

# Victorian Morality in Thomas Hardy's "Tess of the d'Urbervilles"

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Studij: Dvopredmetni sveučilišni preddiplomski studij Engleskog jezika i  
književnosti i Pedagogije

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**Viktorijanski moral u romanu "Tessa iz obitelji D'Urberville" Thomasa  
Hardya**

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Mentorica: doc. dr. sc. Ljubica Matek

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Bachelor's Thesis

Supervisor: Ljubica Matek, Ph.D, Assistant Professor

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## **Abstract**

This paper is concerned with the concept of Victorian morality and how it showcases in one of Thomas Hardy's most prominent works, *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*. Throughout the prosperous reign of queen Victoria, English society showcases a specific type of behaviour known under the term of *Victorian Morality*. There are several aspects of Victorian morality: *specific code of conduct, restraint, intolerance towards crime and religion*. The concept of such morality and the society which requires it are criticised throughout the novel as hypocritical, and full of double standards applying only to women and proscribing the idea of an ideal woman. Because of this, Tess was, at first, seen as an immoral character, until Hardy himself justified her actions numerous times. This is also the reason why the subtitle of the novel is *A Pure Woman Faithfully Presented*. Tess was never immoral by society's definition, but she was rather its victim and the victim of men who used their dominance to their advantage.

**Keywords:** morality, Victorian era, code of conduct, ideal woman, *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, Thomas Hardy.

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## **Introduction**

*Tess of the D'Urbervilles: A Pure Woman Faithfully Presented* is one of Thomas Hardy's most prominent works. It depicts the life of a young Tess Durbeyfield, who attempts to help her family with their financial struggles once they find out that they are the direct descendants of the noble D'Urberville family. Also, the novel embodies Hardy's criticism of the corrupt Victorian society in the nineteenth century England.

The aim of this paper is to show that Tess was not a true fallen woman, but rather a victim of Victorian morality. To do this, the first chapter will shortly present Thomas Hardy and his works which thematise the main concern of the Victorian era. The second chapter will define Victorian morality and exemplify the context in which it was established. The following two chapters will discuss both men's and women's roles in Victorian society, and how defying the social norms of any kind was heavily looked down upon. The chapters will look at the social requirements for women and men and define the idea of an ideal Victorian woman. Finally, the last chapter is dedicated to the analysis of the novel which will show that Tess was a pure woman until the very end.



## 1. Thomas Hardy

Thomas Hardy, a famous British poet and novelist, was born in 1840 in Dorset, a rural part of England, where he spent the early years of his life. During that time, he became acquainted with the culture of his surroundings, which greatly influenced his works in later life. His initial profession was that of an architect, but after returning to Dorset from London in 1867, “his habits of intensive private study were then redirected toward the reading of poetry and the systematic development of his own poetic skills” (Millgate). Furthermore, in 1872, Hardy “undertook to supply Tinsley’s Magazine with the 11 monthly instalments of *A Pair of Blue Eyes*—an initially risky commitment to a literary career that was soon validated by an invitation to contribute a serial to the far more prestigious *Cornhill Magazine*” (Millgate). This act resulted in Hardy’s first major famous work, *Far from the Madding Crowd*, which was published in 1874 and is the most prominent work from his early phase of writing. He received recognition for his “agricultural settings and its distinctive blend of humorous, melodramatic, pastoral, and tragic elements” (Millgate), all inspired by Wessex. He went on to publish *The Hand of Ethelberta* (1876), which was not so successful, but his next novel, *The Return of the Native* (1878) was widely popular. *The Return of the Native*, the eminent work from the middle phase, deals with marriage and the wish for moral improvement, which was an everlasting ideal of the Victorian society at that time. He published “two more novels generally considered “minor”—*A Laodicean* (1881) and *Two on a Tower* (1882)” (Millgate) before moving to Wimborne and later Dorchester due to his illness. His works from that time, *The Mayor of Casterbridge* (1886) and *Woodlanders* (1887), incorporate the Dorchester history in the former, and depict the socioeconomic issues of the Victorians in the latter. Hardy then devoted himself to publishing collections of short stories, some of which are *Wessex Tales* (1888), *A Group of Noble Dames* (1891), and *Life’s Little Ironies* (1894). The closing phase of Hardy’s fiction work is marked by “the publication of *Tess of the d’Urbervilles* (1891) and *Jude the Obscure* (1895), which are generally considered his finest novels” (Millgate). He spent the late years of his life devoted to poetry and drama, remaining a prolific author. He died in 1928 in Dorchester.

