

## The Stigma of the Fallen Woman in the Novels of *Jude the Obscure* and *Yeryüzünde Bir Melek*

### Authors

Ecem Başak Emiroğlu<sup>1</sup> \*

### Affiliations

<sup>1</sup> Master's Program in English Language and Literature, Graduate School of Social Sciences Yeditepe University, Istanbul, 34755, Turkey

\*To whom correspondence should be addressed; \*E-mail: [basak.emiroglu@yeditepe.edu.tr](mailto:basak.emiroglu@yeditepe.edu.tr)

*This article is derived from the author's M.A. dissertation entitled "The Stigma of the Fallen Woman in the Novels of Jude the Obscure and Yeryüzünde Bir Melek".*

## **Abstract**

Regardless of the cultural differences, the 19<sup>th</sup> century Victorian England and Tanzimat Period in Ottoman Empire had similar expectations from women. The two novelists from these two countries, Thomas Hardy and Ahmet Mithat Efendi, had critical attitude towards such expectations. Thus they created socially unacceptable but acceptable for them heroines. After all, for some Sue Bridehead is Hardy's main focus and similarly for Ahmet Mithat Raziye is still an angel. The reason why these two heroines are unacceptable for the society's of their days is intriguing. Considering all these, the aim of this thesis is to discuss these two heroines through the lens of stigma of fallen woman so that why these heroines experience exclusion may be discussed. While doing this Erving Goffman's ideas regarding stigma along with Stafford&Scott's arguments on how stigma and norms are related; and Link&Phelan's writing on stigma and its connection to negative stereotypes will be used.

**Keywords:** Erving Goffman; fallen women; stigma; Tanzimat Era; Victorian England

Preprint

## INTRODUCTION

Human beings have always thought about and discussed the society they are part of, from as early as Ancient Greece, continuing throughout the Enlightenment Period and up until today. The discussion has varied upon issues such as how society came into being, whether it is necessary, its components, and, later on, its effects on the individuals and vice versa, and so on. Even today, the extend of the effects of society on the individual remains quite a vast question, and continues to be dealt with by many of the social sciences.

Society, as etymonline (2023) notes, is etymologically rooted in the Latin word *societam*, standing for “fellowship”, “community”, etc. and, at the same time, this root word is thought to be associated with the word “to follow” (n.p.). The etymology of the word reveals one of the crucial qualities of society; it is a gathering of people that ‘follow’ each other in the sense of sharing the same ideals, beliefs, etc. Of course, societies include more than that, but it may be said that following the same thing, meaning sharing the same ideals, thoughts, life-styles, etc., is important in keeping the members of a society together. Furthermore, maybe just because of our social nature, as beings that have been so long part of a group, humans cannot escape feeling the *need to belong* that Baumeister&Leary (1995) acknowledge as something “fundamental [and universal]” (p.500). However, history has always witnessed misfitting, non-belonging characters and societies have always found ways to discriminate against them, which will be discussed further below. Misfit characters also became the main characters of literary works, such as Madame Bovary, Hester Prynne, and so on.

This study, similarly, plans to focus on two misfit heroines and the inevitable discrimination they suffer. In order to provide a common ground for discussion both novels were selected from the 19<sup>th</sup> century, however, in order to provide diversity, the two novels were taken from two different countries; Victorian England and the Tanzimat period Ottoman Empire. When Thomas Hardy wrote *Jude the Obscure* in 1895 it created controversy mostly because of its supposedly obscene heroine, Sue Bridehead. Ahmet Mithat Efendi’s novel *Yeryüzünde Bir Melek* (1878) received a similar critical reaction

because of it dealt with a of a married woman, whom he did not avoid calling an angel, for another man.

