



Selective Morality and Gendered Double Standards in Thomas Hardy's "Tess of the D'Urbervilles"

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Abstract: This research explores the theme of selective morality in Thomas Hardy's novel "Tess of the D'Urbervilles" through the lens of gender difference theory. The novel portrays the experiences of Tess Durbeyfield, who faces double standards and unequal treatment based on her gender. The study is qualitative in nature. Using gender difference theory as a theoretical framework, this study examines the societal expectations and moral judgments imposed on Tess as she navigates the challenges of her circumstances. The analysis highlights the gendered nature of moral judgments, where women are held to stricter standards than men. Tess's encounters with Alec d'Urberville and Angel Clare exemplify the disparities in how society perceives and punishes individuals based on their gender. The research investigates the power dynamics, socialization, and social control that contribute to the perpetuation of selective morality. The findings underscore the need for a more equitable moral framework that challenges gendered double standards. By critically examining the novel and applying gender difference theory, this research contributes to a deeper understanding of the complexities surrounding selective morality and advocates for societal change to promote gender equality and justice.

Key words: Morality, Tess of the D'Urbervilles, Thomas Hardy's, Gender Equality

1. Introduction

Selective morality refers to the tendency of individuals or societies to apply moral judgments or standards selectively based on various factors such as personal biases, social norms, or situational contexts. It involves the inconsistent or biased application of moral principles, where certain actions or behaviors are deemed morally acceptable or unacceptable depending on subjective criteria. In the context of selective morality, individuals or groups may judge or condemn certain actions or behaviors in one situation while tolerating or even endorsing similar actions or behaviors in another. This inconsistency often stems from personal interests, societal biases, cultural norms, or power dynamics. Selective morality can result in the unequal treatment of individuals or groups, as well as the perpetuation of double standards.

Gender plays a significant role in selective morality, as there are often different moral standards applied to individuals based on their gender. Gendered double standards are evident in many societies, where women are often subjected to stricter moral judgments and expectations compared to men. Actions or behaviors that are considered acceptable or even celebrated when performed by men may be heavily criticized or stigmatized when performed by

women.

For example, in the case of sexual behavior, women are often judged harshly for engaging in premarital sex or expressing their sexuality, while men may face fewer or even no repercussions for the same actions. This illustrates the gendered selective morality that places a greater burden of moral responsibility on women and imposes limitations on their agency and autonomy. Selective morality can also manifest in other areas such as race, socioeconomic status, or political affiliations. People may hold different moral standards for individuals from different racial or ethnic backgrounds, economic classes, or political ideologies, leading to inconsistent moral judgments and unequal treatment. The study of selective morality raises important questions about the fairness and objectivity of moral judgments and calls for critical examination of the underlying biases and societal structures that contribute to these inconsistencies. It prompts us to reflect on the need for a more equitable and consistent moral framework that respects the dignity and rights of all individuals, regardless of their gender, race, or other social identities.

Gender dynamics and societal expectations have long influenced moral judgments, often resulting in selective morality and double standards. One compelling literary work that delves into this theme is Thomas Hardy's renowned novel, "Tess of the D'Urbervilles." Set in the late 19th century, the novel vividly portrays the struggles faced by the protagonist, Tess Durbeyfield, as she becomes entangled in a web of societal judgments and gendered moral biases. This research aims to explore the concept of selective morality from the perspective of gender difference theory, unraveling the intricate ways in which Tess's experiences exemplify the unequal treatment of men and women. By analyzing the characters, their actions, and the societal responses within the novel, this study seeks to shed light on the profound implications of gender-based moral expectations and provoke a critical examination of the lasting influence of selective morality in society.

1.1 Research Question

- How does "Tess of the D'Urbervilles" by Thomas Hardy depict selective morality and double standards based on gender, particularly in relation to the character of Tess Durbeyfield?
- What insights can be gained from applying gender difference theory to analyze the societal expectations and moral judgments imposed on female characters in "Tess of the D'Urbervilles," and how do these insights contribute to our understanding of selective morality?