According to Boumelha, Hardy's significance arises from his versatility:

There is a Thomas Hardy (1840–1928) for almost any critical history of the English novel that you care to mention: Hardy the last Victorian or the proto-modernist, the rural idyllist or the social-problem novelist, bearer of the last vestiges of the folk-tale or pioneer of the feminist heroine and the working-class hero. Whether you are looking for a historical novel or a Bildungsroman, a

tragedy or a social satire, there is at least one among Hardy's fourteen novels that can be pressed into service. (Boumelha 242)

The focus of this paper will be one of his most famous novels, *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, which, upon its release, was heavily criticized for its alleged immorality. It depicts a young lower-class girl Tess who, on her journey to meeting her famous noble ancestors, transitions from an ideal Victorian young girl to an alleged fallen woman. Hardy criticizes the concept of Victorian morality throughout the novel:

Tess profoundly questions society's sexual mores by its compassionate portrayal and even advocacy of a heroine who is seduced, and perhaps raped, by the son of her employer. She has an illegitimate child, suffers rejection by the man she loves and marries, and is finally hanged for murdering her original seducer. (Millgate)

Furthermore, Hardy stands in the defence of his novel's titular heroine, which is clear from the subtitle, *A Pure Woman Faithfully Presented*. In this way, Hardy emphasizes that Tess is not immoral, but rather a victim of the moral code and its double standards through the seven phases of her life as they are depicted in the novel: *The Maiden*, *Maiden No More*, *The Rally*, *The Consequence*, *The Woman Pays*, *The Convert*, and *Fulfilment*.

## 2. Victorian Morality

The term Victorian stands for the period of the reign of Queen Victoria, which lasted from 1837 to 1901. This period is known to have been prosperous for the country's economy, which was fuelled both by the Industrial Revolution and by British colonial endeavours. Within the country itself, the Queen established a set of values which applied to every member of the society:

The most thought were given to what was respectable. From the aristocracy to the working class, respectability was the topmost thing on everyone's minds. Being clean, truthful, and polite and observing the rules of conversation was very important. Philanthropy was also an example of Victorian morality. ("Victorian Era Morality Facts")

This set of values made the Royal family an ideal towards which everyone should strive, not only to maintain the country's superior status internationally, but also to spread Victorian ideals. The values that influenced the creation of these ideals are known under the term *Victorian Morality*. According to Oxford Dictionary, morality refers to "a particular system of values and principles of conduct", upon which "the distinction between right and wrong or good and bad behaviour" is made. More specifically, a radical change in Victorian modes of behaviour is described by Harold Perkin:

Between 1780 and 1850 the English ceased to be one of the most aggressive, brutal, rowdy, outspoken, riotous, cruel and bloodthirsty nations in the world and became one of the most inhibited, polite, orderly, tender-minded, prudish and hypocritical. The transformation diminished cruelty to animals, criminals, lunatics, and children (in that order); suppressed many cruel sports and games, such as bull-baiting and cock-fighting, as well as innocent amusements, including many fairs and wakes; rid the penal code of about two hundred capital offences, abolished transportation, and cleaned up the prisons; turned Sunday into a day of prayer for some and mortification for all; bowdlerized Shakespeare, Gibbon and other obscene classics. (Perkin 280)

Here, Perkin demonstrates several aspects of Victorian morality. One may notice how it appeals to a *specific code of conduct* ("polite, orderly, tender-minded..."), *restraint* ("suppressed many cruel sports...as well as innocent amusements"), *intolerance towards crime* ("the penal code"), and *religion* ("turned Sunday into a day of prayer"), showing the influence of the Anglican

