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Role of Chance and Fate in Thomas Hardy's *Far From the  
Madding Crowd*

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**Abstract**

Without any shadow of doubt, it can be said that Thomas Hardy is of the leading novelists of the Victorian Age who contributed a great deal to the development of Victorian novel by imparting it depth and gravity. *Far From the Madding Crowd* is a powerful tragic expression by Hardy in which he portrays beautifully the role of chance and fate played in the lives of the characters that ultimately leads to the suffering and even death of some characters. This role of chance and fate is so prominent in Hardy's fictional works that some critics call Hardy as a pessimistic novelist.

Hardy's philosophy of life is marked with a strong note of fatalism. In Hardy's novels Destiny is character. Man is a helpless creature, a mere puppet at the hands of Destiny or Fate. Man in Hardy's world does not enjoy Free Will. The keen eyes of fate are always looking intently on his activities with a view to intervening as and when it so likes. Man is not free to choose the type of life he wants to live. Obstacles and hindrances swarm on his path of life,

**Key Words:** Chance, Fate, Tragedy, Atmosphere, Pessimism, Character.



## Paper

There is no doubt in denying the fact that during the first half of the nineteenth century, Charles Dickens contributed with his humorous and satirical portraits in his novels, and during the second half of the same century, it was Thomas Hardy who has translated his typical philosophy and architectural skill in his novels like *Far From the Madding Crowd*, *Tess of D'urbervilles*, *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, *Under the Greenwood Tree*, and *Jude the Obscure*.

So, whether it is Bathsheba, Tess, Jude, or Henchard, their personalities are architecturally gigantic and thematically domineering to the extent that when pitted against the vast immensity of indifferent and callous nature or environment, they appear insignificant and small. Consequently, these heroes and heroines of Hardy are humbled and crushed to uphold the invincible power or supreme will along with emphasizing the malignity of fate and human destiny.

In other words, every novel of Thomas Hardy in general, and *Far From the Madding Crowd* in particular, is an artistic rendering of the central conflict between the individual's will and supreme will, or what David Cecil rightly calls it an interplay between the characters and the environment. There is a tragic tale of suffering, torment ending in the final death of the hero and heroines which constitutes the crux of the central thematic vision of Hardy's novels.

In the same way, *Far From the Madding Crowd* is a powerful and electrifying illustration of this interplay between man and his environment, or what Dorothy Van Ghent rightly calls the interaction between character and fate. So, while discussing the central thematic vision of Hardy's novels, it should be kept in mind that the world of Hardy - the Wessex society - is the



most powerful force which both defines and determines the central thrust of the book. Any shift of focus and emphasis can be made on behalf of one's own complete understanding of the theme of the novel as well as the central thematic vision of the novelist.

*Far From the Madding Crowd* is a powerful exploration of tragedy of characters and delineates the story of the career and personality of a man who is impulsively rash and is gifted with a strong will power and a man of fairly ambitious disposition. In the very beginning of the novel, the marriage proposal of the hero of the novel, Gabriel Oak, is dismissed by the heroine of the novel, Bathsheba Everdane. Hardy describes the dislocate look of a man with the streak of calmness followed by the non-communicative silence between the hero and heroine of the novel speaking of their meeting.

After a cruel blow given by the fate, the hero of the novel, Gabriel Oak, has to serve as a shepherd under the heroine of the novel, Bathsheba, when all his hopes of prosperity are dashed to the ground. Even after many ups and downs which come one by one in oak's life, he remains faithful and loyal towards Bathsheba and, moreover, when Bathsheba marries Sergeant Troy, a trickster and Oak, as a stoic, endures it calmly. The opening of the novel, suggests the heroine as a vain, tainted, haughty and proud as well as conscious of her beauty, but is unconscious of the everlasting loyalty of Gabriel oak.

The valentine sent by Bathsheba to a calm, sober and submissive Boldwood, creates a very explosive and destructive effect on him finally culminating in to the tragic end of Boldwood. Towards the end of the novel, the everlasting loyalty of Gabriel Oak is rewarded as he is united with Bathsheba. The role of chance and fate which is not so prominent in *Far From the Madding*



Crowd is found to be in its most effective form in Hardy's later novel *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, *Tess of D'Urbervilles* and *Jude and Obscure*.

Hardy's delineation power of handling the characters, particularly in case of female characters, is at its best in the present novel, the way in which he traces a remarkable transformation in Bathsheba's personality from a vain and haughty lady in to a calm, sober and submissive one. In all of his novels in general and, *Far From the Madding Crowd* in particular, Hardy depicts a group of rustic characters which contributes a lot in relieving the tense atmosphere with certain amusement.

However, Hardy might not be a radical iconoclast like Shaw, but certainly is a radical thinker and a philosopher, who has structured and shaped almost all of his works on the strong edifice of his artistic vision and philosophy of life. In that sense, he is the most discussed and misunderstood artist whose vision has been explored as per the suitability, taste and need of different scholars from time to time.

While for David Cecil he is the most pessimistic novelist with a tragic view of life, but for Arnold Kettle, his novels are gloom architecture in to a complex pattern of life, whereas for F.R Leavis, Hardy might not be a tragic artist, but the final vision of life he portrays is that of poetic justice and triumph of goodness and the virtuous.

So, the roll call of past and present scholars give us a very disturbing and even the conflicting picture of Hardy as a novelist mentioned appears to be conglomeration, complicating and even contradictory views. But, the comprehensive and understanding of Hardy's philosophy can be achieved by making a close and incisive scrutiny of all the texts of his novels in general and, *Far From the Madding Crowd* in particular.



Unlike Dickens, Hardy believes in a different and even indignant superpower assuming different grabs like nature, environment, destiny, fate, and chance which is responsible for all happenings and misfortunes, tensions and conflicts, struggle and defeat of human beings in life course central to the philosophy of the novelist which is the concept of supreme will vis -a vis individual will which are invariable and at loggerhead and opposed to each other as David Cecil points out:

“A struggle between man, on the one hand and, on the other, an omnipotent and indifferent fate-  
that is Hardy’s interpretation of human situation.”

In this regard, Hardy seems to share Shakespeare’s vision in *King Lear*, where Lear says

“As flies to wanton boys are we to god  
They kill us for their sport”

However, the philosophical vision presented by Hardy will not be completely discussed and understood without understanding the omnipotent role of the cosmic forces of nature translated in terms of fate of man that thematically justifies the re- appearance of Sergant Troy, a man who is fully responsible for the final tragedy of fanny robin and also whatever is left.

In other words, the tragedy of all characters in *Far From the Madding Crowd* is not the tragedy of a simple arithmetic equation of the rise and fall of human beings within a given socio-cultural and psycho- spiritual complex, rather in the tragic death of a few characters. There is a powerful illustration of hardy’s central philosophy as a novelist where the human life is depicted as an inevitable and inherently doomed of what Elizabeth Jane says in *The Mayor of Casterbridge* after the death of Micael Henchard when she says:

“Happiness is but an occasional episode in the general drama of pain and suffering”



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