

# A Narratological Analysis of the Strategic Affective Enlistment in Hardy's Major Wessex Novels

Saeid Behnoud<sup>1</sup>

Department of English Language and Literature, Central  
Tehran Branch, Islamic Azad University, Tehran, Iran.

Negar Sharif (Corresponding Author)<sup>2</sup>

Assistant Professor, Department of English Language and Literature,  
Central Tehran Branch, Islamic Azad University, Tehran, Iran.

Zahra Bordbari<sup>3</sup>

Assistant Professor, Department of English Language and Literature,  
Roudehen Branch, Islamic Azad University, Roudehen, Iran.

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## Abstract

The present study focuses on the strategic process of enlisting the readers' empathetic responsiveness in Thomas Hardy's major Wessex novels. The analytical perspective draws on Suzanna Keen's theories in affective narratology; it intends to uncover the stylistic strategies of affective impressionism in the Wessex narratives. The methodological procedure is grounded in the qualitative appraisal of the emotive aspects of Hardy's realistic representations through critical discourse analysis. The research approach is influenced by the recent mind theories in cognitive science, emphasizing emotional perception as the most significant determinant of the gestalt of interpretations. The semi-fictional world of Wessex capitalizes on an insight into the primacy of emotive sensibility over cognitive rationality. The authorial intentionality in the Wessex narratives aspires to propagate human compassion by resorting to the literary application of the empathy-altruism hypothesis. The melioristic agenda for edification via investment in the readers' emotive capacities saturates the narratives' impressionistic composition. The manipulation of the narrative consciousness foci in the major Wessex novels enables Hardy to maintain his readers' empathetic identification with his characters' predicaments in a philosophical context. Moreover, the tagged characterization of the protagonists establishes the intended impressions of their temperament and demands the corresponding empathetic responses from the readers.

## Keywords

Affective Narratology; Empathetic Identification; Affective Sensibility; Wessex Novels; Thomas Hardy; Empathy-Altruism Hypothesis.

## 1. Introduction

The recent neuroscientific theories ascertain the hold of the mind's affective capacity over logical faculty as the unique attribute of humankind. Affective perceptions fundamentally shape the worldviews that dictate the kind of behavior and interaction with the sociocultural contexts; therefore, their importance also extends to the domain

<sup>1</sup> [saeid.behnoud@gmail.com](mailto:saeid.behnoud@gmail.com)

<sup>2</sup> [negarsharif@yahoo.com](mailto:negarsharif@yahoo.com)

<sup>3</sup> [fbordbari@yahoo.com](mailto:fbordbari@yahoo.com)

of cultural poetics. Stephen Greenblatt refers to Daniel Lerner's research to discuss a crucial point in social history when "psychic mobility" or "the capacity to see oneself in the other fellow's situation" characterized human consciousness (224-225). Then he notes that although "in our time, indeed, the spread of empathy around the world is accelerating," the efforts for eliciting empathy are "scarcely ever wholly disinterested and benign" (Greenblatt 228). In the same vein, as an eminent figure in affective narratology, Suzanne Keen challenges the literary application of the empathy-altruism hypothesis, which claims that empathetic recruitment mechanisms in literature will result in the readers' prosocial moral rectification in real life. That is why Keen perceives literary texts as "ideoartistic battlefields" ("Narrative and Emotions" 18) and believes that it is crucial to scrutinize the stylistic strategies of the literary narratives that invest in the evocation of readers' empathetic identification.

Studying the mechanisms of affective impressionism in imaginative compositions is significant since literature benefits from the unique neurolinguistic power in stirring the readers' emotive responsiveness and can perform as a sophisticated ideological apparatus. Neuroscientific breakthroughs permeated the domain of critical theory and revived the classical debates on the literature's instrumental capitalization on emotional susceptibilities. Research in affective narratology attests to the predominance of emotional faculty in the various stages of literary composition, intricate reception procedures, and the subsequent gestalt of interpretations. The instigated emotional impressions in fictional story worlds have a remarkable capacity for crystallizing into perceptual affective realities. Thus, they can overarch the readers' cognitive faculties in the process of orienting behavioral patterns to the induced reality perceptions, and that is how "submission to narrative self-fashioning" is successfully exacted in literary discourses (Greenblatt 234). Emotive determinants consequentially fashion the kind of individuals' interactions with the social context. Accordingly, in Hardy's *Wessex*, the tragic compulsions of the protagonists' affective realities instigate the characters' ill-fated reactions to sociocultural influences.

It is in consideration of the significance of such a theoretical framework that the current research intends to address the following questions regarding Hardy's capitalization on empathy from an affective narratological viewpoint: What are the stylistic narrative strategies that ensure the *Wessex* novels' remarkable stamina in the elicitation and enlistment of the readers' empathetic responses? What are the formative convictions underlying the resolute authorial intentionality that presides over the strategic application of affective imprints in the *Wessex* novels? How does the semi-

fictional Wessex's affective agenda influence the protagonists' characterization and temperamental dimensions? What functions do the narrators fulfill in enforcing the reader's empathetic identification with certain characters? The methodological procedure in seeking responses to such questions is characterized by the qualitative reading of Hardy's major fictional narratives to identify and analyze the affective dynamics in the discourses. Since the inclusion of the concept of authorial intentionality is indispensable for discourse analysis in the affective approach, paratextual data and secondary sources have been employed to provide the essential backdrop of fin de siècle sociocultural influences on Hardy's design.