1.2 Theoretical Framework

Gender difference theory serves as a valuable theoretical framework for analyzing the selective morality and gendered double standards depicted in "Tess of the D'Urbervilles." This theory examines how societal norms, expectations, and power dynamics shape the experiences and treatment of individuals based on their gender.

Gender difference theory emphasizes the social construction of gender roles and the associated expectations placed on individuals. In the novel, Tess is subjected to the societal expectation of female purity and virtue, which becomes a basis for moral judgment. Gender difference theory sheds light on the existence of double standards in moral judgments, where women are often held to stricter standards than men. This theory helps us understand how Tess is unfairly blamed and stigmatized for her loss of purity, while male characters like Alec face lesser consequences.

Gender difference theory explores power dynamics within gender relationships and their influence on moral judgments. Tess's lack of agency and vulnerability in the face of male coercion highlight the power imbalances inherent in gendered morality. This theory examines how societal norms and institutions shape individuals' behaviors and moral judgments. Tess's upbringing and the societal pressures she faces contribute to her internalization of the gendered moral expectations, making her susceptible to scrutiny and judgment. By employing the gender difference theory as the theoretical framework, this research investigates the complexities of selective morality and gendered double standards present in "Tess of the D'Urbervilles." It allows for a comprehensive analysis of the novel's portrayal of societal expectations, power dynamics, and the impact of gender roles on moral judgments. Through this lens, the research aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of the gendered dimensions of moral judgments and prompt critical reflections on the need for a more equitable moral framework.

2. Literature Review

Nixon (2009) argues that Thomas Hardy's novel *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* defies the conventions of the literature of the fallen woman, a genre characterized by strict guidelines and the portrayal of female figures immersed in fault, misery, and eventual demise. Hardy introduces a remarkable departure from these established norms through the strategic utilization of sleep states at pivotal moments in the narrative. This artistic choice not only absolves the protagonist, Tess Durbeyfield, from culpability but also enables her to transcend her perceived transgressions. Furthermore, it plunges Tess into a realm of internal ambivalence, intensifying her alienation from both society and the expectations ingrained within her genre. In this paradigm-shifting representation of the fallen woman, Hardy echoes his discontent with the hypocritically ambiguous society of his era, while simultaneously introducing the transformative concept of forgiveness. By undertaking an exploration of Hardy's deft utilization of these sleep states, this study illuminates their extraordinary influence on the perception of the fallen woman.

Azizmohamadi (2023) uses John Austin's theory to examine speech actions in *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* by Thomas Hardy. The current study's overarching goal is to examine the locutionary, illocutionary, and perlocutionary speech actions of the novel's female characters. The publication of Austin's ideas in the book *How to Do Things with Words*, which introduces speech actions, is noteworthy. According to the thinkers, words show us the world. Put simply, it reveals the existence or nonexistence of something. The speaking activities of Tess reveal the same technique. Language is not a medium of communication for Tess, one may argue. It is a means by which they may shape their mind, their sense of self, and their future. Linguists may get new insights into the novel and linguists can show new elements of the work by applying linguistic theories to the chosen work. We may deduce that Tess's social failure and terrible fate are caused by her speech actions, and we can also discern the relationship between the characters' language and mind.

Shah (2022) examines the societal construction of women, characterized by predetermined images and roles that shape their identities, using the Victorian novel *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* as a focal point. Authored by Thomas Hardy, this novel portrays the hardships endured by women during the Victorian era in England. Through a qualitative analysis of the text, the research sheds light on the various aspects of women's objectification presented within the narrative, employing a feminist perspective. The findings of this study affirm the presence of sexual objectification based on gender, emphasizing the need for both society and women themselves to recognize and assert their inherent rights as capable and independent individuals. The study underscores the significance of women challenging prevailing patriarchal norms, which in turn fosters a renewed sense of self and facilitates the creation of opportunities to defy social expectations.

