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HARDY'S VISION OF LIFE IN *TESS OF THE D'URBERVILLES*

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ABSTRACT

Tess of the d'Urbervilles is a nice tale about the sufferings of its protagonist, Tess Durbyfield. It is a blooming tale which is full of enthusiasm and innocence of little Tess, who from the beginning of the novel towards the end underwent many hardships in her life. Tess is a pure woman by heart; she doesn't know anything about the insecurity of woman in the male dominated world. Tess from time to time led by many incidents, which shows to be harmful for her throughout *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*. This novel is beautifully sketched out in the out skirts of Wessex, and is full of rural scenery and landscape. The seasonal settings are carefully chosen. They reflect a perception which any city-dweller can understand that sunlight is beautiful and conducive to happiness and harmony, and that bleak winter winds and dark skies suggest misery and discomfort. The novel is structured that events take place in seasons which are artistically appropriate. Nature appears to be striving for perfection: everything tends towards wholeness. Human beings are mere creatures of Nature and they seem to strive for fulfillment at such a season. They are frequently shown to be integral parts of the natural scene. The lives of the people of Wessex are determined by the rhythms of the seasons, and by the day to day demands of the animal and crops. The world beyond rarely intrudes. *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* is an extraordinary beautiful book, as well as an astonishingly touching one. The truth that Tess's fate moves the reader so straight and deeply somehow obscures the beauty of the book, its artistic depth and intricacy. This paper explores the Hardy's vision about life. As Hardy is considered as a fatalist, who believes in fate and chance which plays the crucial role in his novels. Nature as well as chance and coincidence mingle together in this novel and they impact as well as depict the prospect of Tess. So this paper is all about the fate and chance, coincidence and nature, which affect the Tess's life course throughout the novel and brought about the tragical death to Tess.

Key Words: Chance, Fate, Death, Tragedy, Nature, Seasons and Vision.

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INTRODUCTION

Thomas Hardy is a strongly dubious thinker. His apprehension is with the emotional rather than the coherent aspects in human nature. Human will

and subjectivity constitute the Hardyan reality. It is the estrangement of the soul from the body that accounts for the chief association in Hardy's novel, which is a progress towards death. Modern in his

creative vision, Hardy occupies the absurdist place in literature and departs from all sorts of Victorian optimism. Still the note of cynicism and the 'Victorian compromise' between religion and rationalism is noticeably absent in his works. David Perkins stated in his essays Hardy and the Poetry of Isolation that Hardy's works constitute "existential isolation" (1963: 143).¹ Tragedy in the life of Hardy's characters stems from the contemporary view of a world exclusive of God; from psychic disruption and hostility and from the bedeviled human beings "wandering in an unmapped no-man's land between two worlds" (De Laura, ELH 34: 381).² It is factor of irresolution and indecision in the lives of the characters in Hardy that frustrates their yearning for accord and order, group and society. They find only division which renders their life absurd and worthless and make them float from one goal to a further. Coming to Tess Durbyfield, we come across that her life has neither ancestry nor reason. It is just a sequence of meaningless wandering in the maelstrom of life. But why does Tess suffer? What is the cause of her trouble? And why all these fruitless actions from life to demise? Tony Tanner observes in his beautiful essays Color and Movement in *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* as:

And why should it all happen to Tess? You may say..., It was to be. Or you could go through the book and try to work out how Hardy apportions the blame-a bit on Tess, a bit on society, a bit on religion, a bit on the Industrial Revolution, a bit on the men who abuse her, a bit on the sun and stars, and so on. But Hardy does not work in this way. More than make us judge. Hardy makes us see; and in looking for some explanation of why all this should happen to Tess, our eyes finally settle on that red ribbon marking out of the little girl in the white dress, which already foreshadows the red blood stain on the white ceiling. In her beginning is her end (*Hardy, The Tragic Novels*, 1975: 206).³

Tanner solicits the readers to believe the irreducible meticulous, the lonely image as the entirety of Hardy's vision. The representation of the 'red ribbon' and 'the white dress' by Hardy in *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* symbolizes the glittering of hope in the murky and frustrating life of the Tess which is additionally strengthened by 'the image of the red

