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Endorsement of Destruction and Damnation of Unconventional Women in Thomas Hardy's *A Pair of Blue Eyes*

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Abstract:

Thomas Hardy could not decouple his works from the contemporary, prevailing social norms and circumstances of the nineteenth-century Britain and that might be a reason for his endorsement of anti-feminism and misogyny through his characters. But this thought is antithetical to the very foundation of literary and artistic principles. Literature is the mirror of society. It reflects all the goods and the evils of society and makes people aware of the happenings in their surroundings. A responsible writer not only presents the true picture of society in his works but also attempts to rectify the wrong practices. He becomes a torchbearer and through his writings, reforms, inspires, and guides people. Literature influences people, leave an impact on their minds, and has the potential to change and shape their thoughts.

Unfortunately, this kind of sense of responsibility in shaping the mind of the younger generation of the Victorian period misses in the works of Thomas Hardy. His novels stimulate the continuation of age-old traditions, victimization of women, their struggle against the patriarchal system, and ultimately their submission to the unyielding attitudes of society. In fact, it seems as if through his writings he expresses his anger against all those who challenge the established order. In a way, he endorses the destruction and damnation meted out to those who attack the hypocrisy and double standards inherent in Victorian society.

Generally, in his novels, Hardy ruins the lives of all those characters who do not submit themselves to the conventional norms of society. The tragic end of his characters points out the perils and consequences of breaching society's ethical codes. The reasons for creating tragic characters like Tess, Sue, Susan, and Elfride are inherent in his literary theory-Art for the sake of life. The literary interpretation of Hardy's novel "*A Pair of Blue Eyes*" elucidates his propensity to portray women within the realm of contemporary social

norms and laws.

Keywords: anti-feminist, misogynist, conventional, Victorian, society, women.

Literature serves as a reflection of society, representing both its positive and negative aspects, and making individuals aware of their surroundings. Through their works, responsible authors not only depict society as it truly is but also seek to correct its wrongdoings. By their words, writers become torchbearers, inspiring and directing others. Literature influences individuals, leaving impressions on their minds, and has the capacity to alter and mould their ideas. Regrettably, this sense of responsibility in moulding the minds of the Victorian era's younger generation is missing in the works of Thomas Hardy. His works encourage the perpetuation of age-old customs, the victimization of women, their struggle against the patriarchal system, and ultimately, their acquiescence to society's unbending attitudes. Elfride, Tess, Susan are some of Hardy's female characters whose unconventional nature and quest to define their identity in a male-dominated society resulted in their degradation, rejection, marginalization, and ultimately, a tragic end. However, despite the unorthodox representation of his heroines, it is evident that Thomas Hardy detests the idea of women being in pursuit of love, freedom, and self-fulfilment. Hence, to curtail the number of such unconventional empowered women, he employed his writings as a medium to subtly threaten all those who disrupt the existing social order.

Elfride Swancourt who was not a stereo-typed Victorian woman but an independent, strong-willed, unconventional woman too succumbed to Hardy's and the era's rigid doctrinaire idealism. Hardy justifies her transformation from courageous to fearful, independent to dependent, reasonable to emotional, guilt-free to guilt-ridden as a result of her perceived wrong choices and being different. To demean and undermine her, Hardy impregnated her with the sense of guilt and fear rationalizing her resignation to a phallogentric, unenlightened society. His writings expose his skewed perspective and disdain for women who do not harmonize with patriarchal ideals. Hence, he deems aggression and violence against such women necessary to assert control over them and protect a prudish society. As a writer, Hardy could have advocated for equal opportunities for women, promoted gender equality, uplifted them, and paved the way for a more inclusive society, but their cries and voices never reached his ears. Their disappointment never affected him, and thus, due to writers like Thomas Hardy, women in the Victorian era remained invisible, oppressed, discriminated against, and marginalized.