Hardy's literary style is distinguished for its vigor in readily inducing a worldwide audience to identify with the emotional turmoil of the protagonists suffering in an inconsiderate universe. Realism in the representation style of the Wessex's semi-fictional story world is a major factor in endowing the author's dispirited philosophical stance with a sense of compelling reality. Dark depictions of the protagonists' predicaments persist throughout the novels to enforce Hardy's convictions on humanity's condemnation to unceasing anguish. In Hardy's Wessex narratives, the overwhelming sense of human desolation is projected by recognizing the sinisterly superior force of Fate in the universe: "His philosophy, from the time he began to write, was confirmedly gloomy. The universe was a huge impersonal mechanism, directed by some automatic principle of life unknown, pursuing its mysterious end, utterly indifferent to the feelings of mortals" (Cecil 24). *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, *Jude the Obscure*, and *The Mayor of Casterbridge* are the three major Wessex novels that the study focuses on, and they demonstrate the staunch intentionality of Hardy for an impressionistic agenda to effectuate his melioristic aspirations. The convictions and influences leading to Hardy's firm authorial intentionality will be explored in the Wessex novels' paratextual material (remaining in the form of interviews, prefaces, letters, essays, and diaries) in a later section of the study titled "The Authorial Design for Vicarious Sensitivity." For instance, when Hardy was asked about his literary mission in a heated interview with the acclaimed literary reviewer William Archer, he passionately replied, "My practical philosophy is distinctly meliorist. What are my books but one plea against 'man's inhumanity to man' ... Whatever may be the inherent good or evil of life, it is certain that men make it much worse than it need be" (Archer 46-47). Utterly disappointed by the failing historical record of man's rational performance in moral issues, the renowned novelist set out to endow his fictional narratives with a strategic design to employ emotional reasoning for edification. The measure turned into an overstretched agenda at the prospect of making a difference in the dejected circumstances of communal ethicality via the command of sentiments.

Hardy's philosophical mind perceived that spreading empathetic compassion among humankind is the only possible relief for their existential suffering. He exalted "empathy" as the ultimate essence of his career more than a century before the concept became a focus of interest in the multidisciplinary studies that extended to the theories of literary scholars like Suzanne Keen. Such an observation on his wholehearted belief in the unique power of empathetic appreciation in alleviating the adversities of human life is manifested in the discussions he has with Archer in *Real Conversations*. When questioned by the eminent literary critic about the possibility of "getting rid of the remediable ills" inflicting human societies, for instance, war, Hardy provides the only solution in "the gradual growth of the introspective faculty in mankind – of their power of putting themselves in another's place, and taking a point of view that is not their own" (Archer 47). Hardy's conviction can also be traced to the immense influence of Darwin's empirical assertions on him: "We are thus impelled to relieve the sufferings of another, so that our own painful feelings may be at the same time relieved" (*Descent of Man* 81).

## **2. Literature Review**

Thomas Hardy (1840-1920) is one of the towering figures in classic world literature dealing with human emotional dimensions, moral complexities, and societal dynamics in a staunchly philosophical context. His distinct style of infusing realistic representation with affective investment was essential in creating memorably relatable protagonists in the influential collection of the Wessex novels. The narrative composition of Hardy's Wessex is characterized by emotionally evocative depictions of the naturalistic aspects of human existence. Michael Millgate is a prominent scholar of Hardy, and his extensive research provides the details of Hardy's professional life as well as critical commentaries on his works' features and interpretations. *Thomas Hardy: His Career as a Novelist* features Millgate's analysis of the various narrative elements in Hardy's works and elaborates on their stylistic features, dominant themes, philosophical tendencies, character development procedures, and historical background. In *Thomas Hardy: A Biography Revisited*, Millgate presents fresh views regarding Hardy's convictions on the functional characteristics of literary compositions. He also evaluates the novelist's philosophical anguish in dealing with distressing sociocultural realities and traces Hardy's loss of faith in a benevolent force controlling the universe. Dale Kramer is another celebrated expert on Hardy's novels, and his critical output indulges at length with the multifaceted complications in the psychological and emotive dimensions of Hardy's protagonists. In *Thomas Hardy: Forms of Tragedy*, Kramer closely reviews Hardy's application of the structural elements and techniques that convey the sense of tragic despondency, causing the readers to identify with the distressed protagonists.

Patrick Colm Hogan is well-known in cognitive studies with a collection of books and essays exploring the function of emotions in the structure and interpretation of literary compositions. His *Affective Narratology* expounds on how the mind's affective and cognitive functions shape story worlds and are reciprocally shaped by the readers' engagement with narrative discourses. In this context, he proposes a more accurate redefinition of ideology as "all the things that contribute to the formation of prototypes, emotional memories, critical-period experiences, and other cognitive and affective contents that bear on social hierarchies" (Hogan 26). In *Literature and Emotion*, Hogan delves into the processes that enable readers to simulate emotional perceptions via narrative constructs. He also notes that the conception of emotions as fixed and commonly shared must be reconsidered because the perception of emotional qualities in diverse groups can vary depending on the differences in temporal, historical, and cultural factors.

Lisa Zunshine's contributions to the theoretical framework of affective narratology have also inspired subsequent studies focusing on mind theories in literary criticism. Zunshine's *Why We Read Fiction* deals with the reasons for readers' better emotive responses towards some fictional compositions based on her Theory of Mind. Drawing on evolutionary psychology, Zunshine focuses on the mental processes through which readers bring their real-life repository of emotive and cognitive perceptions to ascribe motives, feelings, and thoughts to other minds represented in story worlds. In *Getting Inside Your Head*, Zunshine elaborates on her concept of "embodied transparency," which poses bodily performances as reliable significations of emotions in the sociocultural interpretations of aesthetic representations. She then notes the capacity in the outward displays of such emotive responses to manipulate mind-reading dispositions.

Suzanne Keen's substantial contributions to affective narratology make her a renowned scholar in this field. In *Empathy and the Novel*, Keen surveys the mind's intricate affective functions in the interpretation of novels, focusing on the role of empathy in the readers' reception process. She also draws attention to the issues that can prove problematic in inducing readers' empathetic appreciation. Then, she challenges the practical efficiency of the empathy-altruism hypothesis in propagating morality by the agency of literature. From her viewpoint, it is essential to re-evaluate the melioristic notions that empathetic enlistment in literary compositions leads to the reformation of the reader's ethical performance in real-life. As she notes, although empathetic evocations in literature have reverberations on readers, the optimism in the pragmatic propagation of human compassion in this way needs to be reassessed. She also asserts that literary authors predominantly rely on a commonly shared inventory of human sentiments to elicit the intended emotional reactions from the readers. Moreover, since literary authors are inevitably influenced by ideological impositions, just like other individuals, their alleged altruistic intentions should be critically reconsidered.