blood stain on the white ceiling'. This secluded image lacks centrality but it emphasizes the novelist's 'twilight vision of life'. Further the lonely, irreducible fastidious portrays emblematically and figuratively anxiety, compartmentalization, disintegration and discontinuity; circumstances which are part of Hardy's vision; his contemporary attitude, but it cannot be said to comprise the entirety of the Hardy's vision of life as recommended by Tanner. The query of Tess's recurring sufferings in life which has been attributed to numerous impressions and causes, fails to make a sole reply. Further Tanner turns down the numerous promising answers to Tess's suffering because none of them offer any feasible explanation to the very troubles of suffering which we all, like Tess, do over and over again face in our life. Miller on the other way stated in *Forms of Modern British Fiction* that, "every issue in Tess's life is a matter of chance and accident and that such a sequence of chances can length out and seem to form a pattern" (1975: 65). In the life of Tess alter and chance coincidences and incidents play a main role in deciding her fate. The chance-coincidences form an outline of faction in her life. Miller further observes that out of these changes and chance incidents "a pattern of repetition in differences emerges as if by miracle a chain with no center, origin or end" (66).⁴ These repetitions which form a metrical pattern "are not related, are merely contiguous, leading only to discontinuity" (Miller, *Georgia Review* 30: 344).⁵ Therefore in his spotlight on a decentered text, without a start and an end, Miller, like Tanner, discovers but a facet of Hardy's vision. Apprehension between exterior matter and subjective insight, collisions of images and contradictions between framing and distraction result in deterioration. This unsettled tension between framing and distraction, symbolized by the rural/ country life surroundings and the urban city life surroundings, gives a vibrant force to the novels of Hardy. But distraction is not the final vision of Hardy's novels. The apprehension between the country and city forms a significant aspect of Hardy's picture of human predicaments. The centre of Hardy's Wessex novels is the agricultural theme; the modern calamity triggered by the urban incursion and distraction of the

conventional agricultural society. Hardy's characters suffer because they are not in accord with natural world. Nature here denotes 'human nature and instinct'. Hardy's fictional world posits a process of dislocation and distraction, the disarticulation of one perception by a further. This he accomplishes through a nimble indulgence of images and by presenting things as sights or views; scenes or pictures. He delineates his vision of life all the way through a world of images which the readers view from diverse perspectives. In *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* Tess the little girl is portrayed as "a fly on a billiard table of indefinite length, and of no more consequence to the surrounding than that fly" (142). But as Tess come into the scene; the simile and the truth-seeking proclamations are replaced by the image of the cows with 'great bags of milk' which oozed onward as the animals walked. Hardy's text pictures, things and persons more than fabric actuality. Things are viewed by Hardy in their socio-psychic and psycho-emotional aspects. Tess's never-ending journeys alone, all alone, across open expanses of land portray circumstances of living that are harsh, daunting and disappointing. Landscapes portray, though emblematically, the character of Hardy's personages. But it does not all the time mould the moods and experiences of the whole novel. On the other way, it outlines experiences and states of being in personage scenes. Frequently landscape scenes represent the connection between nature and human nature. Estrangement envelops Tess and Marian as they work on the Swede-field at Flintcomb-Ash farm. The wooden and unsatisfactory landscape spreads out into a structure that isolates the picture as is shown by Hardy in *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* as:

The whole field was in color a desolate drab; it was complexion without features, as if a face, from chin to brow, should be only an expanse of skin. The sky wore, in another color, the same likeness; a white vacuity of countenance with the lineaments gone. So these two upper and nether visages confronted each other all day long, the white face looking sown on the brown face, and the brown face looking up at the white face, without anything standing between them but the two girls crawling like flies (331).

In this context Shiela Berger observes in *Thomas Hardy and Visual Structures*:

The grotesqueness of the featureless faces injects a note of terror...mutely acknowledging the dehumanization of the life lived between them. From grotesque obliteration to charmed harmony, Hardy's Wessex is not a place but a tone, a feeling, a point of view (60).

Almost all the novels of Hardy, there is a stable and recurring consciousness of figures and landscapes and the varying connection between them. The distinguished critic Shiela Berger maintains it in her book *Thomas Hardy and Visual Structures: Framing, Disruption, Process* as:

Often before our eyes landscapes moves from being the picture to becoming the frame for a figure. Recall from *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* the overwhelming quality of the sky: "a white vacuity of countenance with the lineaments gone". The figures that look like flies are there as part of the picture, but barely. At the end of the novel, Angel turns back to observe the road he has just travelled away from Tess: "The tape-like surface of the road diminished in his rear as far as they could see and he gazed a moving spot intruded on the white vacuity of its perspective" *Tess of d'Urbervilles*: 435). A moving spot turns road into frame, and in a moment a new picture... A character's entrance into a scene restructures or redefines the scene; this activity, metaphorically, enacts the characters' efforts to order their lives (*Thomas Hardy and Visual Structures: Framing, Disruption, Process*: 63).