In Victorian times, women were denied the opportunity to showcase their talents in public and were not recognized as independent individuals. They were confined to domestic roles as wives and mothers. Girls were primarily trained in housework, physically demanding but offering little intellectual growth and were forced into childbearing and domesticity. Restricted from exploring the world or pursuing higher education, the entire system was designed to maintain male dominance. Laws and social norms were deliberately crafted to curtail their freedom and strip them of their rights. Lynn Abrams notes:

Domesticity and motherhood were portrayed as sufficient emotional fulfilment for women and many middle-class women regarded motherhood and domestic life as a 'sweet vocation', a substitute for women's productive role. (Abrams: Web)

Married women found themselves in a more disadvantageous position compared to unmarried women, lacking rights to their bodies, earnings, or children. The unjust Victorian laws, evidently crafted to subjugate and victimize women, exacerbated their plight by deeming husbands as the legal proprietors of their property. This elevated husbands to the role of family heads, and dooming women “wholly to the general and inessential”. (Beauvoir: 547). Before the enactment of the Married Women’s Property Act 1882, married women in Britain had no legal rights to own property, and their property automatically transferred to their husbands upon marriage, rendering them dependent on them. The character of Parson Swancourt in *"A Pair of Blue Eyes"* highlights the stark truth that marriages often led to the erosion of women's identity and autonomy. He unhesitatingly married Mrs. Charlotte Troyton, a widow—an unattractive, dark-complexioned woman much older than him—solely for the property she owned. He was well aware that, according to the law, the property would automatically transfer to his name upon their marriage.

Once married, a woman’s property was given over to her husband. Even if she inherited a substantial house or sum of money that became her husband’s upon marriage. He then gave her an allowance of money. Her children also became her husband’s property and he had the ultimate say over their education and future. (Parker: Web)

This marriage exemplified Swancourt's conviction that either his own or his daughter's union was the key to enhancing his social status. For him, emotions and love held minimal significance in the context of marriage. He embraced an unappealing widow driven

by greed for her property and her elevated social standing. Conversely, he dismissed Stephen Smith, deeply in love with Elfride, on account of his impoverished background. Parson Swancourt perceived Elfride's marriage as a medium to elevate his social standing as in Victorian England:

Wealthy families often sought to marry their children off to other wealthy families, in order to maintain or increase their social status. This meant that love and compatibility were often secondary concerns, and marriages were arranged purely for financial gain. (WeChronicle)

Parson Swancourt was a selfish father who had no issue with his daughter's relationship with Stephen Smith until he uncovered the latter's true origin and parents. The day Parson Swancourt learned that Stephen Smith was not a member of a noble family, but rather the son of a local mason, the snooty Parson felt disgusted and disapproved of the relationship with his daughter. Through Jane Smith, the mother of Stephen Smith, Hardy depicted the true essence of the Victorian era:

...I know men all move up a stage by marriage. Men of her class, that is, parsons, marry squires' daughters; squires marry lords' daughters; lords marry dukes' daughters'; dukes marry queens' daughters. All stages of gentlemen mate a stage higher; and the lowest stage of gentlewomen are left single, or marry out of their class. (*A Pair of Blue Eyes*: 142)

The disadvantaged position of Stephen Smith led Parson Swancourt to oppose their union. This signifies the patriarchal mentality that limits even an adult woman's ability to choose her own life partner. This is regrettable and highlights the evident bias of Victorian society, which denies women the right to enter into marriage of their own free will and consent.

During this era, unions were typically formed based on economic and social factors such as familial ties, wealth, and prestige. These alliances were generally organized by parents or guardians without the involvement of the couple themselves, leaving them with minimal control over their partner selection. This could lead to situations in which women were forced to remain in unsatisfying or even abusive relationships due to a lack of legal protection or financial autonomy. (AncientsPast)

Hardy appears indifferent to the prejudice against women, as he does not intervene to support their quest for autonomy and the freedom to choose a spouse at their will. Women were dehumanized under the guise of morality and social laws, and it appears that neither Hardy nor society had any qualms about condoning this dehumanization.

