

## **A Philosophical Review on Pessimism and Deterministic Forces in the Major Novels of Thomas Hardy**

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### **ABSTRACT**

This study examines the pervasive pessimism in Thomas Hardy's novels *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, *Jude the Obscure*, *Two on a Tower*, and *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, exploring how deterministic forces, societal constraints, and moral hypocrisy shape the tragic destinies of Hardy's protagonists. Rooted in Hardy's personal philosophy and Victorian social critique, these works depict individuals who struggle against a hostile universe and rigid societal norms, ultimately succumbing to fate and misfortune. The analysis highlights recurring themes such as fatalism, alienation, class oppression, and the futility of human effort, all of which reflect Hardy's bleak worldview. Despite occasional glimpses of resilience and moral integrity, his narratives remain deeply rooted in existential despair and the limits of free will. This study contributes to Hardy scholarship by contextualizing his pessimism within both literary and philosophical frameworks, reaffirming his position as a critical realist and a tragic visionary in English literature.

**Keywords:** *Thomas Hardy, Pessimism, Fate, Victorian Society, Tragic Vision, Determinism, Social Critique.*

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### **Introduction and Research Background**

Thomas Hardy, born on 2nd June 1840 in Dorset, England, emerged as one of the most influential literary figures of the Victorian era, deeply shaped by his rural upbringing, education, and exposure to classical and local influences. Though trained as an architect, his literary journey began with poetry and gradually evolved into fiction writing, which earned him acclaim with novels like *Far from the Madding Crowd*. Hardy's worldview, shaped by personal losses, social observations, and philosophical reflections, culminated in a distinctly pessimistic tone that permeated his major works. This pessimism is most evident in *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, where Tess's innocence is crushed by social hypocrisy and cruel fate; *Jude the Obscure*, in which Jude's aspirations are destroyed by

societal constraints and religious rigidity; *Two on a Tower*, which portrays love doomed by class differences and conventional morality; and *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, which traces Henchard's downfall due to his impulsive decisions and the relentless grip of past actions. Hardy's depiction of fate, suffering, and societal oppression reveals a consistent belief in the futility of human effort against deterministic forces, forming the crux of his tragic vision and philosophical pessimism.

### **Need and Scope of the Study**

This study is essential for understanding how Hardy's literary pessimism not only reflects his personal philosophy but also serves as a powerful critique of Victorian norms and human limitations. By examining these select novels, we gain insights into the emotional and existential struggles of individuals entrapped in rigid social structures and moral expectations. Furthermore, Hardy's portrayal of fate, coincidence, and nature's indifference resonates deeply with readers facing modern uncertainties, making his work relevant beyond its historical context. While this research focuses primarily on *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, *Jude the Obscure*, *Two on a Tower*, and *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, it opens avenues for future exploration of Hardy's protagonists in other works. Scholars interested in psychological realism, gender dynamics, or fatalism in Victorian literature can build upon this foundation to conduct deeper character studies, thematic analyses, or comparative evaluations across literary periods.

### **Related Literature**

The article on *A Pair of Blue Eyes* explores Thomas Hardy's deep-rooted pessimism through Elfriede Swancourt's tragic love story, reflecting the author's own disillusionments and psychological depth. Mays (2012) connects Hardy's fatalism to personal hardships such as class struggles, romantic disappointments, and social rejection, arguing that these themes shape the despair found in *Far from the Madding Crowd*, *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, and *Jude the Obscure*. Rahnuma (2014) reinforces this view through an analysis of *The Return of the Native*, emphasizing the symbolic use of the bleak Wessex landscape to express emotional desolation. Balkaya (2016) interprets four of Hardy's poems—*Hap*, *The Impercipient*, *The Darkling Thrush*, and *After a Journey*—as evidence of his spiritual confusion and alienation from divine or romantic ideals, framing him as a modern pessimist poet. Sinha (2016), while acknowledging Hardy's emphasis on chance, fate, and suffering, presents a counterpoint by identifying subtle optimism in his values of love, hope, and moral resilience. Similarly, Yadav and Yadav (2020) challenge the dominant tragic reading by uncovering instances of human endurance and positive values amidst his typically gloomy plots. Khan et al. (2021) offers an existentialist reading using Sartre's concept of facticity to analyze *The Return of the Native* and *Tess*, situating Hardy's tragic vision within a broader philosophical framework of human limitation and determinism. Afaq et al. (2022) further explore Hardy's naturalistic approach in *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, arguing that life is governed by immanent forces beyond human control, thereby questioning the existence of free will. Lastly, Krauze (2022) examines the intersection of spatial settings and violence in Hardy's fiction, showing how domestic and rural spaces become stages for psychological and physical trauma, reinforcing his bleak worldview. Collectively, these studies affirm Hardy's identity as a predominantly pessimistic writer, though some acknowledge underlying traces of optimism, human resilience, and philosophical inquiry in his literary oeuvre.

### **Pessimism in Thomas Hardy's Novels**

Thomas Hardy's novels are profoundly marked by a philosophical pessimism that reflects the harsh realities of life, the indifference of fate, and the cruelty of social conventions. In *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, Hardy presents the tragic downfall of a pure-hearted woman who becomes a victim of societal hypocrisy and relentless fate. Tess's efforts to live a virtuous life are repeatedly thwarted by external forces beyond her control, culminating in her tragic end. Similarly, *Jude the Obscure* explores the futility of individual aspirations in the face of rigid class structures, religious constraints, and societal expectations. Jude Fawley's dream of intellectual and personal fulfilment is systematically destroyed, showcasing Hardy's bleak view of human destiny and the oppressive institutions that govern it. In both novels, Hardy critiques Victorian morality and questions whether genuine happiness is attainable in a world ruled by arbitrary forces.

*Two on a Tower* and *The Mayor of Casterbridge* further deepen Hardy's pessimistic outlook. In *Two on a Tower*, the unconventional love between Lady Viviette and Swithin St. Cleve is doomed from the start, suppressed by social norms and the imbalance of age and class, ending in sorrow and separation. The novel highlights the disconnect between personal desire and societal limitations. *The Mayor of Casterbridge* presents Michael Henchard's rise and fall, shaped by impulsive decisions and the inescapable consequences of the past. His fate is not only self-inflicted but also reinforced by an indifferent universe that punishes even redemptive efforts. In all four works, Hardy's pessimism serves as both a thematic core and a narrative engine, portraying a deterministic world where characters are often powerless against inherited flaws, social judgment, and the blind workings of fate. Through these tragic portrayals, Hardy crafts a literary legacy that speaks to the enduring struggle of individuals against forces greater than themselves.

### **Conclusion**

Through analysis of *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, *Jude the Obscure*, *Two on a Tower*, and *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, this study underscores Thomas Hardy's persistent pessimism, manifested in deterministic plots, societal strictures, and moral hypocrisy. It demonstrates how fate, class oppression, and human fragility converge to thwart characters' aspirations, reinforcing Hardy's bleak vision of human agency. Despite moments of resilience and integrity, protagonists ultimately succumb to inexorable external forces. Contextualizing Hardy within Victorian critique and philosophical frameworks, the research reaffirms his status as a tragic realist whose narratives challenge notions of free will and highlight the futility of human endeavor.

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