The entry of a character into a scene brought-out distraction in the narrative. Whereas it is frequently presented in the form of visual structures, it is present in further ways as well, for instance in manifold and conflicting narrative voices and in the division between a voice and a vision. But "these ambiguities and tensions are not always apparent; his novels and poem can give the sense of having a single, authoritative narrative voice (Berger, 1990: 96), which embodies in it the worth of a fastidious Hardy novel or the novelist himself. Hence the novel *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* ends with a note of poetic justice, a note of fatalism: Justice was done, and the president of the Immortals in Aeschylean phrase,

had ended his sport with Tess" (499). The memo of fatalistic pessimism which the novel carries is mainly on account of the protagonist's discontented intentions and gratuitous interruptions and disruptions in the smooth tone of the life. Hardy attributes these sufferings and repressions of the protagonist, Tess, to the sin penetrated by her intimates and her present privations and retributions to the Almighty for the sins of these ancestors. The narrators' statement on the Tess's seduction by Alec d'Urbervilles in the *Tess of d'Urbervilles* is as under:

One may indeed, admit the possibility of a retribution lurking in the present catastrophe. Doubtless one of Tess's mailed ancestors rolling home from a fray had dealt the same measure even more ruthlessly toward peasant girls of their time (108).

The sin of the intimates boomerangs on the straightforward and childlike life of Tess. Consequently, all assays of this pure woman who had stepped from her mother's door to try her affluence at Trantridge poultry-farm is thwarted and disturbed. Providence in the guise of chance and coincidence disrupts all her assays to shape out a niche for herself in this tough, callous and pungent world. In Hardy's novels God is a visor force. He is heartless to the pleasures and troubles of human life. In the hands of the Almighty, human beings are no superior to flies that the President of Immortals kills for sport. Fate works all the way through nature, character, chance and love. Occasionally Hardy's hero or heroine suffers at the hands of society and its conservative ethics as in the case of Tess, Sue or Jude. Intriguing into description the desolation and sufferings of Hardy protagonists it won't be erroneous to say that in the lives of most human beings there is for all time more to be endured than to be entertained. Everybody is a marionette in the hands of a sardonic fate. The mortals do descend like Icarus; however, their failures and privations are barely noticed by the human surroundings all around. The most distinguishing attribute of Hardy's melioristic view of life consists in his faith in the subsistence of an internal energy or inner urge. He refers to this power or urge as the 'Immanent Will', which is

insensible, viewless and tacit. This will is purposeless also. It does not meditate on its opinion and proceedings. It is neither good nor bad. To a certain extent, it is an uncaring and insouciant force. The Immanent Will plays the role in the story of Tess in *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*. It is all the time demanding in the diverse ways and with methods to demolish her happiness. Tess is what she is either of her heredity of her surroundings. She becomes what she becomes due to the enigmatic and mystifying working of the Immanent Will. All over in the Wessex novels, human beings emerge to be trampled by a greater force. This greater might is the Immanent Will. It first works in the outward appearance of Nature. Then it becomes an unconcerned and intimidating chance. Subsequent to this it works all the way through the errors and flaws disguised in the wills and requirements of his characters. This ultimate supremacy which is unresponsive to human suffering is termed as the Immanent Will by Hardy in *The Dynasts*, the one of his plays which he wrote. Throughout the life of Tess, the Immanent Will works in the form of chance. She meets the erroneous man at the very entrance of her life. It is over again due to the navigation of the Immanent Will that Angel Clare enters her world after Alec. It is by chance single-handedly that Tess goes to that extremely dairy farm where Clare is functioning as a pupil. The Immanent Will exploits what inheritance and upbringing have made of Tess, and that have exploits the limitation in her character. It makes her persuade Clare. When her letter of assertion slips underneath the door, fate works all the way through chance. It necessitates a revelation following the wedding of Tess and Clare. When she goes to see the parents of Angel Clare, she finds that they are away from their house, she returns disenchanted; she meets Alec preaching to some people. She writes to Angel Clare, but her letter reaches him too belatedly. The Immanent Will makes Clare to holdup his come back to Tess. The deficiency of her family forces her to acquiesce to the nasty and diabolic persuasions of Alec. This admit-defeat is hastened by the death of her father. She suffers due to the erroneous conservative scruples of her husband, Angel, who is an artifact of conventional morality.