Both authors, at the same time, are known for their critical attitudes towards the position of women and the marital customs of their days; thus it is no surprise that they created socially misfitting but, for them, acceptable heroines. *Jude the Obscure*, as will be discussed further, focuses on a heroine who defies what society expects from her and, for Hardy, when this is the case it is society which proves to be victorious (Mallah, 2015, p.64). Ahmet Mithat's novel on the other hand, is also about a misfitting heroine but her exclusion, as will be further discussed, is thought to have been included as a "punishment mechanism", showing that Ahmet Mithat was aware of the potential criticisms of his novel (Ekici, 2019, p.32). On this basis, this study aims to discuss the exclusion of Raziye and Sue through the lens of the stigma of the fallen woman. Focusing on these two misfit characters and discussing their discrimination also makes one consider why these novels are still read and relatable even in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, since misfit individuals were, still are, and will be part of human societies, and thus they are easy to recognise and sympathise in every age and era. In other words, it is those misfit individuals that nourishes the novels' durability. In this context, throughout this research, Erving Goffman's idea of stigma and Stafford&Scott's, and Link&Phelan's articles will guide the discussion.

## RESULTS

In *Jude the Obscure*, Sue experiences exclusion even before she lives with Jude out-of-wedlock. After staying with Jude at night, she is expelled from her school. Later, she marries to Phillotson but due to her unhappiness with him she decides living with Jude. The pressure though started to be more heavily felt when Little Father Time comes. Now, this unpeccable family draws people's attention, and people start gossiping. One of the examples may be Arabella's asking: "Have you met Jude and his young woman, or wife, or whatever she is?..." (Hardy, 2002, p. 282). Even though it is only Arabella in that scene who is focused on the couple's status, one can easily assume that if one individual can question it, others may also do that. This is what happens in the church scene. When people see her with children they imagine that she is a married woman, the wife of Jude. Following

Goffman's idea that one may note that people create this virtual social identity, when her actual social identity does not meet with the expectation, there one may recognize stigma. However, later on people's suspicion that the marriage never took place gets even stronger, they gossip about her, not greeting her on streets and, finally, the gossips causes her and Jude to lose their jobs. Sue is already a deviant woman with her perception of marriage but now because her thoughts are turned into actions, she experiences exclusion and disvaluation. As Stafford&Scott (1986) point out deviant individuals likewise experience stigma, a mark which makes that individual different than the others (p.77). It is notable that in this era any woman who did not meet the norms was highly likely to be included in the category of the fallen woman. Then, following the components Link&Phelan have noted, one may infer that Sue is first labelled as an unmarried mother, an unaccepted quality, and then she is categorised as a fallen woman. As a result, she is devalued and experiences status loss: people now pass her by without greeting her, as discussed above, and, again, because of the gossip she and Jude lose their jobs. Moreover, through the dialogue between Arabella and Sue one learns that she could not find any job other than selling bakery products on the streets when Jude is sick (Hardy, 2002, p.302).

Raziye, on the other hand, is not an unmarried mother, but the process starts due to her secret meeting with Şefik. In the minds of other people she is İbrahim Bey's wife and, of course, the acceptable norm of togetherness dictates that the couple's togetherness should be legalized, by marriage, and the wife should not have secret meetings with her lover at night under the cumba or she should not be found in a house together with him. Thus, when the couple are raided, what marks Raziye as different from other Tanzimat wives is revealed; meeting with a lover does not belong to the category of a Tanzimat wife in the minds of others. Her breaking the norm, showing deviant actions already causes her to be open to the threat of stigmatisation. She is stigmatized, but then the question arises; how? The components Link&Phelan present are also applicable to Raziye's case. She is first labelled as an adulteress, and as the historical era predicts, as in the Victorian era, any women who did not perform what was expected of them might be categorised as a fallen women. In this way, Raziye is linked with a negative stereotype, that of the fallen woman. As a result, she is devalued and loses her status. It has been noted previously that the people once admired her like the Greeks admired Aphrodite, but this lasted only until the raid

(Mithat, 2000, p.54). She is exposed, experiences a shame parade, and a trial, and ends up as a divorced and penniless woman who is made unwelcome by every household.