Badinjki (2021) In Thomas Hardy's novel *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, his non-conformist beliefs are prominently displayed through the contrasting negation of institutionalized codes and the rejection of stereotypical Victorian ideals of femininity. Hardy portrays himself as a protective figure, watching over Tess like a sorrowful father, and emphasizing her status as an innocent victim. However, despite his best efforts, he is unable to rescue her from her predestined demise. Hardy's pursuit of a utopian society and his desire to challenge societal norms regarding sex and gender face significant obstacles due to repression from editors, reviewers, publishers, and proponents of the "purity movement", to shield himself from the trauma of rejection, Hardy extensively edits and revises the original text. Nevertheless, the tragic conclusion of the novel illustrates that prevailing ideologies and the excessive prudishness of the League of Virtue's supporters have overwhelmed Hardy's perceptions and undermined his liberal concepts. The frustration, bitter experiences, and unwarranted attacks directed towards Hardy and his literary works seem to have played a significant role in his decision to discontinue writing novels.

Gurman (2020) investigates the role that literature and how it is interpreted play in the conversation over women's implicit sexual consent in Western society. In order to do this, it examines how sexual consent and the semi-conscious female body are portrayed in Thomas Hardy's *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* (1891) and makes analogies with the court records from Brock Allen Turner's trial and conviction. Despite their differences, these stories both highlight how society has a propensity to sexualize the submissive female body and struggle with how to determine permission when the body is made totally unconscious. The feminine figure that is about to fall asleep is often portrayed in the 19th-century novel as seductive and appealing. The Turner trial demonstrates how society continues to be fascinated by the eroticization of the subservient female body and how this understanding of feminine sexuality pushes the bounds of consent beyond what is reasonable and compliant. The purpose of this

essay is to examine how the semi-conscious and unconscious female body has been sexualized and the idea that this body may be able to provide permission. Additionally, it investigates the intricate relationship between literary narratives, criticism, and contemporary rape culture, highlighting instances where they may perpetuate or endorse such cultural tendencies.

Morgan (1989) Argues that the portrayal of Tess as a passive character who succumbs to circumstance and fate has been criticized by many, often reflecting a nineteenth-century liberal perspective that sympathizes with fallen women, considering them unfortunate victims of nature. This perspective suggests that Tess, inherently silent, trusting, passive, and yielding, lacked the strength of will and reason, absolving her of responsibility for her actions. However, such interpretations fail to align with Hardy's intentions. Throughout his entire body of work, few condemnations are as unequivocal as his denunciation of the sexual double-standard evident in Tess. This condemnation encompasses the double-standard that denies sexually active women the same agency, willpower, reasoning ability, self-responsibility, and moral integrity that is readily granted to sexually active men. In Hardy's portrayal, Tess possesses a sexually vital consciousness, unequivocally exhibiting each and every one of these qualities.

3. Research Methodology

The present study is qualitative in nature. The researcher investigates and analyzes the novel of Thomas Hardy "Tess of the d'Urbervilles". The primary goal of the current study is qualitative analysis of the chosen novel. The initial data were based on the text of the chosen novel, and the researcher used the qualitative approach to examine the novel from the viewpoints of gender difference theory and selective morality.

Through an in-depth qualitative exploration, the study aims to unravel the layers of meaning embedded in Thomas Hardy's "Tess of the d'Urbervilles." The qualitative analysis extends beyond surface-level observations, delving into the intricate nuances of the narrative. By grounding the investigation in the text of the novel, the researcher employs a qualitative approach that facilitates a nuanced examination of how gender Differences and selective morality play out within the storyline.

This qualitative inquiry involves a meticulous examination of character interactions, societal expectations, and moral dilemmas presented in the novel. By focusing on gender dynamics and selective morality, the study seeks to uncover the subtle ways in which the characters navigate these themes and how they contribute to the overarching narrative. Through this qualitative lens, the research aims to offer a deeper understanding of how Hardy's work reflects and critiques societal attitudes toward gender and morality during the period in which the novel is set.