“A Theory of Narrative Empathy” includes Keen’s expositions on the principal concepts of affective narratology, a review of the recent research hypotheses in neuroscience, and their application to the methodological analysis of empathetic identification in literary discourses. The essay furnishes the affective studies on narrative fiction with a classification of empathy elicitation strategies and proposes concepts such as “situational empathy,” “ambassadorial empathy,” and “broadcast empathy” (Keen, “Theory” 215). In addition, Keen enumerates some stylistic features like characterization procedure and narrative situation that fiction authors deploy to invest their compositions with sentiments and then examines them for their impressions on readers. Keen’s “Narrative and Emotions” probes into the procedures by which narratives engage with readers’ sentimental faculties and discusses the use of universally shared emotions to convey affective impressions in literary narratives. The classically presiding dualism of reason/passion or cognition/emotion is essentially refuted in light of the recent empirical breakthroughs in neuroscience. The advances in cognitive science attest to the interconnection and interdependency of diverse perceptual functions in the complex nexus of mental activities. In a later essay, “Narrative Empathy,” Keen recapitulates the fundamental hypotheses of her previous publications and proceeds with an account of the contributions of other acclaimed scholars to affective narratology.

Suzanne Keen’s investigations in affective narratology are distinguished for linking Thomas Hardy’s literary genius with the recent cognitive hypotheses on the function of emotions in literature. In *Thomas Hardy’s Brains*, Keen examines the pronounced resourcefulness of Hardy in dealing with the characters’ psychological complications and inner dimensions. She investigates the stimulation of emotional responses through character development and other narrative techniques. She attends to the subtle emotional dynamics of Hardy’s novels not only in the framework of recent neuroscientific findings but also in the context of the established mind theories of Hardy’s own time. Keen believes that Hardy’s sophisticated style of representing the psychological depth of his characters indicates his notable awareness of the empirical theories that were emerging at his age. She also finds Hardy’s insightful style associated with the contemporary hypotheses in affective studies and draws attention to how his engagement with the philosophical complications is imbued with formative emotive stimuli.

### **3. Theoretical Framework**

The present study draws on affective narratology to focus on the stylistic aspects of the emotive strategies in Hardy’s Wessex novels. The introduction to *Affective Narratology* maintains that narratology is “the area of literary study most closely connected with cognitive science” and “narratological treatments of emotion” still have much space to be developed in narrative theory (Hogan 1). That is why an affective narratological approach has been selected to furnish the current study’s reassessment of Hardy’s stylistic

strategies with the perspectives on the mechanism of empathetic impressionism. In “Cognitive Narratology,” David Herman notes that the predominant discourse analysis procedures in the affective approach are mainly associated with cognitive literary studies as “a subdomain within ‘postclassical’ narratology,” focusing on “the mind-relevant aspects of storytelling practices” (30). As he clarifies, the scope of research in this sphere encompasses the evaluation of “multiple factors associated with the design and interpretation of narratives, including the story-producing activities of the tellers, the processes by means of which interpreters make sense of the narrative worlds (or ‘storyworlds’) evoked by narrative representations or artifacts” (Herman 30). Therefore, affective narratology centers on the interrelated mental functions in perceiving the devised emotive components of the reality simulations in which readers’ worldviews “can be hijacked by the pirates of emotion” (Cacioppo and Gardner 194).

The urge to reconsider the claimed moral altruism in emotively saturated literature has been sparked by Suzanne Keen’s concerns over the latent aspects of capitalizing on empathy in narratives. Keen’s outstanding investigations are among the most influential contributions to the latest analytical theories in affective narratology. Her in-depth research addresses the narrative stylistics of fashioning interpretations gestalt through the instrumental function of empathy in story worlds. In “A Theory of Narrative Empathy,” Keen highlights the concepts of “empathic inaccuracy (discordance arising from gaps between a [*sic*] author’s intention and a reader’s experience of narrative empathy” (215) and “categorical empathy (with characters matching reader’s group identity” (218) as constrictive for the genuine function of empathetic appreciation. Instances of these concepts in the affective fabric of narratives must be considered while exploring the stylistics of emotive stimulation since they can distort the desirable effects of empathetic engagement in literary discourses. The potentiality of the mind’s affective susceptibilities in fixing cognitive impositions and shaping behavioral patterns is another alarming capacity that must be noted in studying the instrumental enlistment of readers’ empathy. Neuroscience asserts that the human cognition underlying behavioral patterns is inextricably interwoven into the predominantly affective constitution of the mind nexus: “affect is primary in our lives. We feel before we think” (Rivkin and Ryan 1257). The neuroscientific concern over the dominion of affective mechanisms over the behavioral patterns in sociocultural contexts informs cultural poetics too.

In order to clarify the interconnectedness of affective studies and cultural poetics and also explain how affective susceptibilities end up shaping societal behavior in power structures, it is imperative to consider the current theories on human mental function. The procedure through which affective perceptions crystalize into cognitive

constructions of reality and make individuals subscribe to ideological propositions is a subtle process in power structures: “Examining emotions deepens our understanding of the subjective investment in political formations ... Emotions research also illuminates political actions and ideological processes” (D’Arcens and Waldek 1-2). Zadra and Clore’s research in “Emotion and Perception” delineates the ways emotions “provide a strong motivating influence on how the environment is perceived” (676). Their empirical analysis draws on the affect-as-information hypothesis to emphasize “the influence of affect, mood, and emotion on attention, judgment, and thought” (Zadra and Clore 682). Other neuroscientific investigations like “Seeing What You Feel” also verify the fact that human perception of reality is a construction heavily influenced by the function of mental susceptibility and sensibility: “What a person consciously sees in the moment is a mental representation of the real world, not a direct reflection of it” (Siegel et al. 7). The gestalt of inner affective realities influences the processing and perception of the external stimuli from the social context and instigates the formation of worldviews. The resultant ideological stances, in turn, interpret situations or events and dictate the specific types of behavioral patterns and actions in accordance with the mental instigations: “Ideology thus serves as a crucial bridge between individual minds and collective behavior, and any complete explanation of ideological formation and change must therefore integrate the individual-cognitive and group-social levels of analysis” (Homer-Dixon et al. 344).