In her case, the exclusion scene is important for one more reason; it shows one that Ahmet Mithat is aware of the potential criticisms and thus punishes his heroine (Ekici, 2019, p.32). However, even though Ahmet Mithat accuses men of the fall of women in society, it is again men who offer help. Şefik saves Raziye, and Ahmet Mithat does as well, only after revealing that she is still innocent. Hardy through Sue Bridehead also shows the already lost war of an unfitting individual against the society (Mallah, 2015, p.64). For that reason, unlike Ahmet Mithat, Thomas Hardy condemns his heroine to an unhappy ending. After the suicide of Little Father Time, and his killing of his siblings, Sue loses everything including her determined opposition to society, she gives in and shows that at last it is society which is always victorious (Mallah, 2015, p.64).

Even though one female protagonist is condemned and one is saved, both of the authors still call them angels. In fact, compared to their opponents they signify divinity, or soul. In *Jude the Obscure* Arabella is said to stand for carnal love (Urgan, 1991, p.300) whereas Sue is depicted as more “refined”, suitable for Jude’s intellectual taste as well (Mallett, 2002, p.112). Similarly, Ahmet Mithat (2000) compares Arife to Raziye as *aşk-ı cismaniye*, versus *aşk-ı ruhani* (p.104). All in all, in both cases *aşk-ı ruhani*, spiritual love, proves victorious over *aşk-ı cismaniye*, carnal love.

The novels, at the same time, depict characters who are influenced by the stigmatization of the heroines. The theoretical background similarly suggests that the people who are close to the stigmatized individual share in their exclusion. Sue’s lover Jude and his legal son Little Father Time, and her ‘legal’ husband Phillotson are exposed to exclusion. Jude loses his job, as noted, Little Father Time is ridiculed by his peers and Phillotson, similarly, is dismissed from school. Similarly, in *Yeryüzünde Bir Melek*, Nimetullah Hanım and Salih Çavuş are exposed to exclusion. Nimetullah Hanım is named as a “whore” along with Raziye and the way people see Salih Çavuş changes (Mithat, 2000, p.261). Thus, in order to avoid the crowd and its rejection, Nimetullah Hanım and Salih Çavuş get married and move to a desolate place.

*Yeryüzünde Bir Melek* is nourished with the theme of love and revenge; whereas love is a theme of *Jude the Obscure*, revenge is not. Arife's revenge on Raziye causes everyone to acknowledge her as a prostitute which solidifies Raziye's status as fallen woman. However, as discussed above, she is saved because of her chastity.

## DISCUSSION

Since this thesis focuses on two misfit heroines, first, one has to acknowledge what was considered as normal for women, in other words what was expected from them, back in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Prior to this discussion though, it is beneficial to acknowledge that in the two countries the development of novel was rather different. The Ottomans used translations, meaning that the effects of Western culture is inescapable, and similarly adaptations were made. However, it is noted that the effects of meddah stories and *aşık hikayeleri* were also thought to be influential (Moran, 1983, p.16). One difference may be that the victim heroine and the femme fatal characters in the Ottoman novels differ from those Western ones. Of course, at the same time, the didactic aims of the Ottoman novelists cannot be overlooked.

However, regardless of their different backgrounds and cultures, regarding the position of women in the 19<sup>th</sup> century there are massive similarities between the two. Both of them expected their female individuals to be indoors, obedient and selfless throughout their ultimate journeys as wives and mothers. In Victorian England, the image was strongly affected by Queen Victoria herself who believed that "women are not made for governing" and, similarly, she declared her "utmost joy in being married" (Arildsen, 2019, p.21-22). Adding to that, Coventry Patmore's poem 'the Angel in the House' was also influential. The Angel, though, co-exists in the society with its counterpart, and thus women who did not fulfill this ideal might effortlessly be categorised under the label 'monster' in England and "sinner" in the Ottoman Empire (Kia, 2011, p.23). Similarly, those women who did not fit in, in both of the countries are easily linked with the idea of the fallen woman. Both of the countries gave importance to the institution of the family because both believed that any corruption at the core of the society, meaning the family, might affect the rest of the society. In the Ottoman Empire's case, though, the basic reason behind the attempts to

control family was the yearning to return to its powerful days. The authors from both countries who were concerned with questioning the submissive position of women did not refrain from voicing their opinions in their works. They could not but question the image of the 'Angel in the House'. Moreover, they included those who refused to perform their duties, and they asked an important question, when the deviant women spoke, was it the voice of a 'monster' or a 'victim'?