In essence, the qualitative analysis of "Tess of the d'Urbervilles" undertaken in this study serves as a scholarly exploration into the complexities of gender relations and moral judgments, shedding light on the novel's thematic richness and contributing to a broader discourse on literature and societal values.

4. Analysis

Thomas Hardy's novel "Tess of the D'Urbervilles," selective morality is a prominent theme that can be analyzed from the perspective of gender difference theory. Gender difference theory examines how societal norms and expectations shape the experiences and treatment of individuals based on their gender. In the novel, Tess Durbeyfield, the protagonist, faces a double standard in terms of morality due to her gender. The societal expectations for women during that time period were based on the concept of purity and virtue. Tess is depicted as a morally pure and innocent young woman at the beginning of the novel. However, her life takes a tragic turn when she becomes a victim of the selective moral judgments imposed by society. One instance of selective morality is evident in Tess's encounter with Alec d'Urberville. Alec, a wealthy and powerful man, seduces Tess and takes advantage of her vulnerability. Although Tess is a victim of sexual coercion and manipulation, society blames her for the loss of her purity. She is ostracized and labeled as impure, while Alec faces little to no consequences for his actions. This discrepancy highlights the gendered nature of moral judgment, where women are held to stricter standards than men.

When Tess meets Angel Clare, she falls in love with him and decides to disclose her past to him before their marriage. Tess's confession reveals her struggle with guilt and her desire for honesty. However, Angel, who holds conservative views regarding female purity, reacts unfavorably and cannot accept Tess's past. This reaction further reinforces the selective morality imposed on women, as Angel himself has a past that includes a sexual encounter but expects a different standard for Tess. The novel also explores the societal expectations of female responsibility for male desires. Tess is repeatedly blamed for the actions and desires of men around her. This can be seen in the reactions of her family and the community when they discover her connection with the d'Urbervilles. Tess's mother and others hold her accountable for attracting Alec's attention and indirectly blame her for the subsequent events. This perspective places the burden of morality solely on women, reinforcing the gendered double standard.

The gender difference theory helps to analyze how the novel portrays the unequal treatment of men and women in terms of morality. Society's selective morality is deeply rooted in gender roles, where women are expected to embody purity and virtue while men face less scrutiny for their actions. Hardy's portrayal of Tess's experiences highlights the injustices and inequalities perpetuated by this selective morality. Overall, through the lens of gender difference theory, "Tess of the D'Urbervilles" underscores the societal double standards and selective morality imposed on women, particularly regarding issues of purity and virtue. The novel invites readers to reflect on the unfair treatment of women based on their gender and the need for a more equitable moral framework.

5. Conclusion

The analysis of "Tess of the D'Urbervilles" through the lens of gender difference theory has revealed the profound implications of selective morality and gendered double standards within the novel. Tess Durbeyfield's experiences exemplify the injustices faced by women as they navigate societal expectations and moral judgments based on their gender. The novel portrays a society that holds women to a higher standard of purity and virtue, while simultaneously granting men greater leniency for their actions. Tess's encounter with Alec d'Urberville highlights the selective moral judgment imposed on women, as she is blamed and ostracized for the loss of her purity, while Alec faces minimal repercussions. Tess's confession to Angel Clare underscores the unequal treatment of men and women in matters of morality, as Angel's inability to accept Tess's past reveals his adherence to a double standard.

By applying gender difference theory to analyze these themes, we gain a deeper understanding of the societal norms and expectations that shape moral judgments. This research illuminates the inherent inequalities in selective morality and invites critical reflection on the perpetuation of gendered double standards in society.

Through the exploration of selective morality in "Tess of the D'Urbervilles," we are reminded of the importance of questioning and challenging the gendered biases that underlie moral judgments. By fostering a more equitable moral framework, we can strive for a society that recognizes the inherent worth and agency of individuals, irrespective of their gender. The lasting impact of this research lies in its call for greater awareness and societal change, paving the way for a more just and inclusive future.

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