Church. Values which Victorians greatly regarded were “sexual propriety, hard work, honesty, thrift, [and] sense of duty and responsibility towards the less well off” (“Victorian Era Morality Facts”). Despite this, the whole concept is today seen as having many contradictions, because “on one hand, there was utmost abeyance to the dictates of society, exemplified behaviour and formality. On the other hand, child labour and prostitution were highly prevalent at the same time” (“Victorian Era Morality Facts”), all of which sparked many social movements, including the anti-liberal movement, the Oxford movement, utilitarianism and Marxism. In other words, people ignored many rampant evils. The contradictions of Victorian morality and the Industrial Revolution began to erase the differences in the already strictly divided society; yet, belonging to a certain class was still a crucial factor when it comes to the values one was going to hold. The upper classes were wealthy and would let wealthier middle class in their ranks only when they struggled financially. They considered themselves as caretakers of everyone else and as those who pass on tradition and heritage (“Victorian morality Facts: Moral views”).

### 3. Code of conduct: Men

Code of conduct represents “an agreement on rules of behaviour for a group or organization” (Collins Dictionary). It is one of the crucial segments of Victorian morality and may therefore serve as a tool of distinction between the acceptable and unacceptable behaviour. It consists of three spheres: the value of Evangelicalism, theory of Utilitarianism, and empiricism theory, all of which are based on common principles such as duty, hard work, respectability, charity, and philanthropy, which contribute to the conception of Victorian morality. *The value of Evangelicalism* refers to the moral conduct of a person who, according to its founder John Wesley, must dedicate himself to causes (changes and social reforms) which will benefit the society. Secondly, *theory of Utilitarianism* neglects human and cultural values and considers actions as morally right if they help in overcoming all kinds of issues. *The Empiricism theory* gave a lot of importance to education and art because it was believed that the man’s natural talents should be well-developed.

When it comes to the conduct of men and morality, Victorian men were expected to be the patriarchs of the family, which means that the society prescribed restrictive gender roles. Men were expected to be bread winners, and protectors of their family; they were considered superior in body and mind, were better educated, and assumed the position of the head of their family. In other words, a Victorian gentleman should be loyal, intelligent, honourable, with well-established ethics, and needs to support his family (“Victorian Era Code of Conduct”). Anne Digby writes how the Victorians ideologically divided their society into two spheres: the public sphere, viewed as rather masculine, concerned with paid work and national politics, and the private sphere, seen as a female domain, concerned with home and family (195). Furthermore, she refers to the Catherine Hall’s arguments concerning the division as follows:

It was during the transitional period of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries that, according to Catherine Hall, “gender divisions were reworked” and “men placed firmly in the newly defined public world of business, commerce, and politics; women were placed in the private world of home and family.” (qtd. in Digby 199)

In family and marriage, a man was the main figure in a woman’s life. If he wanted to get married, he had to be at least five years older than his future wife. Furthermore, he had to earn her father’s respect and permission to marry by providing evidence that he is wealthy enough to support his future wife and children (Hughes). In addition, Hughes states that, contrary to the

norm of a bride having to be a virgin before stepping into marriage, a man did not need to stay pure:

If a young man was particularly pious he might manage to stay chaste until he married. Many respectable young men, however, resorted to using prostitutes. All the major cities had red light districts where it was easy to find a woman whom you could pay for sex. Out-of-towners could consult such volumes as Roger Funnyman's *The Swell's Night Guide through the Metropolis*. Unfortunately, syphilis and other sexual diseases were rife, and many young men unwittingly passed on the infection to their wives. (Hughes)

The double standards were legal and examples proving this can be found in legislation, "such as the Matrimonial Causes Act of 1857: women could be divorced on the grounds of their adultery alone, while it had to be proved that men had exacerbated adultery with other offences" (Furieux). With everything said, a broad generalization may be made, and it can be said that the code of conduct for men showcases double standards of Victorian morality, especially from women's point of view, which is evident from the two gender-based ideological spheres.