A consideration of the expounded process and the mentioned studies substantiates a consequential conclusion: The determinant mental formations emerging from predominant sentimental faculties define the individuals’ perceptual realities/identities and exert dominion on the behavioral patterns in the sociocultural power structures. The utmost significance of such a process lies in the fact that the transfigurations of reality engendered by affective perceptions are alarmingly equipped with self-fashioning powers and operate like self-fulfilling prophecies. According to Robert Merton’s classic exposition of such a mechanism, “the self-fulfilling prophesy is, in the beginning, a false definition of the situation evoking a new behavior which makes the originally false conception come *true*” (195). Therefore, the resultant reality transfigurations can actualize the consequences of their predicated assumptions by reflecting on behavior, regardless and independent of the propriety of the initially stimulating affective instigations. The consequences can also bear upon the individuals’ identity construction processes by subjecting them to self-fashioning (Greenblatt 244) and forcing them to adjust their demeanor to the instigated sociocultural directives. For these reasons, it is imperative to adopt fresh perspectives on the insidious capacity of the readers’ affective

registration of perceptual realities via literature. The current analysis of the stylistic mechanism of affective instigations in the Wessex world takes into account Keen's position towards "the literary version of the empathy-altruism hypothesis, which holds that novel reading, by eliciting empathy, encourages prosocial action and good world citizenship" ("Theory" 224). Keen's theories on narrative empathy pertain to the perceptual mechanisms that relate readers to the affective construction interwoven into the fictional worlds.

#### **4. The Authorial Design for Vicarious Sensitivity**

In this section, the investigation of Hardy's paratextual material will disclose his predetermined mission in the Wessex narratives as an impressionistic meliorist and also trace back the convictions underlying the novels' authorial intentionality. Substantial pieces of evidence will be derived from these sources to establish Hardy's intent to inscribe profound affective impressions on the readers and to induce empathetic appreciation for fellow humans' suffering. The consideration of Hardy's predetermination in the impressionistic design of the Wessex world is of particular significance since analytical research in affective narratology is basically inconceivable in the exclusion of the concept of authorial intentionality: "intention is built into the concept of meaning" (Hermeren 65). In fact, the initially evoked emotions in the readers can substantially undergo verification, suspicion, scrutiny, or rejection due to the underlying authorial intent. The premeditated authorial intentionality for altruistic morality through vicarious impressionism bears heavily on the structure of the Wessex narratives. The authorial mindset underlying the composition of the semi-fictional Wessex story world is characterized by the philosophical "wants and intentions" that make empathetic capitalization on empathy "the very process of communication" (Hermeren 76).

Hardy's insight into the far-reaching primacy of empathetic impressionism over cognitive argumentation in addressing mentalities is perceived from his reliance on "the force of an appeal to the emotional reason rather than to the logical reason," as expressed in "The Profitable Reading of Fiction": In this essay, Hardy contends that "by their emotions men are acted upon, and act upon others" (qtd. in Orel 115). The Wessex novelist's stance on the nature of his compositions is the chief clue to the deployment of interconnected stylistic strategies in the narratives. He is determined to enforce his doleful personal philosophy via unsuspecting empathetic sentiments. The Wessex story world attests to Hardy's mindfulness of a faithful portrayal of the grave capacity of emotional susceptibilities in fixing human fortunes. As Keen notes, "Hardy's interest in the human condition of living with emotion-driven brains shows forth

vividly in the novels” (*Thomas Hardy’s Brains* 14). A later preface to *Tess of the d’Urbervilles*, which Hardy felt impelled to add to the 1892 edition, registers his conviction about the eminence of emotive impressions over cognition in his literary representation style: “The novel was intended to be neither didactic nor aggressive, but in the scenic parts to be representative simply, and in the contemplative to be oftener charged with impressions than with convictions” (Hardy, “Preface” 4). He passes his verdict on the nature and function of a novel by reiterating emphatically that his narrative compositions are meant to target the impressionistic affective sensibility of the readers, not their argumentative reasoning: “Let me repeat that a novel is an impression, not an argument” (Hardy, “Preface” 5).

A close analysis of Hardy’s personal notes, letters, and diaries compiled in his book *The Life and Work of Thomas Hardy* can also help in tracing the roots for his steadfast authorial intentionality in infusing vicarious affective sensibility into his narrative style. Hardy’s private writings signify that his highly sensitive soul had made the emotional dimensions of human life the most significant aspect of its quality for him. Afflicted by the emotional turmoil of his harsh experiences in life, he developed a “constitutional tendency to care for life only as an emotion and not as a scientific game” (Hardy, *Life* 89). From Hardy’s standpoint, the most authentic aspects of human truth did not stem from empirical reasoning but from emotional impressions, and he insisted on reflecting the same in his aesthetic realism: “Forces; emotions; tendencies. The characters do not act under the influence of reason (Hardy, *Life* 261). His insistence on the impressionistic quality of his literary representation style stems from his philosophical convictions on the nature of truth: “We don’t always remember as we should that in getting at the truth we get only at the true nature of the impression that an object, etc., produces on us, the true thing in itself being still beyond our knowledge (Hardy, *Life* 261-262). That is why in order to implement his altruistic plan of initiating positive change in his fellow beings’ behavior towards each other, he decided to resort to affective impressionism.

Since the fundamental qualities of human life were governed by the influences of sentiments in Hardy’s view, He entrusted the concept of empathy with the most prominent role in his altruistic meliorism. He contended that the only possible remedy for the miserable circumstances of human suffering was to develop a collective moral sense of empathetic understanding for others: “Altruism, or The Golden Rule, or whatever ‘Love your Neighbour as Yourself’ may be called, will ultimately be brought about I think by the pain we see in others reacting on ourselves, as if we and they were a part of one body. Mankind, in fact, may be, and possibly will be viewed as members of one corporeal frame” (Hardy, *Life* 235). The ardent philosopher was invigorated in his

melioristic intentionality when the empirical findings on the pragmatic function of sympathy in human societies were published in *Descent of Man*, maintaining that “those communities, which included the greatest number of the most sympathetic members, would flourish best and rear the greatest number of offspring” (Darwin 82). What Darwin called sympathy in his theories “today would be termed empathy, altruism, or compassion” (Ekman 557). Darwin controversially severed the roots of man’s elemental moral incentives from the realm of divinity, and this intensified the call upon humans themselves to take responsibility for the well-being of each other. The pensive novelist’s conception of empathetic appreciation as the sole alleviation of humanity’s existential plight embraces Darwin’s methodical hypotheses to “tie the success of human evolution (and even ‘lower animals’) to the evolution of compassion” (Kukk 14). As inferred from his personal notes, Hardy carefully followed the latest empirical theories of his time, especially on the psychological front, and endeavored to incorporate them in the representational style of his compositions: “Darwin’s ideas provided Hardy with a framework for understating human morality, how it developed by natural selection, and how it could be influenced by carefully crafted fiction” (Roberts-Day 2).

