

Tess of the d'Urbervilles: the Tragedy of Godless Human Existence

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Abstract

In *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* Thomas Hardy depicts a godless world where human consciousness is unable to comprehend the consciousness of the universe. Hardy shows that, having created God as the culmination of his own moral perception, man hopelessly expects mercy and poetic justice from his own creation. Tess's catastrophe is not the work of Christian God, but the work of the powers beyond the understanding of the character. Although Hardy suggests the solution for the circle of tragedy in human solidarity, in the civilization of man, or in the social stratification of the Victorian world, however, there is no place for peace and harmony. Hence, from Hardy's perspective, man is alone and defenseless in the face of the tragedy awaiting him. Criticizing in a sardonic way the patriarchal mentality and the ignorance of his main character Tess, Hardy reveals that human existence is tragic, and what defines the life of individual is crass-casualty.

Key Words: God, Fate, Universal ethics, Tragedy, Human consciousness.

Özet

Thomas Hardy *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* adlı eserinde tanrısız bir dünyada insan bilincinin evrensel bilinci algılayamayacağı hikâye eder. Hardy tanrı kavramının aslında insanın ahlaki algılayışının bir sonucu olduğunu ve insanın kendi yarattığı bu varlıktan çaresiz bir şekilde ilahi adalet ve merhamet beklediğini anlatır. Tess'in felaketini planlayan da Hıristiyan tanrısı değil, karakterin algılayamayacağı güçlerdir aslında. Hardy, bu döngüyü kırmanın yolunun insan dayanışmasından geçtiğini gösterse de, insanın yarattığı medeniyette, ya da Victoria Çağı'nda barış ve huzur yoktur. Dolayısıyla, Hardy'nin bakış açısından değerlendirildiğinde, insan kendisini bekleyen trajediye karşı yalnız ve savunmasızdır. Alaycı bir şekilde insan cehaletinin ve ataerkil düşünce kalıplarının tezahürünü ana karakteri Tess'e yüklerken, Hardy varoluşun trajik olduğunu, bireyin hayatını da sadece kör talihin belirlediğini söyler.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Tanrı, Kader, Evrensel etik, Trajedi, İnsan Bilinci.

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Tess of the d'Urbervilles (1891) is Hardy's twelfth novel, and can be classified as the gloomy work of his maturity which sees the existence of man as tragic. The novel depicts, through the story of Tess, the daughter of the poor rural family, a Godless universe where hostile powers are at work and against man. When Hardy wrote *Tess*, he had already developed an obsessive attitude in his fiction concerning the clash between human consciousness, and the (un)consciousness of the universe. Although Hardy's characters try to attribute meaning to their existence and to the cosmos in which they exist, they are always defeated by the powers beyond their control. Building up a cause-effect relation in his fiction in the form of chain-reaction, Hardy shows that there is, for his tragic characters, a First Cause, a triggering event which leads up to the sequence of events, and "we find that the First Cause almost always works malevolently against mankind," (Saxena-Dixit, 2005, p.25) it is through this malevolence that the fate of the tragic character is sealed. At first, man in Hardy's fiction is unable to realize that some forces have already been arrayed against him, but later on, the character fully understands that irrational powers are at work, and they have already weaved a "plot" against him. The character's final reaction, in frenzy, is an unexpected suicidal response, a final challenge of human consciousness against the weird consciousness of the universe.

The encounter of Jack Durbeyfield with the parson, who tells him that his "ancestor was one of the twelve knights who assisted the Lord Estremaville in Normandy in his conquest of Glamorganshire . . . [and] Branches of [his] family held manors over this part of England" (Hardy, 2000, p. 4) changes Jack's life thoroughly. A chain reaction occurs on account of this coincidental event, which may be called as the "First Cause," and all is drawn into the sequence of events, initiated by this core event, which changes the life of Jack's daughter Tess, and through this change, changes also the lives of the characters related to her. Hence, the notion that everybody is connected to everybody is revealed to describe humanity as one great body, and the idea of "salvation" Christianity offers to man, from Hardy's viewpoint, is just an illusion man has created as he created Christianity itself.