#### 4. Code of conduct: Women and the Ideal Victorian Woman

All women in the Victorian era, no matter which social class they belonged to, had the role of running the household, with limited or no rights at all. For example, they were not to vote or have a property. Everything a woman owned belonged to the man of the family, be it her father or her husband. Such code of conduct is described in many works of literature as it governs the behaviour of characters, and one such instance is Alfred Lord Tennyson's poem *The Princess*:

Man for the field and woman for the hearth:

Man for the sword and for the needle she:

Man with the head and woman with the heart:

Man to command and woman to obey;

All else confusion. (427-431)

The lines of the poem show how dominant the man is in a woman's life: he works, the woman is at home; he fights, she fixes; he thinks, she feels; the man issues orders, the woman listens to them. Anne Digby depicts this by identifying a range of gendered dualisms, namely "personal and political; nature and culture; biology and intellect; work and leisure; intellect and intuition; rationality and emotionality; and morality and power" (195).

These gendered dualisms influence codes of conduct is known as the concept for women and men, and they have contributed to the development of the concept of the *ideal Victorian woman*. It is described as follows:

Women were allotted a subsidiary role, with patience and self-sacrifice the prime feminine virtues. Motherhood was idealized, alongside virginal innocence, but women were subject to pervasive denigration. To the end of the century, strident misogyny was still strong in both popular and intellectual writing - but as loudly as female inferiority was declared immutable, women everywhere were demonstrating otherwise. (Marsh)

This puts women in a domestic environment, which is in accordance with the two spheres ideology. An ideal Victorian woman is also called the *Angel of the House*. This term is derived from the title of Coventry Patmore's poem of the same name which praises a woman as a wife and a mother:

Confined to the home, women were expected to be domestic, innocent, and utterly helpless when matters outside the home were concerned. Not only was the home where women would be protected from the dangers of the outside world, it was also where they could keep their innocence and be a beacon of morality for their husbands. (“The Angel in the House”)

In other words, women were taught from very early on that, as inferior to men, they had to behave in a certain way and that the household would keep them safe at all times, which is why they “ran the house, undertaking domestic work and child care themselves, as well as supervising the servants employed to cook, clean, carry coal and run errands” (Marsh).

Domesticity was expressed in numerous ways. In a middle-class household, it consisted of servants, home entertainment, furnishings, and the most emphasized part, concern for clothes: “The female body was dressed to emphasize a woman's separation from the world of work” (Abrams). In other words, clothes mirrored their social functions. Abrams depicts women’s fashion as “more sexual - the hips, buttocks and breasts were exaggerated with crinolines, hoopskirts and corsets which nipped in the waist and thrust out the breasts”. The function of the clothes itself is described as follows:

The fashion for constricting corsets and large skirts served to underline not only a woman's prime function, but also the physical constraints on her activities. It was difficult to move freely wearing corsets that made it hard to breathe, and heavy fabrics that impeded movement. No wonder that those women who could afford to keep up with the latest fashions were prone to fainting, headaches and what was termed “hysteria”. (Abrams)

In addition to domesticity and clothes, Victorians considered that, along with “love, her tenderness, her affectionate solicitude for his [her husband’s] comfort and enjoyment, her devotedness, her unwearying care” (Furneaux), women required a special set of skills. Those skills, in their opinion, needed to be taught in some kind of informal education at home and are described in the novels of that time. Austen’s *Pride and Prejudice* suggests the set of skills that an upper-class woman should have:

A woman must have a thorough knowledge of music, singing, drawing, dancing, and the modern languages, to deserve the word; and besides all this, she must possess a certain something in her air and manner of walking, the tone of her voice, her address and expressions, or the word will be but half-deserved. (27)



It can be concluded that women were educated only up to a certain extent, again prescribed by a patriarchal society. If a woman showed passion for intellectual development, she was labelled as a “blue-stocking”:

Blue-stockings were considered unfeminine and off-putting in the way that they attempted to usurp men’s ‘natural’ intellectual superiority. Some doctors reported that too much study actually had a damaging effect on the ovaries, turning attractive young women into dried-up prunes. (Hughes)

Due to this, when college education became available for both genders, many families refused to educate their female children beyond the very basics. They feared that their daughters will not marry if they proved to be smarter than their (future) husband.

