touched so he walks in the road mainly to avoid them he sees deprivation alongside wealth and this would inspire some of the plots of his novels Hardy is sickened by what he sees in London and after five years he becomes quite ill he's very successful in London but in London he hates the noise he hates the dirt and the bustle so he comes back home again to Do it while he's in London however he takes advantage of everything London has to offer and his passion for learning takes him to external classes at King's College London it takes him to museums and to art galleries where he is absorbing as much as he can later on Hardy would embark on a very structured plan of self-improvement reading helped by his first wife and London's opportunities for Education he loved and the British was another one of his haunts that he would spend hours studying there coming back to Dorchester his work as an architect takes him next to Cornwall where his employer asks him to do architectural sketching for the renovation of St Juliet's Church and it's here that he meets the Rector of the parish the clergyman of the parish sister-in-law Emma. The marriage at first was extremely happy but later it gradually deteriorated Emma had Ambitions herself to be a writer she like Hardy was passionate about reading she was passionate about poetry and she gives up her own ambitions to further his aims to be a writer he'd already written one novel called "poor man and a lady" but unfortunately couldn't get it published because the subject matter was thought to be too contentious so no publisher would touch it so she helps him she acts as his secretary she acts as his researcher and she basically puts her own writing ambitions on hold but the marriage that was so happy initially would deteriorate rapidly they really grew apart Hardy success as a writer took him into a very masculine male dominated world and Emma begins to feel pushed out she begins to feel resentful she had a strong religious faith and Hardy as she grew older gradually begins to lose his religious faith and to see the flaws in religion and so their marriage deteriorated it never broke up completely they lived under the same roof but they virtually lived separate lives and she was very much aware that Hardy had infatuations for other ladies.

Hardy addresses so many contentious issues of the day, such

as poverty and people's lives because of poverty. He addresses illegitimacy he addresses the inequality of the Sexes, and the fact that it's expected that women will conform to certain stereotypes and that women will not want to go into higher Education. Their role is as a support and an adjunct of the man. It is about becoming educated yourself, um, something he would strongly protest. Tess is the subject matter of, um, a country girl who gives birth to an illegitimate child, which was remarkably contentious in its day, but nevertheless, people bought the book, and in 1891, it was declared the book of the year.

In the 1890s, Hardy's work became darker indeed. Tess deals with some really contentious issues of the day, but in 1895, the publication of "Jude the Obscure" covers so much that people were concerned about in the latter part of the 19th Century and would be concerned about going into the 20th Century Hardy by now is also involved and so was Emma his wife in the cause of women's suffrage. Hardy supported women's suffrage from the letters he wrote to people like Millis Garrett Fett, who was a formidable force in the women's suffrage movement. He protests the role that Society has allocated to women, and if we're looking at links between yesterday's and today's Hardy then and our world now, we can find so many in Jude it's about inequality of opportunities in Education. Jude is a humble stonemason, but he longs to go to University. All he can do is look over the wall. Um, he can't get in. He received a letter from the university authorities saying they wouldn't accept him as a student. You're a working man, basically stick to being a working man; you're not an intellectual, and you never will be, so just face it, he's elbowed off the pavement by millionaire sons who are undergraduates at the University for the simple reason that he's a working man in working men's clothes an injured Hardy protest strongly about this inequality he says Education should be there for everyone not just the privileged.

In his letters, Hardy supports Jude with the non-typical, non-stereotypical family unit again. He says there should only be one family unit, the proper family unit, father, mother, and children. He says why are mothers of illegitimate children discriminated against and why their children are discriminated against. He's tackling this and many other issues in Jude, as well as people living together without marriage, having children, and being unmarried. He's also tackling how Society discriminates against anyone poor, unemployed, or unable to support their family for whatever reason it might be and again, if we look at this parallel between then and now, we can see that there is still discrimination in our world there is still an implication sometimes that if people are out of work, it's their own fault. There are places in the world where women are being denied an education where women and girls are forbidden from getting an education so we can see the links between Hardy's time and our own time and Hardy campaigned against Injustice Hardy was critical of we might think of much of the world he inhabited along with his love of the world his love of the natural features of the world there was a realism with Hardy that although we are not happy with what is happening in our world sometimes there are forces outside our control there are things beyond our control that we cannot change and Hardy admits this he said I've got voice meaning himself I can speak out but ordinary people often feel they cannot speak out about these things but Hardy says you must it's your

duty to speak out he said even if they are forces beyond your control you still must make your voice heard and I suppose linking that to our own times you know it's about making sure that we vote and that we are not frightened to speak out if we think something is wrong Hardy said to think about something and to protest about something even if you know that you are powerless on your own to change it is no reason not to do it. So, he protested strongly against the deskilling of rural workers. He wasn't anti-mechanization at all. He accepted that mechanization is coming in a changing World, whether we like it or not, but he felt that more care should be taken over the massive disruption to rural people's lives.

