



Individual Versus Immanent Will in Thomas Hardy's *Tess of D'urbervilles*

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Abstract

Thomas Hardy is one of the most renowned Victorian novelists who has contributed a great deal to the development of English fiction. He has faithfully reflected the Victorian temper with the pessimism of the age along with a strong streak of moral vision in his fictional works. His novel, *Tess of D'Urbervilles* is a powerful and electrifying exemplification of the conflict between immanent will and individuals where the individuals find themselves beaten at the hands of

malignant chance and fate that destroy human happiness. There is a continuous struggle between man and omnipotent and indifferent fate which describes beautifully Hardy's interpretation of human situation in this universe.

Paper

If the first half of the nineteenth century is recognized by the humorous and satirical novels of Charles Dickens, undoubtedly the second half is determined by Thomas Hardy with his typical philosophy and architectural



skills translated in form of *Far From the Madding Crowd*, *Tess of D'Urbervilles*, *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, and *Jude and Obscure*.

So, whether it is *Bathsheba* or *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 even callous nature or environment, they appear insignificant and small. Consequently, these heroes of Hardy are humbled and crushed to uphold the invincible power of the supreme will alongwith emphasizing the malignity of fate and human destiny.

In other words, every novel of Hardy in general and *Tess of D'Urbervilles* in particular, are an artistic rendering of the central

conflict between the individual's will and supreme will, or what David Cecil has aptly remarked the interplay between the characters and the environment. There is a tragic tale of sufferings and 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, *Tess of D'Urbervilles* is a powerful and electrifying illustration of this interplay between man and his environment, or what Dorothy - Van -Ghent has rightly called the interaction of character and fate. So, it should be kept in mind that the world of Hardy – the Wessex society – is the most powerful force which both determine and defines the central thrust of the novel.



Tess of D'Urbervilles is a powerful tragic expression of its central protagonist, Tess, the eldest daughter of Jack Durbeyfield, who is himself the debased last result of the ancient and picturesque Wessex family, the D'Urbervilles. Chance plays its vital and significant role when Tess' father horse, Prince, is killed in an accident who was the only source of earning bread for the whole family.

It is because of Tess' mismanagement of the horse as well as her over confidence which contribute to her unhappiness as well as her parents as Dorothy Van Ghant rightly remarks:

With this accident are concatenated in fatal

Union Tess' going to Claim' Kin of the

D' Urbervilles and all the other links in her

Tragedy down to the murder of Alec¹

Tess' life is ruined by her parents who send her to claim kinship with some rich people as the whole family was in distress. The cruel chance and fate is responsible for Tess' tragedy as it provides Alec an opportunity to seduce Tess in the name of love. Tess is now no longer a virgin, and should not love the man who had applied the force of brutality in the love making. Now, Tess has her pile of sorrows, she gives birth a child and named him Sorrow, and then Sorrow's death brings additional sorrow for Tess as says George Wing:

The act of human coupling is at its ugliest, when it takes the form of rape, because such a



barbarism is not only a violation of woman's body, but of her personality and her social and civilized right.²

Tess now goes to search another employment and reaches at Tolbothays and decides to be a dairymaid where she comes into contact with Angle Clare. One day, she reveals her pessimism to Clare when she says: " My life looks as if it had been wasted for want of chance....."

Angle Clare proposes her for marriage as he had been dazzled by her beauty, but Tess hesitates to accept this proposal of marriage. Tess' mother advised her to go ahead with her marriage with Clare without revealing her past, but she finds it to be hard enough to be dishonest to him. So, she writes a letter and directed it to Clare and slips the letter under his

door. But, chance plays its vital role as the letter slips under the carpet and when he comes to know the reality after his marriage then he is badly mistaken. Angel feels that he has been duped, tricked by an apparently pure woman and his love for her is instantly frozen. Clare was an intellectual being, yet the weakness of conscience which was inculcated in him by the male dominated social and moral environment in which he had been brought up, guided him wrongly. Arnold Kettle rightly says in this connection:

Hardy took his philosophy of Immanent Will seriously and undoubtedly saw Tess as the victim of the president of Immortals. A pessimistic and determinist view of the the world in which man is at the mercy of an unyielding outside

fate is the conscious philosophy behind the novel.³

However, Hardy may not be a radical iconoclast like G.B.Shaw, but he is a radical thinker and a philosopher who has structured and shaped almost all his works on the strong edifice of his artistic vision and philosophy of life. While for David Cecil, "He is the most pessimistic novelist with a tragic view of life"⁴. But 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 virtuous"⁵

Unlike Dickens, Hardy believes in an indifferent and even indignant superpower assuming different grabs like nature, environment, destiny, fate and chance responsible for all happenings and misfortunes,

tensions and conflicts, struggles and defeats of human beings in life course central to the philosophy of the novelist, is the concept of supreme will vis-à-vis individual will which are invariable and opposite 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"⁶

In this way, Hardy seems to share Shakespeare's vision of King Lear

Where King Lear says:

As flies to wanton boys are we

To God;

they kill us for their sport

In this way, the tragedy of all the characters in Tess of D'Urbervilles 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 a tragic death of a few characters. There is a powerful illustration of Hardy's central philosophy as a novelist where human beings' life is depicted as an inevitable and inherently doomed of what Elizabeth Jennings says in *The Mayor of Casterbridge* after the death of Michael Henchard:

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

References:

1 Dorothy Van Ghent on *Tess of D'Urbervilles*, *A Collection of Critical Essays* ed. Albert J. Guerard (Englewood Cliff: Prentice Hall, 1963) p.80

2 George Wing, *Hardy* (London: Oliver and Boyd Ltd., 1963) p.69

3 Arnold Kettle, *An Introduction to the English Novel*, Vol.2 Henry James to the present Day (Hutchinson University Library, London) p.57

4 David Cecil, *The Novels of Thomas Hardy* (Longmans Green and Co. Ltd., 1950) p.94

5 F.R. Leavis *Thomas Hardy: A Study of His Novels* (Oxford Clarendon Press, 1982) p.57

6 David Cecil, *The Novels of Thomas Hardy* (Longmans Green and Co. Ltd., 1950) p.65