In addition to such education, conduct books or books containing advice on how to behave were published, which “shows the concern that ‘proper’ feminine behaviour was far from natural, and had to be taught” (Furieux). Therefore, much attention was given to proper upbringing of future “angels” so that they would not become *the fallen women*, or “women who had, or appeared to have, sexual experience outside of marriage, including adulteresses and prostitutes” (Furieux). Such behaviour was beyond unacceptable in Victorian Britain, not only because of the women’s code of conduct, but also due to maintaining the public image a woman had before entering a marriage. As mentioned earlier, the norm of being “pure” applied only to women. Seen as immoral, “the fallen women” did not fulfil a woman’s prime function according to the woman’s code of conduct: that of a wife and a mother. Abrams argues that a “marriage signified a woman’s maturity and respectability, but motherhood was confirmation that she had entered the world of womanly virtue and female fulfilment”. Furthermore, “motherhood was seen as an affirmation of their identity”, because “for a woman not to become a mother meant she was liable to be labelled inadequate, a failure or in some way abnormal. Motherhood was expected of a married woman and the childless single woman was a figure to be pitied” (Abrams).

## 5. Tess: a victim of Victorian morality

Hardy divided the novel in seven phases in order to direct the reader's attention towards the main protagonist. The division enables the reader to depict and understand not only the plot of the novel, but also Tess's downfall. Tess's transition from a (young) ideal Victorian woman to a fallen woman is influenced by three factors, which are going to be discussed: her family, her relationship with Alec and her stay at D'Urberville manor, and her relationship with Angel.

The novel opens with the first phase, *the Maiden*, whose name suggests that Tess is, not only a young girl, but unmarried and therefore virginal, too. She is introduced to the reader as one of the girls and women in May Day procession:

She was a fine and handsome girl—not handsomer than some others, possibly—but her mobile peony mouth and large innocent eyes added eloquence to colour and shape. She wore a red ribbon in her hair, and was the only one of the white company who could boast of such a pronounced adornment. (Hardy 15)

The quote depicts Tess as not much different than the other girls, but the features of her face, along with the red ribbon, make her distinguishable. She also attracts attention because of her appearance, “for all her bouncing handsome womanliness, you could sometimes see her twelfth year in her cheeks, or her ninth sparkling from her eyes; and even her fifth would flit over the curves of her mouth now and then” (Hardy 16). At this point in her life, Tess is an innocent and pure girl, somewhat naive, an ideal young Victorian girl on her way towards becoming an ideal Victorian woman, because she “was a mere vessel of emotion untinged by experience” (Hardy 16), and unaware of the outside world. Also, it is at the procession that Tess sees Angel Clare for the first time. He chooses to dance with another girl and leaves her disappointed, foreshadowing thus events occurring later in the novel. She lives with her parents and younger siblings in a modest home, helping her mother to run the household. In other words, she respects the code of conduct fully.

The idea of sending Tess to “claim kin” came from her mother Joan, who, by finding out of their family's noble heritage, sees Tess as an opportunity to climb the social ladder and solve all their financial issues. She states that “Tess ought to go to this other member of our family. She'd be sure to win the lady—Tess would; and likely enough 'twould lead to some noble gentleman marrying her” (Hardy 33). Tess agrees to leave her family home only to earn money, so they could afford buying a new horse. One may conclude that from the moment their parents find out about the noble ancestry and send her to “claim kin” in Trantridge, her transition into

the fallen woman begins. This is no wonder, as other writers have criticized the role of parents, especially mothers, in perpetuating the behaviours that ultimately made girls unhappy. One such example is Jane Austen's Mrs. Bennet who is only concerned with her daughters' prospects for marriage. This results in the youngest daughter Lydia's elopement with the notorious Wickham which (temporarily) casts the whole family in a negative light and earns her the attribute of a fallen woman.

