

‘Shades of the Prison House’: Religion, Children and Tragedy in Some Novels of Thomas Hardy

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Abstract

In Hardy’s vision of tragedy, man is subject to the Immanent Will; and any attempt to overcome his tragic circumstances, often ends in futility. Though accused of being pessimistic, Hardy’s real objective in his novel is to highlight the injustices and oppressions that the people were subject to, in the Victorian age. In most societies, children often become the worst sufferers of such systemic religious and societal oppression, and rural societies in the Victorian age were no different. This study attempts to analyse how Hardy presented children in his tragic narratives: he veers away from the convention of associating children with images of positivity, and instead, places them squarely within the framework of his deepest tragedies. In fact, in addition to being passive victims, children often become agents of tragedy themselves in these narratives. Hardy wishes to highlight how institutionalised religion and callous parenting were often responsible for these tragedies, and thus, in his presentation, he re-presents children with an unconventional idea of childhood.

Key words: baptism, children, Christianity, loving-kindness, meliorism, oppression, Victorian.