Elfride Swancourt, portrayed as a modern woman, defied the conservative wishes of her father. Instead of sacrificing herself and her aspirations to uphold the status quo, she took extraordinary measures to elope with Stephen Smith, seeking liberation from the constraints imposed by her traditional father and society. She was not a fatalist, resigned to accepting the fate designed by her father. Daringly, she proposed to Stephen Smith to formalize their marriage in London without considering the potential consequences. Elfride, who had taken the extraordinary step of eloping, travelled to London to marry Stephen Smith but later expressed her intention to return home without completing the wedding. Despite previously disregarding Victorian social conventions of decorum, she quickly realized her mistake and remarked, “if anybody finds me out, I am, I suppose, disgraced” (A Pair of Blue Eyes: 167). Being unconventional in her thinking, she disregarded the potential repercussions of her elopement with Stephen Smith. However, he, being more aware of the consequences, warned her that “going back unmarried may compromise your good name in the eyes of people who may hear of it” (A Pair of Blue Eyes: 166). Stephen Smith, embodying Hardy's perspective, cautioned Elfride that failing to conform to the Victorian ideal of femininity could lead to contempt from society, branding her as a 'fallen woman.' This exposed the double standard within Victorian society, condemning only women for being unconventional or sexually immoral while excusing males of the same charges. As a member of this prudish society and an active participant in the elopement with Elfride Swancourt, he faced no fear of punishment, loss of chastity, or contempt. In fact, he comforted Elfride and pledged that when he married her in the future, he would attest to her chastity. However, this underscores the disparity within patriarchal norms, where "a woman's virginity is intrinsically valuable not to the woman herself, but only to her future husband" (Jaggard : 261). This highlights a societal imbalance, subjecting women to scrutiny while men, as equal participants, escape conservative moral examination.

Hardy's novels generally portray women falling into two categories: 'pure women' and 'fallen women.' He expects women to embody purity and chastity, finding happiness and fulfilment within the confines of domesticity, excelling in household responsibilities. Those who deviate from accepted social norms are labeled as fallen women. Elfride Swancourt,

following her lapse, becomes a disgraced woman and meets an unfortunate end which Hardy believes is necessary to restrain women from straying.

Mrs. Gertrude is a key figure in Hardy's goal of suppressing Elfride's independence. She constantly blackmails Elfride about her past, making her afraid of both the present and the future. Wanting revenge for her son Felix's death, Mrs. Gertrude cruelly tells Henry Knight about Elfride's secret elopement. She blames Elfride for Felix's death and wants to ruin her life. When Mrs. Gertrude Jethway tells Henry the truth, it brings great unhappiness to Elfride and destroys her life. Mrs. Gertrude's cruel actions show how she seeks revenge for her son's death, which she blames on Elfride rejecting his love. Elfride's rejection of Felix, Mrs. Gertrude's revenge upon Elfride, and Henry's refusal of Elfride all exemplify the oppressive idea that women couldn't stand up for their own desires when it came to relationships. They also weren't allowed to choose their own partners. Elfride's desire to be different, Mrs. Gertrude's anger, Henry Knight's traditional beliefs, and Hardy's support of male-dominated society all lead to Elfride's downfall and early death.

Hardy, as a novelist, refrained from questioning patriarchal values, choosing instead to reinforce societal constraints on women that slim down their autonomy. This is demonstrated through the character of Henry Knight, a typical conventional Victorian man and reviewer of Elfride's "Court of King Arthur's Castle." Instead of nurturing Elfride's writing skills and encouraging her to explore infinite possibilities, he dissuades her by harshly critiquing her work and advising her to focus on domestic chores and errands, finding fulfilment in the domestic milieu. By this blatant insult, he stifled her talent and prevented her from becoming a remarkable and impressive writer, thus rendering her as an insignificant and useless being, always childlike. Henry Knight's belief in the subservient reliance of women on men, their segregation from the external world, and confinement to the domestic realm stemmed from his apprehension that women's capabilities might challenge men's perceived intellectual superiority.

As Hardy's spokesperson, Henry Knight expressed the patriarchal view that women should not express their emotions through writing or any other medium because their "artistic productions are tainted with the vices of amateurism and mediocrity which corrupt taste and lower standards" (Boumelha, 72). Elfride adopted the pseudonym Earnestfield to pen her works, acutely aware that society frowned upon women devoting time to intellectual pursuits. In the Victorian era, female authors often resorted to adopting pen names to pursue an autonomous writing career and ensure their voices were heard. Elfride's decision to write under a male pseudonym sheds light on the challenges faced by female authors in nineteenth-

century Britain, where women were denied equal opportunities in the realm of writing and publishing. To gain recognition and be taken seriously as authors, many women, including Charlotte Bronte, Anne Bronte, Emily Bronte, Mary Ann Evans, and numerous others, concealed their identities by publishing their works under masculine pen names or gender-neutral aliases.