Even though Hardy denied there were autobiographical references in his novel, some critics believe that his character echoed some aspects of Hardy's own life (Urgan, 1991, p.297). And considering this, it is no surprise that he focused on the issues of marriage and divorce since Hardy himself experienced an unhappy marriage (Urgan, 1991, p. 297&301). He simply believed that when it becomes a "cruelty to one of the parties" it is "essentially and morally no marriage" (Millgate, 1994, p.324). Furthermore, through Sue Bridehead, he emphasised marriage lost its supposedly natural ties with the feeling of love. When Sue decides to marry Jude, she notices the words "parites" on the paper; instead of "lovers" (Hardy, 2002, p.271). Similarly, marriage is referred to in the novel as an "iron contract" (Hardy, 2002, p. 249) demanding "certain behaviour from the participants" (Langland, 1980, p.23). Moreover, by naming it a "sordid contract", Sue in the novel draws attention to the artificial side of marriage (Hardy, 2002, p.201). She furthers her comments by noting the fact that 'this contract' along with having all material expectation also legalizes Phillotson's control of Sue's feelings and body. Examples may be varied; however, even from these, one readily hears Hardy's criticism towards marriage, and the position of women, as an institution.

Even though they have different backgrounds and part of distant cultures, what unites the two author's is their critical perception of marriage in their time. Just like Hardy, Ahmet Mithat Efendi also made some critical notes upon the institution. Özdemir (2014) noted that for Ahmet Mithat a balanced synthesis of West and East is needed, meaning that he is not against the "modernisation" of his society but he does not side with losing ties with tradition completely; thus Ahmet Mithat may be said to against out-of-wedlock relationships (p.115, 120, 135). Still, though, he is said to have had a critical approach regarding the marital customs of his day. For instance, pre-arranged marriages were the



common practice in the era but Ahmet Mithat prefers the couple to meet and get to know each other before they marry as long as they stay within the limits of religious belief, including, predominantly, chastity (Özdemir, 2014, p.59). Considering this, in his novel, he draws attention to the relationship between Raziye and her lawfully wedded husband, İbrahim Bey, which is a pre-arranged marriage including a huge age gap difference between the two, thus making it difficult for them to understand each other. Furthermore, Ahmet Mithat, goes as far as supporting romantic relationships and love between young couples and possible meeting places free from the critical gaze and gossip of other people (Özdemir, 2014, p.243). At the same time, he is concerned with the education and the intellectual development of young women. Ahmet Mithat acknowledges the duty of mothers and fathers towards their children and he is concerned with women's education because according to him "first and foremost the woman should be educated so that she could be a good wife and mother" (Özdemir, 2014, p.45). Similarly, in the novel, readers made sure that Raziye received a good education.

When the novels were first published they have to face brutal criticism since both novels centred around married women's love affairs. And similarly, the criticisms they have to face in the real world, may also be seen in their fictional worlds as well. Throughout the story they face discrimination, exclusion and status loss for their deviant choices. But then, how and why they are discriminated against?

As noted above, this study aims to look at those two heroines through the lens of the stigma fallen women. One of the reputed names discussing deviant individuals, Erving Goffman, in his book *Stigma* (1963), suggests that the practise of stigma could be traced back as early as the Ancient Greek world: "The Greeks, who were apparently strong on visual aids, originated the term stigma to refer to bodily signs designed to expose something unusual and bad about the moral status of the signifier" (Goffman, 1963, p.11). Goffman (1963) adds that, people back then, made use of a some kind of a "sign" which is "cut or burned into the body" of this "blemished person" who was expected "to be avoided, especially in public places" (p.11). Even though Goffman did not provide a historical resource to prove his point about this sign on the unwanted individual's body, separation of a misfit individual as a practise of Ancient Athens was proven and discussed by Solak&Teközel

and in Lang's book *Ostraka* (1990). More detailed information about the practise may be found in the theory chapter of the thesis named at the beginning.

