

Victorian Agnosticism: Thomas Hardy's Doomed Universe

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Synopsis of Dissertation

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Thomas Hardy described himself as "churchy". Yet his later novels and poetry gave him the reputation of being an agnostic, an atheist and a heathen. He denied that there was any particular philosophy behind his work claiming that it was the result of impressions not convictions. However, I wish to show that Hardy's fiction and poetry expose specific religious beliefs and doubts, that gave rise to his notoriously pessimistic art.

By investigating the themes of sin, atonement and salvation, as reflected in the Mosaic Law and the New Testament against Hardy's mature novels, and examining Hardy's concept of God in his poetry, I aim to show that Hardy rejected the miraculous and the doctrine of redemption but retained a belief in the Biblical premiss that the earth is cursed and that humanity is governed by the Biblical Laws which dictate the consequences of sin.

Hardy depicts a universe in which humankind is cursed from birth, resides on a cursed earth and is denied the possibility of salvation or redemption. Hardy's profoundly pessimistic world view is a result of his inability to accept the Christian doctrines that offer man a means to rise above the curse of original sin. The characters and plots he created in his fiction were born out of doubt and despair. Consequently, his imaginative universe is permeated with doom and damnation.

