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Reading Masculine Anxiety and Urban Threats in the Select Novels of Thomas Hardy: A Critical Study

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Abstract

The sudden and unexpected shift of the British economy from agriculture to industrial production brought about numerous significant transitions, which expanded the prospects for the arrival of globalisation and modernisation of the world. The subversive narratives regarding such changes gained rapid public interest in academia. In addition, women-centred movements were flung with colourful wings. The gradual rise in women's participation in every sphere of life introduced an uneasy moment for the widely accepted masculine role as the base of social structure. From the early Victorian era, it has been consistently observed that women's participation in the broader sphere of life has increased. In business and commerce, the maleness of the male is partially substituted by the womanly softness, love, and affection. It is as if the smooth going of the universe will not count much on the male robustness. Business, commerce, profit, loss, production, and sale are strong consonants that quickly establish a pervasive air of male dominance globally. This research paper will be a sincere venture to understand this perversion. This article aims to expand our understanding of the growing anxieties among men in Thomas Hardy's select fictional narratives.

Key Words: Globalization, Hardy, Urban Threats, Masculine Anxiety.

1. Introduction:

The desire of the strongest is always the best. Such declarations of Jacques Derrida shed adequate light on our perception of survival in this world (Derrida). It suggests that the world is gradually moving towards a genderless society where strength will be the measure of

everything. Strength will define our survival possibility (Krell). The women's liberation movements of the last few decades have been marked by one plea that has emerged as a key focus of women's empowerment (Hesford). The participation of women in socio-political and economic activities has increased rapidly

(Morris and Withers). This more extensive participation of women over the last three decades has transformed the world's changing face (Schulz). Globalisation, a phenomenal spectacle, is significantly influenced by the immense participation of women. The penetration of females in every walk of life is by no means a matter that should be welcomed (Bahramitash). The researcher is more concerned with how the world in the age of rapid globalised change is being redefined. The 195-day spacewalks by Sunita Williams and the bold journey of Kalpana Chawla are significant milestones of the twenty-first century that heralded the beginning of a new era (Gibson). The presence of women in workplaces, politics, and revolutionary policy-making is rapidly increasing. This might bring sweat to someone's brow. The researcher is not surprised at this increasing female participation rate in every field of life. Eden was good, but Adam's presence did not ruin the glory. Subsequently, Eve came. Eve's presence doubles glory but also darkens the prospects of temptation and fall (Bream). The fall was not of the two. The word fall is presently understood in a more democratic sense. The sense of fall and grimmer prospects more strongly invites the researcher's attention. Consequently, including women in every aspect of life creates a delightful way to brighten the prospects of the women's empowerment agenda (KHOBRA GADE). Any feminist may be happy with this. As mentioned earlier, the equal participation of men and women, as described in the Bible, actually invited unnecessary temptation and fall (Syswerda). Such a fall did not darken the fate of the two but ensured the fall of humanity. Call it excess or equal to the increasing participation of women in the era of globalisation. Is it a prospect? Is the world being redefined? Or is it sexing the world in the age of globalisation through rampant women's participation? The next section of the essay will further explore sexuality in selected novels by Thomas Hardy.

2. History of Male Workforce Participation:

Social scientists have continued to unveil the secrets of women's participation and globalisation (Trask). According to them, the world has seen two significant phenomena in the 20th century: World War I and World War II. These two successive wars have wounded our world in the most severe terms. World War I cost the lives of four million people on the earth. Among them, almost 45% were male. Such immense loss of male lives in the Great War created an immediate crisis of great social force constituted by men for the good of the world (Taylor and Taylor). The workforce was almost ruined. The world was seeking great leaders to shoulder the world's responsibilities. Even the fertility of men was significantly impacted, if not lost, at least it was partially ruined and negatively affected (Filipovic and Challenger). T.S. Eliot, one of the Anglo-American poets, reacted to this kind of lost fertility in his major poem, *The Waste Land*. A nervous breakdown was all around (Krockel). The world lost potential goodness, mostly in men. It was expecting more severe damage. The nightmare of the world soon met reality with the onset of World War II. Once again, the result is broken chiefly in the legs and arms. The manhandling of the atomic weapon did ruin our world in the most destructive terms (Publishing). Once again, the loss was immense; the result was shocking: fertility was hampered in the broadest range. Japan is still reeling from the stench of atomic bombs. This time, the fertility of the world is affected most deeply. The countries that were the victims of nuclear weapons were affected in a pernicious way. The coming generation is still ruined in Japan because of the Hydrogen bombing. Physical disability and mental retardation are now the order of the day (Earhart). In her highly appreciated novel *The Handmaid's Tale*, Margaret Atwood mourns the immense loss of male fertility and the urgency of the female introduction to save the world. The two succeeding world wars created a giant vacuum. The male force that kept the world

going so far met an unexpected interval. The depopulation of the world following the Great Wars disrupted the male workforce, leaving the world to run smoothly. In this transitional phase of world history, women's liberation movements grew so strong that they took the full opportunity (Nischik). Women's upliftment was evident everywhere. Inevitably, the participation of women in socio-economic and political activities increased. Thus, women-empowered movements were further empowered by the male crisis.