Hardy lost his religious faith, and we can date it from the time he went as a young man to a church service at his local church and the clergyman preached a sermon criticizing the working classes for daring to Aspire to the professions Now Hardy considered himself working class and he had dared to become an architect. Hardy said so much of religion is harsh. It's cold, it's sympathetic, and it's not giving people support. It's actually pigeon people into a set frame. If you're working class, you fit in this box. If you're upper class, you fit in another box, which you said isn't right. There should be equality of opportunity, and people should be encouraged to better themselves.

He voted for women's suffrage and was a great promoter of women's suffrage; he indeed wrote letters and campaigned on behalf of women, and he went on record saying that he believed that men need to feel no threat from women's suffrage because women were given vote would actually encourage and motivate men to speak out more on various issues privilege and class. Hardy was very critical of privilege and class. He said why is Education so elitist? Why is higher Education reserved for certain sections of the community? Why not for everyone. He believed that everyone should have the means to aspire to higher Education. Some of the Farm Workers that Hardy would have seen in the fields around his Dorset home every day protested their conditions of work and the fact that nobody seemed particularly bothered that they were being put out of work. One reviewer commented that Hardy's work proclaims the voice of the working classes speaking more clearly and distinctly than ever before.

Hardy in the latter part of the 19th Century and early part of the 20th Century was very much the Elder Statesman and the voice of the new century ha's work was incredibly popular not only in Britain but all over the world hence it gave him a platform for speaking out about things he didn't agree with after the publication of *Jude* Hardy was pillared by some sections of the literary press and indeed some sections of the public because they regard did it and the subject matter and the way Hardy dealt with these contentious issues as a step too far so Hardy's reaction was to become very depressed at that point but gradually certainly with the dawn of the new Century in 1900 things begin to change there's a more liberal Outlook coming and Hardy's work is reexamined and people change their opinion he makes up the ground that he's lost with *Jude* the Obscure Hardy never believe that he shouldn't have published *Jude* is a very moral story and very sympathetic to the working classes yes it's a book that is very difficult to read because it's pretty harrowing in places. From 1899 up until 1902, Britain was involved in the First World War. What was Hardy's attitude to the World War and the First World War? Hardy was an anti-war. He certainly believed that the First World War had a Just Cause, And he

wasn't in opposition to Britain declaring war at all. However, Hardy becomes increasingly disillusioned and horrified as the First World War precedes, and he says that the reason for this is that the war is being taken over by Kings, princes, rulers, politicians, and the top brass of the military. They're making it about their egos, promoting themselves, and using it as a bit of self-promotion, and Hardy says that's not what it's about the rank-and-file soldiers. It's about the men in the field who are doing the fighting, who are doing the dying.

Hardy's sympathy was always with the soldier, and the soldier's suffering in his war poetry is absolutely on par with any war poet. Thomas Hardy needed to always appear alongside them, and in a letter to writer John Goldsworthy in 1918, Hardy formulated his own ideas about the future of the world. He's sickened by how little progress mankind has made. He's tried in his books to show Mankind progressing towards changing the world's wrongs, but he regards the war, particularly the First World War, as a step backward. He asked what happened to humankind working to improve things. When will we ever learn that war really doesn't solve any problems? Isn't it about human nature about Mankind progressing, not taking steps backward? In his letter to John Goldsworthy, he says the exchange of international thought is the only possible salvation for the world.

Hardy's work was taken to the trenches by the soldiers. They loved his work because in the environment they're in, they're looking for something that reminds them of home, that reminds them of a rural way of life, and they love work, and they love his poetry, and after the First World War Hardy's home becomes a mecca for the young men who were poets during the first World War. Soldiers began to eulogize Hardy; he did not want to be eulogized, but they are indeed grateful to him for producing the wonderful poetry that has helped them through some of their darkest days.