Having already lost his faith in a benevolent Providence in the universe, Hardy concluded that humans had only each other to soothe the existential pain, and his belief was reconfirmed by the empirical theories severing the life of humankind from divinity: “Hardy strongly believed in the power of empathy – or loving-kindness, as he often called it- to create a physical reaction in the reader that would give birth to a sense of moral consideration of (and obligation to) others” (West 3). The deliberation on the Wessex narratives’ paratextual data yields informed views on Hardy’s authorial intentionality in structuring the features of his semi-fictional story world. Hardy’s philosophical reliance on affective impressionism dominates the narrative’s fabric and the gestalt of interpretations. The eventual aspiration of the Wessex novelist’s imaginary depictions is to address the inescapability of human dilemma by summoning up his audience’s capacity for vicarious sensitivity: Hardy’s strategic empathizing in his novels ... links his representational strategies to his evolutionary meliorism and his belief that individual altruism might yet alleviate the painful drama of human existence” (Keen, “Empathetic Hardy” 349).

### **5. The Manipulation of Narrative Consciousness Foci**

The structural harmony in the interplay of the consciousness foci with other narrative aspects, such as characterization, is strategically essential for sustaining the audience’s empathetic bond with the specific characters in the Wessex novels. Hardy’s peculiar way of manipulating a narrator’s all-knowing consciousness focus enables him to

directly report the inner dimensions of his protagonists' mentalities. This strategy endows the conveyed affective impressions with a sense of genuine immediacy and credulity. Emotional attributions in fictional discourse, as Suzanna Keen notes, "may be made directly by a narrator employing thought report or psycho-narration about a character's emotions" or "they may be inferred by a reader responding to external cues delivered through actions or characterization" (*Narrative Form* 152). As a result of the authorial design, the Wessex narratives' foci of consciousness employ the characters' inner dimensions and put direct, authoritative impressions of them into effect. The intentional manipulation allows scant spaces for the protagonists' gradual mimetic development through the readers' unconfined inferences from the external significations of the characters or narrative events. This approach also systematically reflects on the characterization procedure and justifies the direct labeling of the protagonists who perform more as emblematic personifications of sentiments than individuated personalities.

The readers are granted a panoramic vision of the protagonists' inner cognitive and sentimental spheres of perception due to their instrumental exposure to the contrivances in the omniscient narrators' foci of consciousness. The narrators have divine access to the consciousness of all the characters in the way that Keen considers a focal influence in accentuating the affective investments. Upon the very initial moments of Tess and Angel's appearance on the narrative stage, while the reader waits for them to be sketched and no word or gesture has yet been exchanged, the narrator discloses their inmost thoughts and feelings towards each other. The omniscient consciousness focus instantly establishes that Angel "instinctively felt that she was hurt by his oversight" and "as for Tess Durbeyfield, she did not easily dislodge the incident from her consideration" (Hardy, *Tess* 21). In a similar vein, *Jude the Obscure's* narrator is so immersed in the inner perceptions of Jude's mind that he can even report the tonal quality of the protagonist's inner voice: "He said to himself, in the melodramatic tone of a whimsical boy" (Hardy 5).

The exposure of the depths of the protagonists' mentalities through the penetration of an authoritative narrative consciousness conjures up the corresponding impressions towards the characters' innate personality traits and merits in the readers. The instigated impressions demand the intended kinds of affective responses from the audience and are reinforced with their emotional feedback to the direct discursive directives. The extent to which the narrator in *The Mayor of Casterbridge* is granted access to the protagonist's inner temperamental dimensions stands out from the opening page. Upon Henchard's appearance, the narrator instantly sums up the

fundamental traits that he is going to have throughout the story. While no word has yet been uttered or no event has yet occurred in the story, and divining merely from Henchard's manner of walking, the narrator promptly delivers a lasting impression of the protagonist's inherent disposition as inconsiderate, determined and egoistic through diegetic representation: "His measured springless walk was the walk of the skilled countryman as distinct from the desultory shamble of the general labourer;—while in the turn and plant of each foot there was, further, a dogged and cynical indifference, personal to himself (Hardy, *Mayor* 5). Throughout the storyline, Henchard's essential temperament operates within the initial personality impressions communicated by the narrator's all-seeing consciousness in the opening scenes, which indicates that "the narrator knows beforehand the import of the interrelationships, of individual and society, of character and signifying role" (Kramer xxv).

However, the narrator's overwhelming consciousness is abruptly cut off after the second chapter for a surprisingly missing temporal span of eighteen years, and the third chapter recommences the story providing no clear account of all developments and events that the main characters experienced before "a long procession of years had passed by" (Hardy, *Mayor* 21). The strategic loss of the omniscient consciousness focus in this point paves the way for a renewed representation of Henchard's flawed, ill-natured personality in a manner that will enable the readers to relate to his shortcomings and wrongdoings. The unknown mysteries of the many years left out from the immediate scene will provide a narrative space for the readers, allowing them to see the protagonist in a new light. The passage of a considerable time span contributes to softening the reader's initial reactions of contempt and blame for Henchard's personality. The authorial design prepares the audience for the gradual understanding of Henchard's tragedy of character flaws and then makes the audience recognize the same defects in their own dispositions, which leads to their empathy with Henchard in his restless efforts to amend consequences. The ineffectiveness of Henchard's aspirations for atonement and positive change in his flawed character resonates profoundly with the readers' own sense of temperamental inefficiency and incapability in real-life situations and stirs empathetic identification with the tragic protagonist.

Success in eliciting the reader's empathetic understanding of the imperfect protagonist is so significant in the discourse that it endows the narrator's voice in *The Mayor of Casterbridge* with another peculiarity; the all-knowing consciousness of the narrator refrains from delving deep into the inner dimensions of other prominent characters in proportion to their central role in the storyline. The manipulation of the

consciousness focus to withhold the immediate, intimate access to the inner dimensions of the other major characters is “actually a narrative silence inextricably intertwined with the textual structure” (Nagatomi 1). The emotional and psychological aspects of Elizabeth-Jane and Farfrae, for instance, are not dealt with attentively despite the fact that they are apparently more decent characters and even act as foils to Henchard to contrast with his catastrophic defects: “The narrator seems, rather strangely, to be only interested in their external behaviour and reserved about their inner motives and feelings” (Nagatomi 8). In fact, the manipulated focus of consciousness induces the readers’ empathetic identification with a bad-tempered anti-hero and simultaneously inhibits affective associations with other characters by obstructing access to their intimately relatable inner dimensions.