Influenced by both Ludwig Feuerbach and Auguste Comte, Hardy sees Christian God as the product of man, and attaches himself to the "System of Positive Polity as well [to the ideas of Positivism expressed by] Edward Spencer Beesley, John Morley, Cotter Morrison, and Frederic Harrison. He certainly agree[s] with Comte's aim to promote human altruism." (Schweik, 1999, p.66) In a world where there is no God, man is alone and has to develop his own logic of the universe which can never accord with the "illogical" logic of the universe. Hence, what is called "fate" is, in fact, this "logic" of the cosmos which man is hardly able to understand. As Hardy knows that there is not a benevolent God with his poetic justice, the only way to cope with the hostile powers is the solidarity among men, which is almost impossible to achieve. Hence, man

is hopelessly alone and forlorn in the universe, and what is left to man is only endurance in the face of crass-casualty.

Tess's downfall is not the work of the Christian God, but caused by the blind powers in the form of a sequence of mishaps. The First Cause for Tess is her family origin. Having been born from a poor and inconsiderate mother who happily gave "births to so many little sisters and brothers, when it was such a trouble to nurse and provide for them," (Hardy, 2000, p.30) and as the daughter of a vain peddler, her destiny has already been sealed as an unfortunate girl. In the chain-reaction of cause-effect relations, she accidentally kills the only horse of the family, the only means of the family's income: fatigued by hard work, she falls asleep while driving to the market. Her father was then terribly drunk to take on the journey himself. The horse skids into the path of another vehicle and is killed. Although Tess is not guilty for the accident, she, however, blames herself for the loss, and this is the beginning of her journey into life: to compensate the loss, she accepts to be sent to the house of Mrs. d'Urberville where she meets Alec, her seducer.

As Tess feels the responsibility of the family more than her parents, she accepts to go and see Mrs. d'Urberville, who, the parents think, is their relative and will make Tess's fortune. In fact, there is no connection between the two families.

The d'Urbervilles—or Stoke-d'Urbervilles, as they at first called themselves—who owned all this, were a somewhat unusual family to find in such an old-fashioned part of the country. Parson Tringham had spoken truly when he said that our shambling John Durbeyfield was the only really lineal representative of the old d'Urberville family existing in the country . . . When old Mr Simon Stoke, latterly deceased, had made his fortune as an honest merchant (some said money-lender) in the North, he decided to settle as a country man in the South of England . . . and in doing this he felt the necessity of recommencing with a name that would not too readily identify him with the smart tradesman of the past . . . Conning for an hour in the British Museum the pages of the works devoted to extinct, half-extinct, obscured, and ruined families . . . he considered that *d'Urberville* looked and sounded as well as any of them . . . [He took this name as his family name which] poor Tess and her parents were naturally in ignorance. (pp. 31-32)

When Tess goes to the d'Urberville mansion, she meets with young Alec, the only son of the family. Tess does not like him even at first sight. Alec, however, appreciates her beauty, and when she says that they are of the same family, he at first thinks that Tess is one of those Stokes, a poor relation. He, however, does not reveal his true identity even after realizing that on account of a misunderstanding Tess has come to visit his mother, Mrs. d'Urberville. For Alec, a typical licentious and lustful Victorian gentleman, she is just a prey to be seduced and abused.

Hardy keeps the “man against nature” conflict as central in his novels, yet, he deals with the Victorian theme of social stratification through “man against man” conflict. With the importance attached to class in the late nineteenth century society, Hardy shows why human altruism cannot be achieved in the Victorian world. In a society in which the concept of class has already been established to form the individual relations of conflict and contract, John Durbeyfield is under the illusion that his “aristocratic background” is significant since this background connects him to the rich d’Urbervilles. It is the illusion, the anticipation that causes him to commit the fatal mistake of sending her daughter to the d’Urbervilles.

As Tess’s parents are so numb and numb to understand what suffering is, they do not suffer. Tess, however, with consciousness and sense of responsibility, is the suffering character. Since the parents do not have the perception to see the awaiting danger, and the conscientiousness to protect Tess, and since there is no benevolent God and His protective angels, Tess is so helpless: in the hands of Alec, she is such a prey that no guardian angel can save her from rape. As Hardy narrates,

Darkness and silence ruled everywhere around. Above them rose the primeval yews and oaks of The Chase, in which there poised gentle roosting birds in their last nap; and about them stole the hopping rabbits and hares. But, might some say, where was Tess’s guardian angel? Where was the providence of her simple faith? Perhaps, like that other god of whom the ironical Tishbite¹ spoke, he was talking, or he was pursuing, or he was in a journey, or he was sleeping and not to be awakened. (pp. 64-65).

