



A CRITIQUE STUDY OF THOMAS HARDY'S *TESS OF THE D'URBERVILLES*

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ABSTRACT

Thomas Hardy wrote Tess of the D'Urbervilles in 1891. It was first published in serial form in The Graphic, a newspaper. In Hardy's book, we follow Tess Durbeyfield, a young English girl, as she navigates life and makes efforts to provide for her family. Tess experiences a great deal of pain and adversity during her journey. Another kind of realism is tragic realism. Its characters are believable and the plot is realistic as well. The anguish of a character or characters is the sad aspect of the genre. Tess is the main character who suffers in Tess of the D'Urbervilles. Tragedies frequently feature a character who suffers as a result of a fatal fault. Hardy manipulates this. Tess suffers not from her own shortcomings but from those of others around her, especially from her parents, Alec, and Angel.

Keywords: - Tragedy, Justices, Tragic Realism, Feminism, Pessimism

INTRODUCTION

The protagonist of Thomas Hardy's story is sixteen-year-old Tess Durbeyfield, who lives in a remote area of England. Tess is stunning, wise, and competent. Compared to her own parents, John and Joan Durbeyfield, she is far more capable. Her mother is traditional and superstitious, while her father is an irresponsible heavy drinker.

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In *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, Hardy depicts the complicated and challenging lives that women were leading at the period. Tess is a very powerful and capable woman based on her behaviours. In particular, when her father is unable to support them, she makes an attempt to provide for herself and her family. Tess is also logical and sensible.

But it is because of her gender that she suffers. Alec's horrible abuse of her and her body makes this evident. Due to his attraction to Tess and the fact that he views her as a lesser woman, Alec feels entitled to her. Throughout the Victorian era, this would have been a prevalent viewpoint. Alec feels enticed by Tess after he converted to religion. Another prevalent belief in Hardy's day was that men were not responsible for their behaviour towards gorgeous women as these women lured men. Tess is in a really challenging situation as a result.

“The beauty or 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.”

Tess is portrayed as a tragic woman who is torn between her own ambitions and what society expects of her. She is a victim of the tight social hierarchy prevalent in Victorian England, where women are penalised for deviating from stringent moral standards.

Set in rural Wessex, the novel *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* is divided into seven 'phases'. Thomas Hardy coined the term "Wessex," which refers to South and South-West England. He first utilised this fictional area as the backdrop for his book *Far From the Madding Crowd* (1874). This picturesque rural area piqued readers' interest to the point where guidebooks to literary landmarks were written. Wessex was described as "a merely realistic dream country (preface)" by Hardy in the preface to *Far From the Madding Crowd* because he didn't want it to be taken literally.

We learn about the Durbeyfield family throughout this stage. They reside in rural Wessex, a region Thomas Hardy made up. They're not too wealthy either. They are descended from an aristocratic family known as the D'Urbervilles, John Durbeyfield learns. This new status has pleased him and Joan much.

They visit the neighbourhood tavern, blow a lot of cash, and get wasted. Joan requests that Tess go to the home of the D'Urberville family, a wealthy local family, and reveal their relationship. By doing this, Joan aspires to become wealthy and well-known. Because Tess has high moral standards and feels that this would be improper and embarrassing, she declines.

To raise money for the family, John Durbeyfield is going to a market. But after drinking so much, he is unable to go, so Tess has to go in his place. Although Tess is successful in selling



her products, Prince, the family horse, dies in an accident. The family's financial success was largely due to Prince, and Tess feels terrible about this. Tess consents to go look for work at the affluent D'Urberville family's estate at Trantridge as a result of her remorse.

Alec, the family's son, welcomes Tess. He finds Tess a job tending to the family's chickens, demonstrating his obvious infatuation with her. Tess soon learns that the D'Urberville family did not inherit the name; rather, they gained it via trade. Their family is not connected to hers in any way. As Tess works there, Alec keeps pursuing her.

He draws her into a remote spot one evening. It is implied—even though Hardy doesn't state it out loud—that Alec rapes Tess. Following this occurrence, Tess departs from Trantridge. She goes back to her family's house to give birth now that she is pregnant. Joan wants Tess to get in touch with Alec and make him do something for their child.