Even though marking the different individual has an old history, when it comes to defining stigma is quite speculative since it depends on the age, culture, and so on; meaning one generation's or culture's stigma could be other's normative behaviour. In order to compensate this, in the thesis it is hypothesized that the historical backgrounds of the two countries, because of their similar expectations of female member's of their societies, provide a common ground for the discussion, as will be developed in the upcoming paragraphs.

Goffman (1963) describes stigma through a familiar scene that humans experience in their daily lives: "when a stranger comes into our presence, then, first appearances are likely to enable us to anticipate his category and attributes, his social identity (p.11). However, even though these are just seemingly simply "anticipations" one has from the very first look, they are in one's mind turned "into normative expectations" and even more they are turned "into rightously presented demands" and thus, in Goffman's terms, creating a mental "virtual social identity" of the other (p.12). In fact, according to Goffman (1963), one's mind does this unwittingly; one may not even be "aware" of that categorization and the consequent expectation of the other to fulfill what the category demands (p.12). A person realizes their expectation, though, when "an active question arises as to whether or not they [the demands] will be fulfilled" (Goffman, 1963, p.12). The thing is, as Goffman (1963) notes, there is a possibility of that stranger having "an attribute that makes him different from others in the [possible] category" that he is thought to be part of (p.11). Meaning that, even if one places that stranger into a category, he might have something that the other members of the category do not share, he might have something odd or different than what that category demands. If that be the case, or in other words if "an individuals' actual social identity does not meet" (Kurzban&Leary, 2001, p.187) with the virtual social identity one creates of him then that person "is reduced in our [one's] mind's... to a tainted or a discounted one" and as Goffman (1963) notes "such an attribute is stigma" (p.11).

Disvaluation of the ‘marked individual’ is also discussed by Stafford&Scott. Moreover, they put forward a different angle to stigma in creating a link between deviance and stigma. As discussed previously, stigma is problematic to define but Stafford&Scott (1986) provide an alternative definition of stigma as “a characteristic of a persons that is contrary to a norm of a social unit” (Stafford&Scott, 1986, p.80). And this point is where the common ground discussed above becomes handy. Even though one does not have a staunch definition of the term, since marriage established itself as the ultimate and the most prestigious goal for women in both of the cultures back in the 19<sup>th</sup> century; the deviant ones, who are violating the norms, because of their possible disvaluation may be discussed along with stigma. In addition, since the deviant ones are ready to be considered fallen women, they may be considered stigmatized as such.

Linking the negative stereotype with the stigma is discussed by Link&Phelan (2001) who suppose four “components” of stigma as follows: *distinguishing and labelling difference, linking with a negative attribute or stereotype, separation of us from them, and status loss and discrimination* (p.367).

In the light of the incompatibility between the virtual social identity and the actual social identity that Goffman discusses; along with Stafford&Scott’s and Link&Phelan’s perceptions on the topic the two heroines are discussed in the thesis.

## **CONCLUSION**

To conclude, one may note that even though the two countries are culturally different, the expectations of woman in general in the 19<sup>th</sup> century were largely held in common. Marriage was the ultimate goal, and husbands expected indoor, selfless, innocent and chaste wives. Anyone who failed to live up to these promises was liable to be labelled a fallen women. The exclusion of the heroines is crucial, because both of the authors are critical of their age’s marital customs and, moreover, Ahmet Mithat uses Raziye’s exclusion as a “punishment mechanism” to mollify the reactions towards his novel (Ekici, 2019, p.32). Similarly, Hardy shows the helplessness of the non-fitting individual in the face of society. Raziye is first labelled as an adulteress while Sue Bridehead is labelled as an unmarried woman. However, since both of the figures are unconventional, both are

NOTE: This preprint reports new research that has not been certified by peer review and should not be used as established information without consulting multiple experts in the field.

ready to be named under the category of the fallen woman and thus, the two heroines, regardless of their different backgrounds, are stigmatized as fallen woman and, in the end, they are excluded, lose their status and are devalued.