Here, Hardy seems to be attached to Feuerbach’s idea that “the Christian god is the product of man’s need to imagine perfection” (Schweik, 1999, p. 66) *and* protection, and the ethical, therefore tragic characters, are not helped by the benevolent and omnipotent God that “sees” everything. For Hardy, all the social norms and moral rules, though they take their inspiration from religion, are human creations. Any violation of these rules will not be hindered by the fabricated God of fictitious Christianity. For Hardy, then, there is either no God, or God has already left the world and man. In the passage above, he makes fun of the reluctance of God to interfere into the human affairs, saying that God was perhaps “sleeping and not to be awakened” while Tess was being raped by Alec. Since God is absent and therefore cannot intervene into the human affairs, man is alone and defenseless in the universe. This perception of Hardy reduces man to the level of other creatures: he sees that man is no different from the other creatures in nature in terms of the rules for survival: he is no better, no worse. Like the other creatures, he has a transient existence, and exists just for a brief moment. As there is no God, man is in the hands of *universal ethics*, or to put it another way, in the hands of natural laws. The

¹ (p.65) *Tishbite* Elijah. The reference is to I Kings 18, which describes him mocking the priests of Baal when their god fails to answer their prayers.

universe, however, is neither malevolent nor benevolent. It is *indifferent* to man and his consciousness.

When Alec takes full advantage of Tess, the reason for such a rape is clear. As suggested early in the novel, when Tess visits the d'Urberville mansion for the first time, Alec feeds Tess with strawberries (Chapter V). This scene is, in fact, very suggestive; it depicts Alec as the stereotypical sensuous man, and foreshows his licentious motives concerning Tess. Since Hardy introduces Alec as the *amoral sensual character* who never cares for human sentiments, we come to know him to be the stereotypical cause creating tragic effects in a chain reaction. Hence, his taking advantage of the moment is natural: lust, passion, or taking advantage of the situation as it develops, however, does not exculpate his deed as any more than dark intention. With this rape Alec impregnates Tess. What he does will create tragic consequences.

In “Phase the Second,” titled “Maiden No More,” Tess turns back to her village to give birth to Alec’s child. During her stay at home she isolates herself from everybody. Even “the bedroom she shared with some of the children formed her retreat more continually than ever.” (p. 75) She shuns people, and only after dark, she goes into the woods. She is never afraid of “the shadows; [and] her sole idea seemed to be to shun mankind—or rather that cold accretion called the world, which, so terrible in mass, is so unformidable, even pitiable, in its units.” (p. 75) At this phase of her life, she is slowly beginning to sense that “some vague ethical being whom she could not class definitely as the God of her childhood” (p. 75) has taken control of her life, and as she gets experienced, she comes to an awareness that she is a victim. As she develops through her sorrow, she differentiates herself from the other characters.

Scientific discoveries and philosophical renovations of the mid-Victorian age affected Hardy to the extent of amalgamating science and philosophy into a new synthesis and thereby create his own theory of man and his place in the universe. In fact, in mid-Victorian England, apart from the debates between Utilitarians and philosophical conservatives, the popularization of the ideas of Charles Darwin by the biologist Thomas Henry Huxley challenged the established beliefs:

Victorian England was certainly competitive and individualistic, and eventually a significant percentage of the intellectuals in Darwin’s day came to accept that species evolve . . . but they rejected just about every other aspect of Darwin’s theory. They would accept evolutionary theory just so long as certain offensive parts were removed – just the parts that externalists cite as reasons for Darwin’s contemporaries accepting his theory. (Hull, 2005, p. 149)

Moreover, the discoveries of astronomers, by extending knowledge of stellar distances to dizzying expanses, were likewise disconcerting. These sciences and scientific discoveries, in fact, reduced man into nothingness.