Tess's stay in Trantridge is characterized by Alec's invasive courtship. His efforts are noticed from the point he laid his eyes on Tess, giving her all his attention and inappropriately calling her his "pretty Coz" (Hardy 54), emphasizing the fact that he finds her physically attractive:

He watched her pretty and unconscious munching through the skeins of smoke that pervaded the tent, and Tess Durbeyfield did not divine, as she innocently looked down at the roses in her bosom, that there behind the blue narcotic haze was potentially the "tragic mischief" of her drama—one who stood fair to be the blood-red ray in the spectrum of her young life. (Hardy 55)

Furthermore, the narrator states that "it was this that caused Alec d'Urberville's eyes to rivet themselves upon her. It was a luxuriance of aspect, a fulness of growth, which made her appear more of a woman than she really was" (55). It is visible that Tess is unaware of her beauty and womanliness, and her ignorance and naivety in the end cause her tragic downfall.

Alec's desires culminate in the Chase, what he describes as the oldest wood in Britain. There, the events which occurred remain unclear. Whether Tess gave her consent or was raped remains the topic of discussion among literary critics. Hardy stays implicit, stating the following:

Why it was that upon this beautiful feminine tissue, sensitive as gossamer, and practically blank as snow as yet, there should have been traced such a coarse pattern as it was doomed to receive; why so often the coarse appropriates the finer thus, the wrong man the woman, the wrong woman the man, many thousand years of analytical philosophy have failed to explain to our sense of order. (Hardy 107)

It is, however, implied that the event was inevitable; as “Tess’s own people down in those retreats are never tired of saying among one another in their fatalistic way: ‘It was to be’” (Hardy 107).

Ashamed by what has happened, Tess returns home and tells Joan what happened. Joan is disappointed that the marriage was never mentioned, saying that Tess “ought to have been more careful” if she “didn’t mean to get him to make you [her] his wife” (119), but Tess breaks down and counters:

How could I be expected to know? I was a child when I left this house four months ago. Why didn’t you tell me there was danger in men-folk? Why didn’t you warn me? Ladies know what to fend hands against, because they read novels that tell them of these tricks; but I never had the chance o’ learning in that way, and you did not help me! (120)

Tess is now aware of the dangers of the outside world, and understands that she does not have the skills of “ladies”, women of the upper class, despite her noble ancestry. The quote depicts not only Alec’s dominance, but the dominance of men over women in the Victorian era. From that moment on, Tess was maiden no more, but a fallen woman. Also, she would never be able to become an angel of the house, at least in the eyes of hypocritical Victorian society. In the novel, the judgment of the people is described as “the people who had turned their heads turned them again as the service proceeded; and at last observing her, they whispered to each other. She knew what their whispers were about, grew sick at heart, and felt that she could come to church no more” (Hardy 124).

Due to Victorian society’s hypocrisy and double standards, Hardy felt he needed to defend his heroine numerous times. He “regarded her then as being in the hands of circumstances, not morally responsible, a mere corpse drifting with the current to her end” (“Overview of Thomas Hardy”). Pinton adds that Tess is “the victim of chance--of heredity, physical and temperamental; of the position she was born into, and all the other factors that impinge on her life. She could not be held responsible for them; she was, in Hardy’s words, ‘a pure woman’” (qtd. in “Overview of Thomas Hardy”).

In the third phase, *The Rally*, the reader is introduced to Angel and his relationship with Tess. Tess is determined to continue with her life after Alec, public condemnation, and the death of her infant child. She finds a job as a milkmaid at Talbothays Dairy. She has changed:

Symbols of reflectiveness passed into her face, and a note of tragedy at times into her voice. Her eyes grew larger and more eloquent. She became what would have been called a fine creature; her aspect was fair and arresting; her soul that of a woman whom the turbulent experiences of the last year or two had quite failed to demoralize. But for the world's opinion those experiences would have been simply a liberal education. (Hardy 144)

At Talbothays, she again notices Angel Clare, who is unaware that they have met before. He is impressed by her beauty and idolizes her as being “a fresh and virginal daughter of Nature” (177) and “a visionary essence of woman” (192).