Tess is unable to do this because of her strong morals. Tess now finds it more difficult to live in her little town because being an unmarried mother was always viewed as quite disgraceful in her society. After giving birth, Tess named her son Sorrow. Due to his extreme weakness, he does not last long. After her son passes away, Tess administers the baptism herself because Sorrow does not survive long enough to do so. Then she bury him in a deserted section of the neighbourhood graveyard. Tess is going through a really difficult moment.

For a long period, Tess laments the loss of her son. Eventually though, she'll have to go back to work to pay her bills. Tess starts working at Talbothays Farm as a milkmaid. She meets Angel Clare here. Tess is obviously attracted to him romantically, and he feels the same way.

Although Angel comes from an affluent family, he is preparing to become a farmer. Because of his strong scepticism towards religion, Angel is unable to follow in his father's footsteps as a pastor. Angel spends some time courting Tess. They progressively come to love one other.

Due to his concern that Tess's working-class upbringing won't be accepted by his parents, Angel is a little uncomfortable proposing to her. This is lessened by the revelation of her aristocratic heritage as well as her grace and brilliance. Additionally, Angel is inspired to instruct Tess by her intelligence. She learns a great deal from Angel and is an excellent student. This also applies to his doubts about religion.

Tess and Angel are expected to tie the knot eventually. Tess is afraid Angel will find out about Alec's actions towards her and the kid she lost. She worries that he'll think less of her. Joan tells Tess not to talk about her history. Rather, Tess makes repeated attempts to inform Angel about her background. These efforts are all unsuccessful.

After getting married, Tess and Angel go on their honeymoon. Angel admits he once had an affair with an older woman while they were on their honeymoon. Tess grants him forgiveness



when he begs for it. Inspired by this, Tess opens out about her personal history. Horrified, Angel dissolves their union. Tess is compelled to return to her family's house once he departs for South America.

Tess gives the money Angel gave her to her family, but it soon runs out. She accepts a demanding and challenging position at Flintcomb-Ash Farm. Tess travels to Angel's family home in a state of desperation to beg for assistance. In a panic, she decides to depart at the last minute. Tess passes a church where a sermon is being given on her way back. It turns out that this man is Alec D'Urberville.

Alec tells Tess he's trying to atone for his faults and that he's converted. Tess expresses her extreme scepticism towards Alec. She is made to vow by Alec that she will never 'tempt' him once more. This reveals his opinion of what transpired between them.

Now Alec starts going for Tess once more. He informs her that he left the monastic life because of her cynicism and that, because of their history, he now wishes to marry her. Alec keeps trying to aid Tess and the Durbeyfield family financially, but she keeps turning him down. Tess's father passes away, and both of her parents are sick.

“Her affection for him was now the breath and life of Tess's being; it enveloped her as a photosphere, irradiated her into forgetfulness of her past sorrows, keeping back the gloomy spectres that would persist in their attempts to touch her—doubt, fear, moodiness, care, shame. She knew that they were waiting like wolves just outside the circumscribing light, but she had long spells of power to keep them in hungry subjection there.”

The Durbeyfield family is impoverished and facing eviction. Tess makes an effort to relocate the family in order to provide for her mother, all of her siblings, and herself financially. Having failed, she yields to Alec. If Tess resides with him as his wife, he would give the family security and a place to dwell. The Trantridge mansion becomes home to Tess and her family.

Angel's commercial endeavours in South America are a complete failure. In addition, he is extremely sorry for how he handled Tess. Angel comes back to attempt to put things right. He discovers Alec and Tess are married and living in a boarding home. During their talk, Tess rejects Angel's apology and his plea. She dismisses him.

After then, Hardy adopts the viewpoint of the boarding house's landlady. She can plainly see that there is a red stain coming through the ceiling from the room above. This room is Alec's and Tess's. It's immediately evident that Alec was fatally stabbed by Tess. She heads out of the boarding house, pursuing Angel. After Tess tells Angel what has transpired, the two spend several days evading the authorities. It's obvious that he loves her very much.



Tess arrives at Stonehenge with Angel. It appears that Tess has accepted her fate. She promises Angel that she will wed Liza-Lou, her younger sister. As the police encircle Stonehenge the following morning, Tess is taken into custody for the murder.