The Wessex narratives’ discourses register unexpected intentional lapses of the narrators’ all-seeing vision, distancing consciousness foci from the situations and characters at significant plot phases. This strategy deliberately deprives the audience of a fully informed assessment of all aspects of the characters and incidents. In the crucial moments of *Tess’s* The Chase scene, the narrator’s divine consciousness is wholly and abruptly distanced from the controversial circumstances of a sinful transgression that critically precipitates the tragic fortunes of all the major characters. The propelling dynamics of the narrative in its affective saturation of empathy for the victimized heroine and also all the subsequent interpretations of major characters and events vitally depend on the unrevealed circumstances of a totally off-stage incident: “It is striking that the event which has probably the most ineluctable and far-reaching consequences of any in the novel occurs silently and invisibly between Phases” (Boumelha xxi). The authorial intentionality attempts to safeguard the pure and innocent impression of the beautiful heroine by occasionally distancing the omniscient focus of consciousness. However, substantial discursive significations dismiss Hardy’s contrived image of his immaculate heroine and point to Tess’s own willful agency in the sinful transgression as a desiring subjectivity. Many later implications in the speeches of Alec and Tess testify to the reflection that “a little more than persuading had to do wi’ the coming o’t” (Hardy, *Tess* 103). Tess’s intolerable sense of guilt and self-loathing stems from her own immoral lapse: “Temporarily blinded by his ardent manners, [Tess] had been stirred to confused surrender awhile” (Hardy, *Tess* 94). In fact, the heroine’s profound regret is rooted in her own infringement stirred by a sensual passion for someone she did not care about emotionally: “If I had ever sincerely loved you ... I should not so loathe and hate myself for my weakness as I do now! ... My eyes were dazed by you for a little and that was all” (Hardy, *Tess* 89).

An examination of the discursive significations will reveal how Hardy manipulates the narrator's consciousness focus to intentionally downplay Tess's own desiring subjectivity in the catastrophic wrongdoing. The narrator's omniscience is strategically and abruptly distanced at the time of Tess and Alec's intimacy in *The Chase*, and the chapter suddenly ends. The omniscient consciousness focus is back "some few weeks subsequent to the night ride in *The Chase*" (Hardy, *Tess* 87), and the story resumes in an entirely different atmosphere in the next phase leaving the true nature of the incident in a shroud of mystery. There are actually no unequivocal discursive indications in the later speeches of either Tess or Alec that attest to the presumption that the immoral incident was Alec's atrocity on Tess's helpless chastity. It is significant to note that before the narrator's omniscient consciousness is disconnected in *The Chase* scene, Alec double-checks with Tess: "Will you, I ask once more, show your belief in me by letting me clasp you with my arm? ... Mayn't I treat you as a lover?" and Tess murmurs, "I don't know—I wish—how can I say yes or no" and then the text reads, "He settled the matter by clasping his arm round her as he desired, and Tess expressed no more negative" (Hardy, *Tess* 79). Neither Tess nor Alec ever uses the specific word for a forced physical lesion to refer to their sinful sensuality: "Tess's language acts to contradict her innocence, such as when she calls Alec her 'seducer'" (Gedraitis 11). The effect of the occasional silencing of the panoramic consciousness focus in the narrative is the preservation of the heroine's angelic image which is in line with Hardy's own empathetic infatuation with his idol of unearthly innocence and beauty. The immaculate image of a helpless, beautiful girl wronged harshly by the cruelty of other characters and Fate's sinister workings feeds on the readers' sense of ethical obligation to cultivate corresponding empathetic responsiveness.

The same observation holds true in the critical scene of Tess's later resolution to confess the truth to Angel by writing a letter. The confession provides the readers with no clues whatsoever into the true circumstances of what happened in *The Chase* because the all-knowing consciousness of the narrator is unexpectedly withdrawn at this point, and there is no account of what she actually writes in the letter. It should then be unsurprising that the plot resorts to sheer chance out of the necessity for withholding details, so Angel accidentally fails to discover the confession letter beneath his door, allowing Tess to destroy the letter quickly afterward. The contents of such a significant revelation could have radically affected the interpretation of the whole course of events and the characters; nonetheless, the readers are strategically denied access to such information by manipulating consciousness focus. Thus, the contradicting discursive significations against the narrator's saint-like image of the

protagonist are contained within the demands of an overwhelmingly empathetic plan. This observation resonates perfectly with Angle's disastrous failure to perceive Tess as she really is, even when she decides to confess her "faults and blunders" to him: "No, no— we can't have faults talked of—you must be deemed perfect" (Hardy, *Tess* 230).

Likewise, in *Jude the Obscure*, the instrumental handling of the omniscient narrator is observed, and another function of this stylistic strategy is noted. The calculated distancing of the consciousness focus from the immediate perspective on the hero's misfortunes effectively implements the investment of a sense of credulity and detachment in the emotively enforced impressions: "Hardy's method for this was to write a narrator who distances himself from the protagonist, in order that the reader will experience the world as harsh and uncaring, and it is this way that the novel is an empathetic one" (Watanabe 143). The measured distancing of the narrator's omniscient consciousness aims to convey a contrived sense of impartiality, which especially suits the purpose of communicating the author's charged convictions in the emotionally saturated context. The imparting of certain cognitive impositions in the vessel of an empathetic design is accomplished through the voices of the narrators, who, upon scrutiny, reveal preferential emotional attachment to the protagonists. The strong favoring of the protagonists by the authoritative consciousness of the discourse urges the readers to align their affective responses with the narrators' empathetic affiliations. Consequently, the audience's empathy with a Wessex protagonist owes much to the narrator's perspective in passionately patronizing the character in adoration. *Tess's* narrator, for instance, describes her with such exact details of her physical attraction, recapitulating on her ethereal delicateness that she is virtually exalted to the status of a demigoddess: "Perhaps there is no greater love tribute offered by a third person omniscient narrator to any heroine in English fiction" (Shires 45).