. . . just as contemporary astronomy and physics influenced Hardy's imaginative perception of man's trivial physical position in the stellar universe, so his writings reveal a similar preoccupation with the way human aspirations are dwarfed in the vast dimensions of archeological time. It is worth remembering, then—given the optimistic tone of Darwin's conclusion to *The Origin of Species* and Huxley's visions of prospects for the possibility of human progress—that the sometimes grimmer image of the human condition notable in Hardy's writing was at least in part rooted in discoveries so compelling as the inexorable implications of the second law of thermodynamics and so poignant as those manifold reminders in his Wessex landscape of how fleeting human hopes and desires appear in the long passage of mankind's time on earth. (Schweik, 1999, pp. 61-62)

The previous paradigm which claimed that man was at the center of all creation, and that everything had been created by God just for the sake of man was left aside in the late nineteenth century: in the new order of things man, too, was subject to the natural laws of rise and decay; he was not the favored creature of God as there was no God at all.

Hardy shows the binary oppositions in life in his works. He thus relies on “multiplicity and incongruity. . . He wants his reader to become conditioned into thinking simultaneously in terms that are multiple and even contradictory.” (Shires, 1999, p.147) Hence, in the story of *Tess*, one cannot help seeing both the traditional and modern viewpoints. From the traditional perspective, *Tess* has been stained with the loss of her virginity. However, from beginning to the end, Hardy's undertone shows *Tess* as pure and innocent even after *Tess* is ruined by Alec. This is a modern attitude; it is a non-stereotypical treatment of character. As Hardy sees stereotypical values and judgments as having been socially constructed and shaped throughout the generations of man, these norms are to be questioned in order to understand what really created them. Was it because of mankind's needs that these norms emerged? If so, can these laws be challenged, or reshaped? Hardy leaves the answers to his audience.

It is the patriarchal logic that shaped *Tess*'s choices. As she sees the need to look after her family, she accepts to seek the help of her “relatives.” Alec rapes and impregnates her, and this, to some extent, is the result of her own choice. She gives birth to Alec's child just to lose it after a short while. The baby comes to the world and dies soon after as a result of her own choice again.

Tess loses the baby. It becomes ill, and she christens the infant in a touching ceremony with her siblings, but the baby dies:

The infant's breathing grew more difficult, and the mother's mental tension increased. It was useless to devour the little thing with kisses; she could stay in bed no longer, and walked feverishly about the room.

'O merciful God, have pity; have pity upon my poor baby!' she cried. 'Heap as much anger as you want upon me, and welcome; but pity the child!' (Hardy, 2000, pp. 82-83)

As she thinks traditionally, she sees that God is punishing the baby for being illegitimate. She takes the blame on herself again; she prays God to have mercy upon her baby. If the baby dies without being baptized, she is afraid that it will directly go to Hell. Hence, she herself baptizes the baby. In the morning, however, the baby dies, and from Hardy's viewpoint, "Poor Sorrow's campaign against sin, the world, and the devil was doomed to be of limited brilliancy—luckily perhaps for himself, considering his beginnings. In the blue of the morning that fragile soldier and servant breathed this last." (p. 84) Although such a sardonic comment by the narrator sounds cruel and pitiless, Hardy just points to the fact that man is subject to the natural laws, and what is called "sin" emerges as the culmination of human tragedy.

After her seduction by sensualist d'Urberville, Tess enters into a hopeless struggle against the prejudices of her social environment. She is snubbed by the people around. However, she has to find a job though it is very difficult for a country girl to survive with her toil only. Despite being socially degraded by the biased and traditional people, she luckily encounters with the kindness of the dairyman and his wife. She finds a work at Talbothays Dairy, but it is only seasonal. This is the second time she is happy. The first time was when she met Angel Clare at the May Dance. Although Angel had then taken notice of Tess, he had not danced with her. At this dairy she meets again with Angel Clare, the figure she idealized as a young girl. The two fall in love. Angel proposes to Tess, and she thinks that by marrying Angel, she will be able to get rid of her fate.