Henry Knight's conviction that women participating in novel writing and pursuing a career in literature are unladylike activities closely mirrors the perspective of the Poet Laureate of England, Robert Southey. In his discouraging response to a collection of Charlotte Bronte's poems, Southey remarked, "Literature cannot be the business of a woman's life, and it ought not to be. The more she is engaged in her proper duties, the less leisure she will have for it even as an accomplishment and a recreation" (Buzwell : Web). Men in Victorian society deemed it unfeminine for women to choose a career in the socio-political realm. The concept of being subordinate to their male counterparts has been ingrained in women's minds since childhood. They were highly valued if they complied with men's wishes and honed their skills in domestic chores, as this was deemed their most suited occupation. Household duties were regarded as honorable responsibilities, and women were denounced by their families and society if they attempted to reject them. They had no role in the public sphere, and those who entered the public sphere to earn a living were often maltreated, underpaid, and also viewed negatively by society. They were deprived of social, economic, and educational rights, which made them subordinate to men, with the ill intention of stifling women's inner abilities and reinforcing patriarchal structures. Harriet Taylor Mill argued in this connection:

So long as competition is in the general law of human life, it is tyranny to shut out one-half of the competitors. All who have attained the age of self-government have an equal claim to be permitted to sell whatever kind of useful labour they are capable of for the price, which it will bring. (Mill : Web)

Women encountered barriers to obtaining equal educational opportunities as education was deemed unnecessary, unfeminine, and labeled as a 'masculine occupation'. The observation of the then-ruler of England, Queen Victoria, captures the spirit of the era.

'We women are not made for governing - and if we are good

women, we must dislike these masculine occupations.'

(Richardson : Web)

Men hindered the intellectual development, advancement, and emancipation of women by denying them the human rights to which they were entitled. Their efforts aimed to strip women of their mental and physical abilities, confining them to a state of confusion and depression, subjecting them to inequality both inside and outside the home. Unfortunately, women's silence and ignorance of their rights rendered them inferior to males in every way, and devoid of any identity, they eventually emerged and were labeled as inferior beings. Mary Wollstonecraft, in her discussions, highlighted the abject submissiveness of women and argued that "the artificial character imposed on women in male society gave them the 'constitution' of slaves and men the occupation of 'slave masters'"(Wollstonecraft: 164). This misguided perception, equating women to slaves, hindered them from recognizing themselves as significant, unique individuals.

Hardy's decision to compel Elfride Swancourt into marriage with a widower, a father of two children, serves as a stark portrayal of the consequences of challenging traditional feminine ideals. In this narrative, it becomes evident that Hardy not only condoned but also actively perpetuated the inequities faced by Elfride. His disdain for women who displayed unfeminine traits drove him to administer punishment upon them. At the close of the novel, Elfride's compliant adherence to societal norms highlights Hardy's mindset, which seems unkind toward women who act in unfeminine ways. He adeptly documented the societal observations of his time in his novels, yet his deep-seated biases and apathy towards women's plight prevented him from feeling empathy and discomfort, thereby forbidding him from advocating for their civil and political rights and recognizing them as fellow human beings.

Elfride used to be independent, free, and full of life. But after meeting Henry Knight, she changed completely. Instead of being herself, she became worried and depended on him. She felt guilty and scared that she would lose him if he knew she had eloped with Stephen Smith before. She lamented her failure to conform to feminine expectations and her unconventional decision to elope with Stephen Smith. Her profound love for Henry Knight and his expectation of a chaste, sober woman as his wife clouded her understanding of her own rights. She failed to recognize that, as a human being, she also had the right to love a man of her choice. She too could make mistakes and could not be flawless all the time. Her past could also harbor dark secrets, which, like those of her

male counterparts, could also be forgiven.

Fearful of the repercussions of her past actions and the possibility of losing Henry Knight, she succumbed to the influence of his conventional beliefs, thus allowing him to mold her into the conventional, docile woman he desired. Henry Knight succeeded in imbuing Elfride with a diminished sense of self-worth and identity, as reflected in her poignant lamentation, “Ah, what a poor nobody I am!” she said, sighing. ‘People like him, who go about the world, don’t care in the least what I am like either in mood or feature’ ” (A Pair of Blue Eyes: 235). In Henry Knight, we encounter the archetype of the typical Victorian male, desiring a woman ‘with untried lips’, pristine both in mind and body, possessing only emotions devoid of passion. Elfride found herself hesitant to divulge her past to the man she deeply loved – a man who valued women’s submissiveness and chastity due to his sexual prudery, conventional ideology, and rigid morality. His unwavering commitment to conventional values was evident in his articulation of appreciation for a woman with “a soul truthful and clear as heaven’s light. I could put up with anything if I had that-forgive nothing if I had it not” (A Pair of Blue Eyes: 331). Knight’s adherence to conventional Victorian morality was so profound that he could not fathom loving a woman with a previous relationship. He aspired always to be the “first comer in a woman’s heart, fresh lips or none for me” (A Pair of Blue Eyes: 368). His conventional mindset aligns with the prevailing ethos of Victorian patriarchal society, which championed the notion of ideal women. Much like his contemporaries, he harbored expectations for women to remain sexually naive and held in high regard those who maintained their chastity until marriage. Women expressing sexual desire were branded as ‘fallen women’, perceived as a threat to societal norms.