Even the implementation of Hardy's well-known social critique largely depends on the narrators' staunch siding with the protagonists that perform as the avatars of the author's own identity and worldview. In *Jude*, the novelist expresses his grievances against the injustice in the accessibility of university education for commoners, delivering his condemnation of the social inequalities through the consciousness of a narrator "whose sympathy with Jude has been acute" (Ingham xiii). As Keen emphasizes, "An author's empathy with her subject is not automatic," the authorial empathetic affiliation with characters draws on a novelist's personal life experiences and "comes into play during the daydreaming imagining that may precede or accompany composition" ("Life Writing" 19). Hardy attempts to obscure the emotional attachment of his predisposed narrators' (and, by extension, his own devotion) to the

protagonists. For instance, he establishes judgments on a protagonist's character in the speeches of secondary characters. The judgments resonate perfectly with the narrator's attachment to the protagonists but have been distanced by their ascription to minor characters. The impelling collective effect of such stylistic strategies in manipulating the consciousness focus in the Wessex narratives prompts the readers to align their responses to the narrators' authoritative tonality and calibrate their emotional feedback for empathetic identification with the protagonists.

### **6. The Tagged Characterization of the Protagonists**

In a definitive manner, Hardy deploys the Wessex novels' narrators to ascribe an array of straightforwardly qualifying adjectives to his protagonists from the initial moments of their appearance on the narrative scene. The determinative labels of a character's personality ultimately aim at demanding particular emotional responses from the readers. Mediated by the consciousness of the narrator, which orients the minor characters' viewpoints to his own stance as well, Hardy instantly tags Tess as a "fine," "handsome," and "innocent" girl with "eloquence" (evocative of feeling) upon her introduction to the narrative scene (*Tess* 20). Initial impressions of her character are promptly associated with simplicity, modesty, passion, and alluring beauty in a diegetic manner, establishing her personality as "a mere vessel of emotion untinged by experience" in her "bouncing handsome womanliness": her face blushed easily and "her eyes grew moist" promptly (Hardy, *Tess* 21).

Throughout the later developments of the storyline, the temperamental dimensions of Tess's character remain principally within Hardy's initial sketch of tagged attributions. The contrived characterization by using direct tags deprives Tess of the individuality of a multi-dimensional character with complex behavior. Allowing the audience to make inferences from Tess's gradual mimetic exposure could have led to the multifariousness of her incentives and reactions. However, as necessitated by Hardy's empathetic design, the entire narrative elements have been organized to emphasize one ultimate impression: Tess's emblematic encapsulation of innocent beauty. The subsequent effect presents an emblematic heroine as the personification of particular virtues with no complications in impression in order to exact the intended empathetic endorsement from all the readers. As the gloomy philosophical agenda demands, the substantial divergent clues attesting to Tess's own desiring subjectivity in the course of tragic events are constrained in the discourse so that her case epitomizes humankind's condemnation to the "sport" of "the President of the Immortals" (Hardy, *Tess* 420). Since the readers' divergent perceptions of the protagonist's character can radically deflate the empathetic identification with her, the tagged characterization contains deviating impressions and safeguards her ideal image.

The essential personality traits of Jude are similarly pushed forward in the initial pages through the protagonist's tagged characterization in childhood as a hyper-sensitive, pensive soul "whose heart grew sympathetic with the birds' thwarted desires" in a manner as if "a magic thread of fellow-feeling united his own life with theirs" (Hardy, *Jude* 9). Initial impressions of Jude's inherent temperament are swiftly established by fixating on labeling the child Jude as "a boy who could not himself bear to hurt anything" (Hardy, *Jude* 11). Through direct, diegetic characterization Jude's exceptional empathetic sensitivity is even stretched to cover the sentiency of the plant realm: "He could scarcely bear to see trees cut down or lopped, from a fancy that it hurt them; and late pruning, when the sap was up, and the tree bled profusely, had been a positive grief to him in his infancy" (Hardy, *Jude* 11). Just like Tess, Jude is characterized as a prearranged, instrumental vessel of the ethereal sentiments to be victimized in his pitiful life. As his childhood sensitivity in the "perception of the flaw in the terrestrial scheme" signifies beforehand, his delicate nature is perfectly fit to be torn apart by the cruel inflictions of Fate (Hardy, *Jude* 10). All of Jude's subsequent incentives and reactions will adhere to his initial impressions sketched via tagged characterization as the overstretched empathetic agenda compels. Hardy even directly enunciates the melodramatic prospect and essence of Jude's yet-to-be-told story right in the initial pages: "This weakness of character, as it may be called, suggested that he was the sort of man who was born to ache a good deal before the fall of the curtain upon his unnecessary life should signify that all was well with him again" (*Jude* 11).

By the same token, as soon as Henchard appears in the narrative discourse of *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, Hardy starts his characterization in the third sentence of the novel: "The man was of fine figure, swarthy, and stern in aspects" (5). Then he immediately establishes Henchard's inherent temperament diegetically by qualifying him as a "springless" man possessing a "dogged and cynical indifference personal to himself" (*Mayor* 5). By tagging Henchard's character as "overbearing" and "quarrelsome," Hardy sums up the fundamental traits of Henchard's disposition in effect and delivers quick, lasting impressions that are in line with the narrative's affective intentions (*Mayor* 10). The initial impressions of Henchard's personality outlined by the tagged characterization will have a focal function in the development of the subsequent course of events, the emergence of interpretations gestalt, and the enforcement of affective dynamics. Throughout the story, Henchard behaves and acts within the boundaries established by Hardy's initial impressions of his flawed temperament. The strategic effect urges the readers to relate to the protagonist's incurable anguish through an empathetic recognition of the similar defects in their own temperaments and a sense of responsibility: "Like Oedipus and Lear, Henchard is to blame for the disasters that bring about his fate" (Kramer xvii).