At the time of their encounter in this dairy, Angel Clare is twenty-six years old. He is very handsome, and almost all the dairymaids are after him. For Tess "There was no concealing from herself the fact that she loved Angel Clare, perhaps all the more passionately from knowing that the others had also lost their hearts to him." (p. 128) Angel Clare is different from the sensualist d'Urberville in the sense that he is an intellectual. This man, however, turns out to be crueler than Alec. "Angel, with all his emancipated ideas is not merely a prig and a hypocrite but also a snob as well. He understands nothing of the meaning of the decline of the d'Urbervilles and his attitudes to Tess is one of self-righteous idealization" (Kettle, 1990, p. 306). After Tess confesses what she lived with Alec d'Urberville, and what happened to her baby, and all the other misfortunes she went through, he says he has preferred not "a wife with social standing, with fortune, with knowledge of the world . . . [but a wife with] rustic innocence . . . [with] pink cheeks" (Hardy, 2000, p. 208). For him, Tess becomes a fallen woman, and comes to think that he has made a great mistake in marrying her. Although Tess tells him that he can divorce her for in his eyes she is now a wicked woman, Angel opposes the idea for familial reasons. Poor Tess also confesses that she even thought of committing suicide, but was afraid of the scandal to Angel's name, and this makes Angel all the more angry.

He cannot divorce Tess, as this divorce will also bring shame to the family name. His way of addressing Tess shows that he sees Tess not as his wife, but as an inferior peasant woman: "Don't Tess; don't argue. Different societies, different manners. You almost make me say you are an unapprehending peasant woman, who have never been initiated into the proportions of social things." (p. 203) Hardy's strong emphasis concerning the authority of Victorianism and Victorian traditions on the lives of individuals is laid bare with the patriarchal behavior of Angel, and with the submissiveness of Tess. For Hardy, it is these traditions that frustrate the lives of the couple. Although they have had the chance of becoming happy together, because of the Victorian-minded reaction of Angel, and because of the limited worldview of Tess, they miss this opportunity. Hence, what is called "solidarity" is hard to find in the Victorian society. As the traditionally minded Angel cannot "forgive" his wife, Tess is left to the mercy of natural laws.

Angel leaves "fallen" Tess, saying "I will come to you. But until I come to you it will be better that you should not try to come to me." (p. 222) He does not tell Tess that she is free, and that she can take a new direction in life. He just leaves Tess, sets *himself* free, but keeps Tess bound to himself. He also thinks that by leaving a sum of money to his father in case that Tess may use it, he tries to get rid of the economic responsibility of this marriage. Tess, however, will not touch the money Angel left to her use. "Certainly he fails Tess when she confesses her past to him, and certainly that failure illustrates a radical inconsistency and hypocrisy in Victorian moral attitudes." (Irwin, 2000, p. X)

After Angel leaves Tess, her social position worsens. She loses her job at Talbothays Dairy as the work was seasonal. Instead, she finds a job at Flintcomb Ash, where "she and other girls become fully proletarianized, working for wages in the hardest, most degrading conditions." (Kettle, 1990, p. 307) At Talbothays the dairymaids were proud individuals and felt the responsibility for the work itself. People were kind, too. Especially in the common kitchen at which the dairyman's wife presided, everybody was kind and polite. At Flintcomb, however, there is nothing kind or satisfying. Conditions are harsh, and Tess and the other dairymaids suffer a lot during the winter. Besides, her employer is teasing her saying that "Some women are so fools, to take every look as serious earnest." (Hardy, 2000, p. 255) Tess, meanwhile, is busy idealizing *and* idolizing her husband. Angel's disappearance is, in fact, in accordance with his vague existence. From the beginning, he did not exist; he was just a glimpse in the novel. Despite his "spirituality" and his physical non-existence, the sensuous Alec has a concrete physical existence in the novel. He comes up again and finds Tess. He tells her what he lived after she is gone; that he felt terribly sorry for ruining Tess; that with the help of the parson of Emminster, old Mr. Clare he now became a good Christian and a preacher. Alec assumes new identities as we continue reading. The womanizer is now a preacher. He then becomes an industrial overseer. And lastly, he will be a victim.