When the central male workforce was disrupted, the dominance of males in the global economy became uncertain. (Lowe). So far, the main force of the world economy has been male activity. In plain English, the global economic drive was dominated by masculine force. However, the unexpected improvement and rapid expansion of technology, science, communication, transportation, migration, and the control of fatal diseases ensured the drive to keep the world moving forward with its changing face. (Robb and Pattinson) A socio-political survey will reassure us who ultimately shouldered the world's responsibility. The changing face of the global economy presents another side of the coin. The globe, which was comfortably positioned on Atlas's shoulders, is losing its original stand and acquiring a new niche, perhaps more pertinently, as women from parliament to panchayats, from space to call centres, are taking on newer roles. (Women).

3. Rise in Female Workforce: *Femme Fatale* and Beyond

Civilisation has always done injustice to its genius. Society has always treated strong women as a threat, often portraying them as femme fatales (Hanson and O'Rawe). Once again, history will come to support. The Duchess in *The Duchess of Malfi* is a woman with incorrigible enthusiasm who goes against her brother and prefers a life partner for the second time, even though she cares very little that she is a widow. She embraced Antonio as her

husband. Her pregnancy was suspected and spied on. She cared, not even straws. She lived her life as her own, without a sense of order or obligation to the society that males dictated. She became a mother as she wished, but maintained enough secrecy to keep the steady goings of her life. She was drawn to the complex repressive tool of male exploitation by her brother Ferdinand and Cardinal, who appointed a spy to watch her, and then the very same spy was instructed to madden the Duchess. She survived. The play by Webster, although it ended in melodrama, conveys a profound message: the arrival of the most muscular female as the fittest to meet her demands (Webster). The post-Shakespearean theatres provided the perfect platform for visually narrating subversion against the established law and order of the kingdom. So, *The Duchess of Malfi* may seem like a tragedy with bloodshed and murder. Still, it can be read positively as an apocalyptic moment in history where serious and authoritative males were losing their voice, and strong females were rewriting a new social order where the desire of the strongest appeared to be the fittest (Luckyj). Joan of Arc fought single-handedly for the freedom of France. The church identified her as a heretic, and she was burned. Joan was a fourteen-year-old girl with a traumatised memory of her past related to her parents' murder. She was never afraid to take on new challenges (Steel). She was bold and courageous, resolved to assert her will. She shouldered the responsibility of her state and guided it to liberty despite the intense antagonism of the royal authority. She defeated the well-armed British force. History saw a teenage girl on the battlefield for the first time. Joan rebelled against unjust, cruel, and unlawful British tyranny. Joan was an underage woman who spoke out against everything that was unbecoming of males. This is another pivotal moment in history that prompts us to reconsider a redefined female who can change the course of history and shape it anew. (Blaetz). George Bernard Shaw laboured successfully to expose

the injustice of civilisation to a female genius like Joan.

4. Globalization & Sexing: An Awkward Analogy

Every idea has a science behind it. Drawing an analogy also requires the rational skill of a scientist. The study's investigator has invoked an unforeseen analogy to explain the comprehensive impacts of globalisation in substance and the layers that follow. Globalisation is the expansion of the globe through communication, transportation, railways, cables, and technological advancements that have shrunk the world into an easily communicable community (Jones). The geopolitical borders between nations are forgotten. The walls at the psychological level have gone into oblivion. The world is now better perceived as a globe. The globe is now connected everywhere with everyone. None is left outside the technological offshoot. The rapid expansion of communication and technology is widening the paths for commercial boom (Wunderlich and Warriar). Trade and its economy are now reaching an area where humans were afraid to live or survive. This horizontal reach of trade and economy is called commerce 'penetration' (Borjian). The better the potential, the longer the penetration. So, the idea of penetration relates globalisation to sexing, which defines the vertical mobility of the male organ (Nagel). Modern technological wonders are bringing such lightning and speedy discoveries that they often lure consumers. Innovative science and technology are introducing gadgets that users can hardly take their gaze off. The words 'gaze' and 'lure' are also crucial to comprehending globalisation. Pre-union luring and post-gratified gaze in sexing relate to globalisation with broader implications. The post-gratified gaze is characterised by repentance, sin, and surprise (McIntosh). Globalisation acquaints us with many such surprises. The instant urge to gratify the same brings sin and repentance. Strong temptations often come with new and