Elfride’s worst fears materialized when Mr. Knight received a letter from Mrs. Jethway, written before her demise. Despite the letter’s inaccuracies, attributing her son’s demise to Elfride when it was due to consumption, Mrs. Jethway’s vendetta proved successful. This letter led to tarnishing Elfride’s reputation, causing her to lose the man she cherished most and conform to societal norms by marrying a widower with two children. Mrs. Jethway was well aware that “nothing is so delicate as the reputation of a woman: it is, at once, the most beautiful and the most brittle of all human things.” (Burney: 279). A cruel and unrelenting figure, she continuously used Elfride’s failed elopement as leverage for blackmail.

Have you forgotten the would-be runaway marriage? The journey to London, and the return the next day without being married, and that

there's enough disgrace in that to ruin a woman's good name far less light than yours? You may have: I have not. Fickleness towards a lover is bad, but fickleness after playing the wife is wantonness.' (*A Pair of Blue Eyes*: 333-334)

Mrs. Jethway may have articulated these sentiments, but she served as a tool for the author to enforce discipline upon women of her era and propagate his ideology that women who defy societal norms bear the consequences of their actions. Hardy, upholding conventional Victorian standards, highlighted chastity and purity as indispensable virtues for women, subjecting his female characters to suffering whenever they strayed from the established norms. Aware of the potential repercussions of her dark past being exposed, Elfride feared tarnishing her reputation, losing Henry Knight, and facing scandal, prompting her to visit Mrs. Jethway's residence. Unfortunately, not finding her there, she left a note, requesting:

Dear Mrs. Jethway-I have been to visit you. I wanted much to see you, but I cannot wait any longer. I came to beg you not to execute the threats you have repeated to me. Do not, I beseech you, Mrs. Jethway, let any one know what I did! It would ruin me, and break my heart. I will do anything for you, if you will be kind to me. In the name of our common womanhood, do not, I implore you, make a scandal of me.—Yours,

E. Swancourt (*A Pair of Blue Eyes*: 366)

Elfride's letter to Mrs. Jethway confirmed the dreaded past she had always feared. With the revelation of her past, her once beautiful and joyful existence turned into a nightmare. Mr. Knight rejected her, stating that it would be challenging for him to love and marry a woman who had been previously engaged in a romantic relationship. As soon as her overnight escapade was brought to his attention, he labeled her as a "fallen woman". He was so blinded by conventional social norms that he was unable to perceive her profound, genuine affection for him. The warped mentality of Mr. Henry Knight played a more significant role in Elfride's downfall compared to Mrs. Jethway's letter. The character of Henry Knight bears a striking resemblance to another male character in the work of Thomas Hardy, namely Angel Clare, who similarly exhibits traits of indecisiveness and subservience to antiquated societal norms and beliefs. It is readily

apparent to readers that Hardy's male characters perceive themselves as deities, a perception reinforced by the treatment they receive from their female counterparts, who, in turn, see themselves as subservient to these godlike figures. In contemporary society, men's mistakes, crimes, or sins were often seen as forgivable. Conversely, this leniency is not extended to women, as forgiving them may inadvertently foster a sense of equality with men, thus leading to assertions for freedom and parity. Similar to Angel Clare, Henry Knight, who lacked strength of character, also had an inability to forgive her, revealing his own authoritarian nature to be even more pronounced than that of Mrs. Jethway. The letter composed by Mrs. Jethway was motivated by a malicious goal to detrimentally impact Elfride's existence. However, it remains unclear as to why Henry Knight, who harbored affection for Elfride, contributed to her downfall and ultimately became the catalyst for her premature demise. Why couldn't he transcend his godlike persona and view her as an equal capable of making mistakes, deserving forgiveness, and becoming his partner on equal terms? Despite his education, why couldn't he shed conventional perspectives and inflexible moral principles? Why couldn't he allow her to maintain her individuality?