Tess of the D'Urbervilles is concluded by Hardy with Angel and 'Liza-Lou strolling away together. They are leaving the prison where Tess was incarcerated under a black banner. This suggests that Tess was put to death for her crimes.

Hardy himself says:

“My pessimism, if pessimism it be, does not involve the assumption that the world is going to the dogs ... On the contrary my practical philosophy is distinctly Melioristic.”

Now it is crystal clear that Hardy is a meliorist rather than a pessimist. R. A. Scott James observes:

“Hardy did not set out to give us a pessimistic philosophy ... Hardy is pessimistic about the governance of the Universe, but not about human beings.”

In Tess of the D'Urbervilles, justice is essential. Throughout Hardy's book, Tess endures a lot of harsh and unfair treatment. Injustices abound in her life. Tess is blamed by her society for being pregnant despite having been the victim of a horrifying rape. Angel, the guy she marries, also holds her accountable for this. This relates to the gender inequality subject that was discussed earlier. Tess is a woman in a patriarchal culture, which contributes to some of the injustices she faces.

“It was the touch of the imperfect upon the would-be perfect that gave the sweetness, because it was that which gave the humanity”

The fact that Tess cannot sustain her family once her father passes away and she must go back to Alec for assistance is an additional injustice. A man who has treated her so badly must have her obedience. This is to ensure that her family has access to food and housing. This is just one more sad turn of events.

“Hardy’s pessimism is not oppressive, it is not the outcome of a soul which rebelled against life. Rebellion against life itself ...”

Tess is never judged by Thomas Hardy's narrator, in contrast to her society. He is portraying her pain in an unkind world. Hardy demonstrates Tess's underlying goodness. She makes a sincere effort to act morally. She still has to deal with a lot of injustice, though. Tess



frequently battles this unfairness since she believes that everything is against her. Here, Hardy illustrates how unfair the world is.

“Never in her life – she could swear it from the bottom of her soul – had she ever intended to do wrong; yet these hard judgments had come. Whatever her sins, they were not sins of intention, but of inadvertence, and why should she have been punished so persistently?” (Chp. 51)

Tess eventually kills Alec. This is one of Tess of the D'Urbervilles' most intricate plot points. This is Tess's deserved compensation for Alec's mistreatment and violation of her.

Hardy left it up to the readers' interpretation, but since Tess has committed murder and is being held for it, she has perpetrated an injustice. He also doesn't address the issue of how the book ends. It seemed quite fitting that Tess's life ended so cruelly, considering everything she had to go through. Or she's been punished for stealing the life of someone else.

The way that Angel treats Tess after learning about her past is another example of gender inequality in Tess of the D'Urbervilles. He acts in a contradictory manner. Tess has pardoned him for his previous actions, which included actions that their culture would consider inappropriate. But Angel holds Tess responsible for what was imposed on her. Hardy is revealing a highly skewed perspective on the world.

In addition, Hardy demonstrates how Tess is viewed very differently by the two men who are romantically interested in her. Alec has an extremely lustful view of Tess. He is drawn to her and concentrates on her attractive appearance. Alec uses deception to obtain what he desires from Tess.

Although Angel is considerably gentler with Tess, his perception of her remains distorted. Angel's impression of Tess is idealised when he first meets her. Because he believes she is flawless, he calls her "Artemis," after a Greek goddess. Tess appears to Angel like the Victorian archetype of the "Angel of the House."

Alec and Angel both mistakenly perceive Tess as a woman, which is what unites them. Neither of them recognises her true self. Although none of them views her as human, she stands for certain things to them both.

Throughout the Victorian era, the Angel of the House cliché was prevalent. It alludes to the notion of the ideal wife and mother. She is gentle, well-mannered, pure, and adept at doing all household chores. The line originates from Coventry Patmore's poem of the same name from 1854.

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Thomas Hardy's writings reflect a pessimistic viewpoint in which a character's downfall is determined by possibility or fate. Destiny and pessimism are still evident, even though they are much more suppressed. Thomas Hardy cemented his place in the hearts of commentators by writing about Victorian Britain with a great deal of pessimism in his early works and then giving up books one by one to write poetry and novels. In fact, this one-two punch of political correctness and creative fabrication would have ensured that he was overstated even if he had been an absolute hack. That being said, his ability as a writer has ensured that he is among the most underappreciated authors in the English language.

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