unforeseen surprises in the age of globalisation and technological wonder. To a newcomer, sex comes with the strongest temptations and surprises. Sexing also offers another remote sense. Humans often disturb the dangerous deep when strong temptations try with immense greed (Stiglitz). To be more precise, the researcher focuses the highest level of attention on the issue of excessive exploitation of mines. The degree of exploitation depends on the temptations that appear on the scene for the capitalists. In a nutshell, sexing implies 'penetration,' 'temptations,' 'gaze,' and 'exploitation' (Mishra). The next section of the discussion will address these implications and their application-level reliability in the context of globalisation.

5. Thomas Hardy in Global Context:

Thomas Hardy has a reputation as a novelist of the countryside. For him, every piece of agricultural land is embedded with stories, as it involves the people who work on it daily. Rural life is so rich in possibilities that he has always sought stories about the humble and rustic, their daily struggles, and tales of happiness (Bullen). In Hardy, the characters fundamentally occupy the central area of interest. The stories unfold through the characters' development in the simple rural context. The most interesting thing about the characters in Hardy's novel is that they live in the countryside, far from the city's noise. The noiseless tenor of their lives is as charming as it is filled with simplicity and a melioristic state of mind (Page). The characters are essentially unique. Each one is distinguished from the other. Their traits are so distinctive that even a single reading leaves an impression on our minds. However, the characters cannot be separated from their spatiotemporal existence. In every narration, as the Victorian regime dictates, characters and their free play are controlled and limited by time and space. They act and speak as time dictates; they like and choose as life offers (Pinion). In Hardy's novel, characters will not have their free lunch

anywhere. They generally live with the purest belief that their hard physical labour would assure their daily sustenance (Mallett). Hardy presents the characters as human beings with an original and unaffected mindset. They act, respond, and cry at ease. Their cry lacks the superficiality of the city (Page). The novel is an instrument for the novelist, like a sword to a soldier. During the disappearing echo of the Agricultural Revolution, Hardy could not stop himself or his character from growing possibilities in the cities (Ford). People were flying into the town in search of better income. The temptations were hard to resist. Agricultural land was losing its labourers. Villages were getting deserted and depopulated. People like Oliver Goldsmith rued the vanished glory of the countryside. It was a loss that never met with accurate compensation (Camaiora). The researcher is convinced that in his novels, Hardy could not resist the temptations or the threats of growing and expanding urbanism (Williams). Hardy wrote his novels with stories from the countryside when the Industrial Revolution had already passed three or four decades ago. The dominant outcomes of the Industrial Revolution were already there. It was hard for the storyteller to divorce their characters from the dominant ideology of the age (Rattenbury). The industry that brings change can never pass unnoticed by the people living during this time. The outcomes of industrialisation were many and, in fact, multi-fold. Cities offered more excellent income opportunities; people had the choice of selling extra labour; the concepts of market crept in; people had excess money to meet their needs and preferences; consumerism became the ruling principle of the time. People were in a condition to buy every pleasure. Consumerism and moral decay were two sides of the same coin (Dobson and Goldsmith). Oliver Goldsmith stated in "The Deserted Village" (1770) that people like village preachers and schoolmasters only resisted the strong temptation of industrialisation. However, between Goldsmith and Hardy, some hundred years had already

passed. Does the character in Hardy's novels have the same level of moral control and self-resilient mind to stop him from the changes around them? The researcher prefers to address the characters' moral stamina and self-resilient minds, irrespective of gender. People were leaving their lands and discontinuing their husbandry; they were keen to avail themselves of every luxury in the city (Goldsmith and Abbey). Was it the same story for both men and women? When one talks of a self-resilient mind, was the story the same for both men and women? Was there any discrimination between men and women regarding their approach to the new ornamented life and comfort they found in the city? Instead, the researcher proceeded through textual instances from Hardy's novel to address all these queries.