However, events at Trantridge deeply affected Tess's relationship with Angel. She is scared because of her past, and considers herself less pure than other women. Because of this, she initially rejects Angel's wedding proposal, saying to him that “it is for your good, indeed, my dearest! O, believe me, it is only for your sake! I don't like to give myself the great happiness o' promising to be yours in that way—because—because I am SURE I ought not to do it” (257), but in the end, resolves to marry him, but the guilt Victorian society put on her continues to torment her:

‘I shall give way—I shall say yes—I shall let myself marry him—I cannot help it!’ she jealously panted, with her hot face to the pillow that night, on hearing one of the other girls sigh his name in her sleep. ‘I can't bear to let anybody have him but me! Yet it is a wrong to him, and may kill him when he knows! O my heart—O—O—O!’ (262)

Whether to tell Angel about Alec and her noble ancestry becomes a heavy burden for Tess from that moment on. Eventually, she tells him about her being a descendent of the true D'Urbervilles and agrees to marry him, but does not tell him about Alec. Instead, she writes to her mother who advises her “that on no account do you say a word of your Bygone Trouble to him” as “No girl would be such a Fool, specially as it is so long ago, and not your Fault at all” (281). The norms and standards of Victorian society haunt Tess throughout the novel, who is aware that there is a big possibility Angel would not marry her if he found out she was a fallen woman, “immoral” woman, despite the love they share.

The wedding passes, and on their wedding night, in belief that he will forgive after he told her about his past, Tess tells Angel the truth about Alec, which marks the end of *The Consequence*. In theory, their sin is, as Tess says it, the same. Here, Angel's depiction,

idolization of Tess as pure and virginal falls apart, and he remarks that he loved not Tess, but the person he thought she was. Even though he despised his family for their conservative point of view, one cannot help but notice how Angel holds the conventions valid. In other words, the double standards applying only to women step in, as Angel's main concern now is his reputation. The narrator describes the situation as follows:

He looked upon her as a species of imposter; a guilty woman in the guise of an innocent one. Terror was upon her white face as she saw it; her cheek was flaccid, and her mouth had almost the aspect of a round little hole. The horrible sense of his view of her so deadened her that she staggered, and he stepped forward, thinking she was going to fall. (335)

Through the rest of the novel, Angel cannot cope with the truth and continues to reject Tess, which triggers her to kill Alec in hope that it will kill her past, which prevented her from having a happy life with Angel. At the end of the novel, she is punished for murder, but loves Angel until she is dead, and expresses her last words to him, at peace, saying that everything “'is as it should be,' she murmured. 'Angel, I am almost glad—yes, glad! This happiness could not have lasted. It was too much. I have had enough; and now I shall not live for you to despise me!'” (580).

In conclusion, one may see how all three factors contributed to Tess's downfall. Her family saw a way of climbing up the social ladder through Tess marrying a (false) D'Urberville, Alec used his male dominance and the hypocrisy of the Victorian society to his advantage, while Angel, due to his and society's double standards, threw away any chance of a happy marriage between him and Tess.

Shakury describes Tess's victimization as follows:

Tess is the symbol of an age-old wrong, a tragedy of women, of nature and of society. She gives the impression of being larger than the fate itself. She expresses Hardy's feelings towards women and, in one respect, towards society. His feeling is shown when he defends Tess against the Victorian manners and morals. He succeeds in that the reader is outraged at the unjust treatment of Tess by her society. Angel Clare represents the harsh reactions of society against her. (Shakury 94)

## **Conclusion**

The paper analysed Thomas Hardy's novel *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* as an example of Victorian morality, its aspects, and both men's and women's roles in the Victorian society. Hardy's role in the British literature, especially between two eras in European literature, Realism and Modernism, is clear as he employs both the Victorian concerns about morality and double standards and foreshadows Modernist desire for liberation.

The novel shows that defying the social norms of any kind was heavily looked down upon, but it also shows the dreadful consequences of Victorian hypocrisy, which eventually led to Tess's downfall. The focus on form and custom-made issues of guilt and fairness irrelevant, and even though Tess dies alone and scorned, the novel implies that this is an injustice as Tess was a pure woman until the very end. She was not a fallen woman, but rather a victim of Victorian misdirected morality.

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