Preprint

## REFERENCES AND NOTES

- Arildsen, E. (2018). Challenging or Conforming to the Norms of Victorian Society: Queen Victoria's Stance on Women's Social Status. *Leviathan: Interdisciplinary Journal in English*, (3), 18–29.  
<https://doi.org/10.7146/lev.v0i3.107777>
- Baumeister, R. F. & Leary, M. R. (1995). The Need to Belong: Desire for Interpersonal Attachments as a Fundamental Human Motivation. *Psychological Bulletin*, 117(3), 497-529.  
[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/15420847\\_The\\_Need\\_to\\_Belong\\_Desire\\_for\\_Interpersonal\\_Attachments\\_as\\_a\\_Fundamental\\_Human\\_Motivation](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/15420847_The_Need_to_Belong_Desire_for_Interpersonal_Attachments_as_a_Fundamental_Human_Motivation)
- Ekici, I. (2019). *Ahmet Mithat Efendi'nin Roman ve Hikayelerinde Aile Yapısı*. (Unpublished masters thesis). Ege University, Turkey.
- Goffman, E. (1963). *Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity*. New Jersey, NJ: Penguin.
- Hardy, T. (2002). *Jude the Obscure*. P. Ingham (Ed.). New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- Kia, M. (2011). *Daily Life in The Ottoman Empire*. Santa-Barbara, CA: Greenwood.
- Kurzban, R., & Leary, M.R. (2001). Evolutionary Origins of Stigmatization: The Functions of Social Exclusion. *Psychological Bulletin*, 127(2), 187-208.  
Retrieved from [\(PDF\) Evolutionary Origins of Stigmatization: The Functions of Social Exclusion \(researchgate.net\)](#)
- Langland, E. (1980). A Perspective of One's Own: Thomas Hardy and the Elusive Sue Bridehead. *Studies in the Novel*, 12(1), 12-28. Retrieved from  
<https://www.jstor.org/stable/29532018>

- Link, B.G., & Phelan, J.C. (2001). Conceptualizing Stigma. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 27, 363-385. Retrieved from <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2678626>
- Mallah, N. (2015). *Differing Concepts Of Womanhood And Marriage In The Novels Of Jane Austen, Thomas Hardy, and D. H. Lawrence*. (Unpublished master's thesis). University of Aleppo, Syria.
- Mallett, P. (Ed.). (2002). *Thomas Hardy: Texts and Contexts*. New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Millgate, M. (1994). *Thomas Hardy: His Career as a Novelist*. London, England: The Macmillan Press.
- Mithat, A. (2000). *Yeryüzünde Bir Melek* [An Angel on the Earth]. N. Sağlam (Ed.). Ankara: Türk Dil Kurumu Yayınları
- Moran, B. (1983). *Türk Romanına Eleştirel Bir Bakış I : Ahmet Mithat'tan A. H. Tanpınar'a* [A Critical Look Towards Turkish Novel: From Ahmet Mithat to A.H. Tanpınar]. İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları.
- Özdemir, A. N. (2014). *Ahmet Mithat Efendi'nin Romanlarında Kadınlar* [Women in Ahmet Mithat Efendi's Novels]. (Unpublished masters thesis). Trakya Üniversitesi, Turkey.
- Society. (2023). In Etymonline dictionary. Retrieved from <https://www.etymonline.com/search?q=society>
- Stafford, M.C. & Scott, R.R. (1986). Stigma, Deviance, and Social Control: Some Conceptual Issues. In S.C. Ainlay & G. Becker & L.M. Coleman (Eds.), *The Dilemma of Difference: A Multidisciplinary View of Stigma* (pp. 77-90). New York, NY: Plenum Press. DOI: 10.1007/978-1-4684-7568-5
- Urgan, M. (1991). *İngiliz Edebiyatı Tarihi* [The History of English Literature] (Vol. IV). İstanbul: Altın Kitaplar.