The initial impressions of the characters greatly influence the interpretations of their subsequent interactions by orienting the readers' affective affiliations; therefore, Hardy resorts to diegetic, tagged characterization to ensure his intended effect and curb the divergent impressions that can arise from the gradual mimetic characterization through demeanor and action. Hardy provides the protagonists with instant labels or readily available tags in order to orient and accentuate the intended affective imprints. His stylistic measure resonates interestingly with the discovery in the reviewed paratextual material that impressionistic effects are the ultimate concern and mission of Hardy's literary career. What triggers the readers' empathetic affinity with a less desirable protagonist like Henchard is that despite his bad-tempered, egoistic impulses, he aspires to control his emotions and atone for the consequences of his inconsiderate behavior in a self-loathing manner. This redeeming quality reverberates powerfully with the audience's affective susceptibilities because Henchard's character flaws and shortcomings are of a nature that all the readers can identify with and relate to in their personal repository of self-reproach. In fact, rallying support and empathy for Henchard starts right from the novel's front cover, where Hardy labels him as *A Man of Character*, signaling the readers beforehand that they are expected to cultivate emotional validation for the protagonist they are going to encounter in a story that is going to unfold.

Furthermore, the Wessex narratives' secondary characters substantiate the protagonists' ascribed labels by building on the response-defining tags and verifying the insinuated impressions in their own speeches and reactions. The minor characters' attributions align with the narrator's labels to project the authorial intent in the protagonists' affective function. Therefore, soon after Tess is attentively labeled innocent by the omniscient narrator, the lesser characters' validation follows in concordance: "Bless thy simplicity, Tess," said her companions" (*Tess* 21). Hardy fixates on the ideal image of his heroine as a reality on which universal human compassion can crystallize, so he assigns other characters to amplify the affective focus on Tess: "The secondary figures in the book have useful parts to play, but finally they are little more than accessories, whose task is not so much to draw attention in their own right as to heighten the reality of Tess" (Howe 131).

Another aspect of the Wessex novelist's specific manner of characterization is the empathetic identification of the author himself with the unceasing suffering and emotional turmoil of his protagonists. As Patricia Ingham notes in the introduction to *Jude the Obscure*, "parallels with Hardy's own life" in the novel were so overwhelming that "editors have felt documentation of the autobiographical element was essential:

Jude as Hardy” (xi). The realities of the Wessex world frequently reflect Hardy’s grievances with life’s sociocultural and naturalistic circumstances. In light of such parallelism, the protagonists are conceived as surrogate fictional projections of Hardy’s subjectivity burdened with the grief-stricken anguish of his own life. His protagonists have been modeled on the sensitive novelist’s profound identification with his created surrogate personas. Keen recognizes such an emotional bond between a writer and his characters as “author’s empathy” and believes it can be “an intrinsic element of successful fictional worldmaking” (Keen, “Theory” 222).

An assessment of the three major Wessex novels’ full titles, as well as the previous titles that Hardy intended, reveals his empathizing with the affective qualities of his protagonists. All three titles nominate their protagonists for the front cover spotlight and signify Hardy’s primary focus on the protagonists’ troubled psychological and emotional dimensions in the context of sociocultural forces. The subtitle of *Tess of the d’Urbervilles: A Pure Woman, Faithfully Presented* exalts her to a saint-like status and subtly attempts to suggest that her purity is not the author’s subjective opinion but a credible verdict since her image is rooted in trustworthy and accurate presentation. The title of *Jude the Obscure* sets the sympathetic tone towards the still-unknown protagonist right from the front cover and hints at the prospect of his wretched life in advance. The previous titles that Hardy later upgraded for this novel included *The Simpletons*, *Hearts Insurgent*, and *The Recalcitrants*, none of which could single out the protagonist and demand empathetic feelings for him as *Jude the Obscure* does. The full title for Henchard’s story is *The Mayor of Casterbridge: The Life and Death of A Man of Character*, and again, it hints that the whole novel is going to revolve around a protagonist who is empathetically deemed to be *A Man of Character* despite the temperamental flaws and shortcomings that he is going to suffer.

Hardy’s over-empathizing with his protagonists in the realistic representations of the fictional Wessex and exonerating them from responsibility for whatever happens under the auspices of the so-called Fate backfired harshly in a shocking reversal of his altruistic moral aspirations. His emphatic projection of all the protagonists’ sufferings and dilemmas on the wayward external forces of a sinister existence stirred Victorian public outcries on moral grounds condemning the tender treatment of immorality, transgression, follies, and flaws. The austere reactions inflicted such a severe impact on the Wessex novelist’s sensitive soul that he later discontinued writing novels altogether. His disillusionment echoed in the preface to a later edition of *Tess*. Addressing the unfeeling criticism torrent, he regretted the tagging of his heroine in the subtitle as *A Pure Woman, Faithfully Presented*: “*Melius fuerat non scriber* [It had been better not to write it]. But there it stands” (Hardy, “Preface” 8).

## 7. Conclusion

An affective narratological analysis of Thomas Hardy's major Wessex novels reveals the stylistic strategies underlying their outstanding capacity to enlist the readers' empathetic identification with the protagonists. The analysis also establishes that the narrative design and structure of the Wessex novels are characterized by Hardy's altruistic authorial intentionality for moral edification through literary representations. Hardy's premeditated design for eliciting and enlisting the readers' emotive responses towards fictional characters aspires to cultivate communal empathetic appreciation as the only consolation for universal human suffering. His impressionistic approach relies on an insight into the superior capacity of the readers' affective sensibility in shaping sociocultural behavior and is put into effect in a realistic story world imbued with philosophical convictions.

Hardy's investment in affective impressionism organizes the interconnected stylistic strategies and elements in the Wessex discourses and dominates the gestalt of interpretations. Manipulating the consciousness focus of a Wessex novel's narrator has a prominent influence in rallying profound emotional support for the protagonists that benefit from the staunch authorial empathy. The omniscient consciousness focus penetrates the inner dimensions of the protagonists and enables the readers to relate to their psychological complications and emotional turmoil by imparting a sense of immediacy and credulity. However, the omniscient narrative consciousness is occasionally and strategically distanced from the scenes that are crucial for interpretations gestalt to safeguard the intended image of the protagonists and maintain the readers' empathetic identification with them. Moreover, the tagged characterization directly labels the protagonists' personality traits and enforces the formative impressions that demand corresponding emotive responses from the readers. Hardy's emotive investment in the realistic representations of his major Wessex novels manifests the literary application of the empathy-altruism hypothesis in narrative fiction; his stylistic strategies capitalize on the readers' empathetic responsiveness and pursue melioristic moral edification through affective impressionism.

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