Her past cast a perpetual shadow over her present and future, hindering her peace, as she anticipated rejection from the man she loved upon the revelation of her past. His mistake lay in idealizing her instead of recognizing her as a fallible individual. The problem arose when his masculine pride couldn't forgive her elopement. To appease it, he outright rejected her, leading to her downfall and premature death. Elfride experienced profound distress upon being rejected by the man with whom she shared a deep emotional connection, leading to a decline in her physical well-being and a persistent desire for death. However, the mentioned separation did not cause any distress to Henry Knight. It seems he didn't feel bad because he thought her past was unforgivable and believed his decision was the right one.

After she recovered, Elfride wanted to live for others and help her family, so she decided to marry Lord Luxellion, a widower with two children. Elfride didn't love Lord Luxellion, but she felt ashamed and was scared of being disgraced because of her past. She wanted to protect her family's reputation and avoid being rejected by society. She saw marriage as the only solution, even though she didn't want it. Her choice to marry and become a good wife shows how Hardy emphasizes that men should stay in power and women should stick to traditional roles. Additionally, he also attempts to discourage women from acquiring intellectual vigor, cultivating their understanding, and resisting oppression. He isolates them from the outer world by keeping them confined to the

domestic realm, where they grope in the dark as they breed and nurse children, and exploit their charms to keep their husbands content and happy. By subjecting Elfride to the chauvinistic, unenlightened society, Hardy intended to recommend that women should uphold the conduct of feminine virtues such as docility and chastity.

Motherhood, like marriage, was also deemed sacrosanct and a fundamental obligation for Victorian women. Consequently, to conform Elfride to the stereotype of a typical Victorian woman, tasked with the roles of a wife and mother, Thomas Hardy subjected her to the embrace of motherhood. Unfortunately, akin to Lady Luxellion's attempt to fulfill Lord Luxellion's wish for a son, Elfride tragically succumbed to death during childbirth. The tragic demise of Elfride at the novel's end reflects Hardy's disdain for unconventional women. He could not envision a convincingly happy ending for Elfride, who tarnished the image of womanhood by defying patriarchal prohibitions and posing a threat to the chauvinistic society's established order. Through her tragic fate, Hardy aimed to persuade his readers, particularly women, to prioritize grace, elegance, and propriety. He also cautioned them to adhere to standardized practices, or else be prepared for the repercussions of unconventional living. Sadly, Elfride echoes Hardy's other female characters, like Tess, and Sue, who also perceive submission to patriarchal standards as the only survival strategy.

In the later part of the novel, Elfride is depicted as Lord Luxellion's second wife, fully immersed in her new life. She is engaged in raising Lord Luxellion's daughters, willingly shouldering the responsibilities of a considerate wife, and performing all the expected duties in accordance with social expectations defined by Hardy and prevailing societal norms for women. However, the conclusion of the novel, marked by Elfride's death, underscores Hardy's discriminatory stance towards women. He could have chosen to conclude the narrative on a positive note, depicting Elfride overcoming her past and enjoying a contented life with her husband, Lord Luxellion. However, in such a scenario, the writer's intention to instruct women to adhere to recognized moral standards would not have been fulfilled. Victorian literature abounds with instances of women inviting miseries and tragic outcomes for straying from moral norms. "Adulteresses met tragic ends in novels, including *Anna Karenina*, *Madame Bovary*, and *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*. While some writers and artists showed sympathy towards women's subjugation to this double standard, some works were didactic and reinforced the cultural norm" (Wikipedia). Elfride's untimely and seemingly futile demise serves as a poignant reminder that nonconformist women may face repercussions, hinting at their accountability for both

their actions and the ensuing outcomes.

While Hardy's writings could have been a powerful tool to challenge the oppression of women in the 19th century, his silence on the issue suggests a troubling acceptance of the societal structures that caused them harm. His passivity, despite witnessing the inequalities and injustices women faced, implies he may have even endorsed limitations placed on women who dared to defy societal norms. Literature itself reflects these broader systemic issues, meaning that shifting towards a more equitable society requires changing how women are perceived and treated. It's essential to dismantle harmful societal constraints, advocate for women's rights, and explore how these themes are represented in literature and impact real-world experiences.

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