He thinks that a woman is misled if her physical limpidness is lost. She awfully over and over again meets the immoral man at the right time. Nature works at one end but she works to a different end. Therefore, her mournful scrape. She is measly a marionette in the hands of fate, a bird in the menagerie of the Immanent Will. She flutters and beats her wings in emptiness. Dragged downward to the rivulet of life by the malevolent set-up of Destiny or the Immanent Will, she is at span hurled into the appalling bay of ruin. Tess's narrative is thus an odyssey of a solitary individual's frantic fight against overpowering odds. It is an attempt to preserve one's dignity as an entity and guard oneself from societal dilapidation. Tess is meager but truthful. She is a peasant girl but she is marvelous, yet valiant. Hardy is thus true in calling her an untainted woman. His views of limpidness are uttered by Angel Clare who says in *The Tess of d'Urbervilles*, "The beauty of ugliness of a character lay, not only in its achievements, but in its aims and impulses; its true history lay, not among things done, but among things willed" (210). Therefore a character is to be judged not by his or her accomplishments, but by tendencies, by his or her approach towards life. Well thought-out from this position it would not be incorrect to say that from the extremely outset of her ordeal, Tess's conduct, her wishes and thoughts are immaculate and pure. She is verily 'a pure woman'. Calamity in Hardy's novels is an apotheosis of the human will. It reveals to us the important decency and bravery of the human soul. Tess struggles up to the conclusion against profound odds and by her valor and resilience endears herself to the heart of the readers. She bleeds in her fight for endurance but she not at all crows downward before threatening forces. She is cleaned out but not liquidated. She surrenders her corpse to Alec but not her soul. She is trampled but not entirely smashed. Hardy's tragedies like Tess do not dampen and dissatisfy the readers. They do not anguish us. On the other way, they are ennobling and motivating. They do not shudder-our faith in life but make us further revitalizing and vivifying. They make us wiser, loyal and practical. Character may be destiny in Shakespeare but in Hardy, Destiny is character. The prospect of the Hardy's protagonists

is predestined. They are ordained to suffer the pangs of their routine subsistence. In the state of thorough hopelessness and distraction they at times cry out, it was to be in the words of Hardy in *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*:

In the ill-judged execution of the well-judged plan of things the call seldom produces the comer; the man to love rarely coincides with the hour of loving. Nature does not often say 'See' to her poor creature at a time when seeing can lead to happy doing or replies 'Here' to a body's cry of 'Where'? Till the hide and seek has become an irksome outworn game (120).

However all this be supposed to not show the way us to the conclusion that Hardy is an insightful philosopher. He is acknowledged to have objected to being called a philosopher. He is not a philosopher who gives a systematized body of contemplation or a theory of possessions. His novels, as he declares, are but a testimony of imitation. He had no specific sagacity of values. He documents his convictions and views of what is excellent or awful in human life. When he begins to pact with the query of what is right or wrong in life, he acquires a viewpoint of life. His apprehension with the theme of loveliness and ugliness, ethical and unethical, noble and ignoble, in the Wessex novels makes him somewhat of a philosopher. Thus, we can insecurely depict his views on human life as his philosophy which is an artifact of his surroundings and times in universal and his depressed and brooding disposition in particular. He portrays a miserable and dark view of life and infers that gladness is but an irregular episode in the general drama of pain and suffering. He does not have the same opinion with Browning that God is in Heaven and all is right with the world. Therefore the dreadful misery of his protagonists. Elizabeth Drew has aptly summed up Hardy's view of life in *The Novel: A Modern Guide to Fifteen English Masterpieces* as:

Hardy's vision is centered on the ironic contrast between man's aspirations and his performance; between his will and his compulsive emotions; between the illusions of his pride and his realities of his self-ignorance. The grimness of the

general human situation is always his subject. Yet his attitude towards the individuals caught in these baffling circumstances is deeply humane and compassionate. What he emphasizes as the most remarkable quality in man is his courage and his dignity (The Novel: 144).

Tess embodies Hardy's convictions about the goodness and self-esteem of the human soul. Affronted and betrayed in life, she faces the vicious assaults of continuation with strength and consummate endurance. She is by no means abject, though she goes down combating. In front of her stands the unconcerned and insensible cosmos. But she does not stoop down and she braves it out. She gives away her physic to Alec but even then she should not be scorned or damned. It was to be and it was fated. What strikes us most is somewhat undiminished in the character of Tess, which renders generosity of spirit and nobility to her feminine self. She symbolizes Hardy's sunset-type view of life. Hardy's vision of life arose from the modern-day "scientific outlook which left no place for Providence or the Christian idea of God, or love" (Pinion, 1968: 179). Tess dies for the reason that in the end, 'death must conquer'. We become subject to death all the way through birth and Hardy believes that optimism appears not simply as an absurd, but also as in reality wicked way of thinking as a bitter travesty of the appalling suffering of humanity.

Conclusion

Chance and coincidence play a vital role in all the novels of Hardy. While character is certainly responsible to a large extent for the undoing of human lives in Hardy's fiction, chance and coincidence often operate as the deciding factors in this novel. The emphasis in *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* is on certain social and historical forces-the conventional code of morality and the decline of English peasantry of the time. This book is a social, an agricultural, an even an industrial tragedy, as much as it is a personal tragedy. It is another matter that, when we think of this novel, we think of it first and foremost as a personal tragedy, the tragedy of an innocent girl who was betrayed by two men, a sensualist and an intellectual. Tess suffers for no glaring fault in her own character, and it is her brave

endurance of her suffering and her fortitude which make a true heroine of her.

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