Hardy's poetry carries on protesting and Christmas 1924 on this short, brief slide. You can see he writes this at Christmas 1924 after the First World War is over, but he's very much thinking of the First World War, and he's also protesting against religion, how little religion has a stand where religion stands during the First World War he's asking that question:

“Peace upon Earth” was said
We sing it
And pay a million priests to bring it.
After two thousand years of mass
We've got as far as poison gas

Poison gas was used as a weapon of Warfare for the first time in the First World War, so the First World War sickened Hardy, and it took him a long while to recover. He regards it as a complete waste of human life because the nation of the world has learned nothing from what's gone on before.

In 1912 November of 1912, Hardy's first marriage ended with the death in November of that year of his wife Emma, and Emma's death brought about a complete change in Outlook. Hardy was very depressed by the reception given to “*Jude the Obscure*.” He turned away from novel writing to writing poetry, arguably from 1898, when he published his first volume of poetry until he died in 1928. He produced the most marvelous poetry certainly after Emma's death, which seems to have inspired him to make even better poetry because it's as though he's fallen in love with the woman who was his partner in a marriage where so much went wrong where he

was to blame she was to blame they were to blame why didn't they sort it out when they had the chance how could it have been changed how could what happen have been avoided he's asking all these questions in his poetry and his poetry at this period in his life is the most moving poetry of love and loss so again he's examining his life.

Hardy married again in February of 1914. He married Alle Florence Dugdale. She was 39 years Junior and had been working for him as his secretary and researcher. There is relatively strong evidence that they were involved in an intimate relationship before Emma's death. He's in the 20s. He's the voice of the new Century and Elder Statesman, but he's still campaigning against inequality and what he perceives as wrong with society. Hardy died on the 11th of January 1928, and, um, he died of heart failure. He was 87 years of age. He wanted his heart, or he wanted his body, I should say, buried with his first wife, but the public outcry that he must have a funeral where he's buried in Westminster Abbey was so strong that this compromise was reached, and his heart is buried this is Thomas Hardy's grave and um both of his wives would be buried with him Emma who predeceased him and Florence who died in 1937.

3. Conclusion

Hardy's style is paradoxical in that he gives us despair one minute, then joy in the following sentence, and uplifts us. Hence, Hardy became explicitly politically active as a man of substance and was inclined to take up politics directly to become directly involved. Indeed, he wrote letters to politicians, and both in his books and in the letters he wrote to friends to people who just wrote fan letters to him, family members, fellow authors, and fellow poets, he absolutely stresses the causes that he believes in and what he thinks is wrong with the Society that we live in at the moment and how Mankind really is making a mess of things he's sincere he's very frank. Hence, he shows a strong inclination to become directly politically involved.

Hardy is a big supporter of women's suffrage, but in real life, he turns his wife upstairs in his home at Max's gate, which is not in keeping with his support for women's rights. Hardy admits in his poetry that they were both wrong she was wrong he was wrong how he blames himself but he's very honest in his examination of what went wrong now when Max gate was built the marriage was Rocky by 1885 but the marriage deteriorated over a number of years one of the reasons is probably when Florence Dougal becomes his secretary researcher the other reason it deteriorated was the publication of *Jude the Obscure* Emma was religious she believes strongly in religion she regarded *Jude* as a personal attack on her now what she then did when Hardy had an extension built to Max gate she asked Hardy and this came from Emma herself would he create two rooms in the Attic where she would withdraw to in practice she moved into these two rooms Hardy didn't tell her to she asked Hardy to do that she wanted to distance herself from his writing, she was upset by "Jude the Obscure" she was upset at the criticism of religion she regarded it as a personal attack on her and then the Advent of Florence Dougal finished the job and she withdraws from him and effectively they start to lead increasingly separate lives but the decision to withdraw into the two attic rooms was Emma's it wasn't Hardy's.

To conclude, Hardy boldly addresses some of the wrongs of Society, among them the powerless elements of Society, one

of them being women; Hardy weaves some very complex plots within plots to set out to tell a story. He was concerned about what he perceived as the wrongs of Society and that Mankind is not progressing in kindness and generosity in caring for their fellow human beings. Hardy asks where the progress is and why we are going backward instead of forward.

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