6. Unstable Male in Hardy:

'Equilibrium' is the most widely used word among the doctors of mind in Victorian and mid-Victorian England. Equilibrium is not a disease of the mind; instead, it is a state of mind that is unintentionally achieved or acquired through unexpected events that pass into the mind as shock from which the characters can hardly recover. *Merriam-Webster Dictionary* (1918) notes equilibrium as 'a state of intellectual and emotional balance'. Equilibrium is defined in *Collins Dictionary* (2013) as a 'balance between several different influences or aspects of a situation.' The various opinions are related to equilibrium, so the researcher can never objectively separate them. According to the *Macmillan Dictionary* (2017), equilibrium is a state of balance in which opposing forces or aspects are in balance. If equilibrium dictates a delicate balance between different elements or forces, disturbed equilibrium connotes the reverse, meaning the absence of balance between forces or aspects. The next section of the discussion will highlight the mental instability of the male characters as portrayed in the selected novels of Hardy. Masculine unrest among the characters is widespread in the books written during this transition from an

Agricultural economy to an Industrial economy (Robb and Pattinson).

7. Boldwood & Disturbed Equilibrium

Authoritative male characters are individuals with an unstable equilibrium, suggesting that they lack a fundamental balance in their mental or physical demeanour (Bantz). *Far From the Madding Crowd* traces the story of one such disturbed male. William Boldwood, an elderly bachelor in his mid-forties, decided to remain a 'confirmed bachelor' with a prosperous farm income. A letter came into his life and compelled him to reassess his marital affair. As readers know, the letter was not thoughtfully written; it was hastily executed and sent twice, light-heartedly by Bathsheba Everdene on Christmas evening. She never even dared to dream of such a thing. The letter worked in Boldwood's mind like slow poisoning. Boldwood was impatient with himself. More minute observation assures that the letter came to Boldwood almost in the manner of temptation. He did not dare to resist the same or reject it with a single breath. The temptation of the letter had a lasting effect on him. He gazed at the object repeatedly and chased the sender of the same, which may sound unusual. Boldwood had even stopped searching for Fanny Robin, the orphaned woman whom he had sheltered. His visits to the farm and agricultural land had become scarce. He was thinking heavily about the subject, which he was unaccustomed to. His dealings with others became harsh and unpredictable. He was losing his sanity. He was loosening the balancing components of his reasoning. The equilibrium was losing its hold; Boldwood was becoming increasingly agitated and irrational. A single letter and its kinetic temptation edged Boldwood's reasoning. He became a gazer and an unaccustomed hoarder, which was unusual for him. He met Troy and threatened him with death. In the final scene, he killed Sergeant Troy and was taken into police custody. He did not face severe punishment as the court trial concluded he was insane and his behaviour was

unusual. As the researcher stated earlier, globalisation and sexing connote the 'temptation,' 'gaze,' and 'penetration.' The love letter arrived at Boldwood as a temptation he could not resist. The stronger the temptations, the longer the gaze. Finally, the letter with the message of the freakish proposal of marriage came so hard to him that he could not resist the penetration of its effects in his life. This led to the disturbances of his mind. Boldwood's anxiety waiting for the letter from Bathsheba includes fear, stress, and uncertainty.

8. Male Anxiety in Alec

The sobriquet identity of Victorian England is widely associated with materialism. This trend towards materialism was essentially the import of industrialisation. This foundation of materialism is a fully desire-driven event. A Victorian citizen had his feet on the earth, but desire was in the sky. At this time, a shilling enabled an orphan to look at the sky for a while and then decide how to consume a good or any pleasing service. It is a boundless human instinct to be a desire-driven being regardless of time and place. When desire and its gratification dominate a human, he finds himself free enough to choose either an object to possess or a pleasure to consume. He attends whatever appeals to him strongly. Regular gratification of desire depends upon the inner landscape of a human. Both desire and anxiety occupy the human mind. The level of anxiety that we mention is twofold--pre-gratification anxiety and post-gratification guilt-ridden anxiety. The first one drives the mind to gratify, but fears the outcome. The second kind of anxiety leads to post-sin repentance. In the second case, the mind remains obsessed primarily and does not optimise further urges in the character. So, words like mind, desire, anxiety, and identity cannot be separately understood. Thomas Hardy's other classic novel, *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, relates a story of materialism and its hangover. *Tess* shows the anxiety of male identity. It is depicted that the leading standard of masculinity is threatened by desire and

anxiety. The male identity in Tess is tormented by desire. Very reasonably, this male is endangered. The tension increases when each male perceives their competitors. The ruin of Tess is the failure of the male characters in this to stabilise their existence. Unstable Alec reacted stoically in the face of the complete crisis in ordering masculine identity, as society sought a system and order. This abysmal and disrupted situation of the male identity continues as masculine instability. It was further cemented by the significant loss of lives in World War I. Hardy envisioned the entire scenario before the war, and thus presented Alec as an unstable male, always seeking identity and order. Critics rightly commented on this unstable maleness of the male that was so passively nodded by Alec:

"Alec's eventual crisis in masculine identity results in a personal backlash that throws him to the opposite extreme, a situation that is guaranteed to be as unstable and inadequate as his original position. For that instability to reach its full destructive power, however, what is required is a rival who will create the kind of erotic triangle that embodies sexual conflict and the masculine will to power. In other words, what is required is the advent of Angel Clare." (p. 94)

In Victorian England, gender roles were clearly defined for males and females, particularly in urban areas. Nevertheless, the picture of the villages was not precisely the same.

9. Henchard's Nemesis:

There are situations and moments in life that overpower characters beyond their knowledge. Thomas Hardy's narratives in the fictional texts often present such a vista, which is, by and large, unpredictable and beyond human reach, though humans themselves are the victims of it. In *Mayor of Casterbridge*, readers meet a husband named Henchard, a man with adequate sense and sensibilities and a follower of the ordinary course in life. His existence as a man and his domestic role as a husband were

never on the periphery of doubts. On the whole, he was an unquestionable character. The unrest of his mind never found the proper ventilation. Henchard, the man in this passive kind of narration, is not as innocent as he sounds in the narration. He visits a fair with his family. He and the family look delighted after arriving at the fair. Some nemesis drives him mad, and he finds himself very uncontrolled in the face of drink; outside his nature, he decides to sell his wife to avail himself of the drink. This might appear unusual, but his madness does not exhibit any discernible pattern in his day-to-day life. At the cost of his wife, he gets the drink and swallows it to fill his throat and finds himself in a wretched condition. Henchard's strongest desire for wine is not a simple narration. It reveals many such aspects of his character. Here, desire overpowers the human, and greed overshadows the civilised role of Henchard with which he was entrusted. The sudden overpowering moment invites the readers to reanalyse the character of Henchard in the light of his masculine grit and sudden loss of it. What has imported in him this sudden surrender of his masculine temper? Later in the story, we find him as a father completely resurrected and a husband fully and rightly reconciled with the guilt-driven decisions of his past. Henchard, after coming out of his remorse, tries recklessly to negotiate and compensate for his past guilt. This story of Henchard sheds adequate light on those select masculine characters who became loose or a bit uncontrolled of their predefined temper. He looks defeated even at this time. However, Henchard, no doubt, is among the rarest of Hardy's created characters who make the right kind of restoration to his original self. However, this temporary loss of his character introduces us to the broader discourse of Victorian England, where wealth accumulation could not stop the moral fall of the people. Hence, Henchard's wish to have a drink is a temptation. With his masculine grit, he falls short of controlling it. The truth behind this moment of nemesis is hard to swallow. However, the safest assumption is that a

paradigm shift from agricultural to industrial economies is underway. Hence, the urban luxuries were rapidly gliding their swift feet toward the countryside. Henchard was tamped with these fragile feet for a while, but he regained the loss of breath in no time. The reader finds it the most economical to stress the origin of Henchard's loss of masculine grit, which begets the chronic anxiety in him.

10. Conclusion

A single and tepid glance on Lyme Regis, where Sara Woodruff is sitting by the seashore, and Charles Smithson, in John Fowles's *The French Lieutenant's Woman* (1969), envisions the stormy weather as the most iconic moment of masculine anxiety. The background story of the novel sheds further light on the character of Charles Smithson, who is passing through a Hamletian version of procrastination regarding his marriage to Ernestina. Charles was in the hardship of making two distinctive choices, either to marry Ernestina or 'to love and to be lost' in Sara's mystery. The kernel of this brief narrative presents a postmodern reworking of Victorian concerns. However, the reader can be happy with the kind of observation envisioned from Charles's character, i.e., the deep and underlying masculine anxiety, though on the other hand. In Hardy, the narrative is simple and unaffected, as life in early Victorian England was simpler. The most talked-about Industrial Revolution introduced a worldly life that complicated the entire periphery of life. Life, livelihood, pleasure, working habits, and other aligned practices underwent a thorough change. Though from the countryside, Hardy threaded the truth flawlessly in his novels. The growing anxieties among leading and powerful males, along with a spontaneous rise in the impactful participation of women, remained a less talked-about agenda in Hardy's fictional universe.

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