Alec makes a marriage proposal to Tess which she refuses saying that she has no affection for him, and that she is in love with her husband. In fact, Alec did not know that Tess was already married to another when he proposed to Tess. However, Alec shows the kind of understanding when he hears that she is a married woman and in love with another. If Angel had shown the same kind of understanding when Tess confessed to him her past with Alec, Tess's tragedy would have been avoided. As the story proceeds, she becomes more and more unhappy. Her personhood gradually disappears into nothingness with the development of events for which she feels responsible. At the end of the novel, she just becomes a black flag, signaling her execution and non-existence.

In Hardy's viewpoint although each individual is responsible for herself, the same individual finds herself in a net of social responsibilities which prepare her devastation. And although in nature no creature is bound to the others with compelling ties, only human beings are under the grip of such responsibilities. When Tess learns that her mother is ill and is about to pass away, she hastens back to her village to look after the mother. When she arrives home, Tess does everything to make her mother comfortable. Meanwhile, she begins working in the garden and on the family's land. One night, she finds Alec working next to her. This time again Alec offers help to Tess and to her family, and again he is turned down by her. On the way back home, Tess's sister tells her that they have lost the father, which means that Tess's family will lose the house they were staying as tenants, and that they have to find a new house for themselves. Something unexpected has happened again. Tess was thinking that not the father but the mother was ill and near death. If there is no father, there is then nobody to support the family. Her mother and her brothers and sisters will be homeless if Tess does not shoulder the responsibility of the family.

From the beginning Tess has followed the patriarchal logic in her choices. Now she is hopeless and knows that she is gradually approaching to the proposal Alec has made. Although she tried to keep her fate, her husband, and the people around under control, she was unable to do so. In the first place, her being born to Durbeyfield family was not her choice. Having such a foolish woman as her mother, who gave birth to many brothers and sisters was not her own fault. Her father's vanity and poverty were not again her choice. It was just fate, and Tess was unable to understand the workings of the uncontrollable powers acting on herself. Add to this the patriarchal logic she has adopted while making decisions, and the dreaming of absent husband who turned Tess down very early in their married life, she is about to go crazy. In a final attempt to change her fate, she writes a letter to her husband in which she talks about the cruelty he practiced on herself. This cruelty, in fact, is the sum of the cruelties she has encountered in life. While complaining about her husband's unjust behavior, she, in fact, complains about the injustice in life:

O why have you treated me so monstrously, Angel! I do not deserve it. I have thought it all over carefully, and I can never, never forgive you! You know that I did not intend to wrong you—why have you so wronged me? You are cruel, cruel indeed! I will try to forget you. It is all injustice I have received at your hands. (p. 313).

After giving the epistle to the postman, she turns back home to spend the last night with her brothers and sisters. This has been the house where they were all born, and now they are leaving it. Tess asks the children to sing her a song, and the children sing her the song they learned at the Sunday school. The first three lines of the song summarize the Christian viewpoint concerning life man experiences on earth:

Here we suffer grief and pain,
Here we meet to part again;
In Heaven we part no more. (p. 314)

Though Christian in its outlook, the song is also ironic, suggesting the traditional perception of human existence on earth. For Hardy, however, we are all bound to the natural laws for our existence. The belief that though we suffer and lose the loved ones in this world, we somehow will come together in Heaven is just a consolation, or a childish idea. The traditional moral definitions of “good” and “evil” are never taken into consideration. Suffering is never rewarded. The universal logic is what man can never comprehend, and there is no need to attribute our own logic to the workings of the universe and define this created and traditional logic as God. In the final analysis, there is no God, no poetic justice.

The absent husband finally changes his mind and turns back to find his wife. He cannot, however, find her easily. Angel first travels to Flintcomb-Ash, and then to Marlott, where he learns that Mr. Durbeyfield has died, and the family had to leave the house. He also finds Tess’s mother; he wants to learn from her where Tess is, but she does not tell him her address. Later, however, she feels pity for Angel and tells him that she is in Sandbourne. At Sandbourne Angel finds Tess staying at an expensive lodging called The Herons. He does not understand why she is there, and how she has managed to buy expensive clothes. He asks for her forgiveness without knowing that she is Alec d’Urberville mistress. Tess, of course, cannot accept Angel: it is too late.

Upon the departure of Angel with a broken heart, Tess goes upstairs and stabs Alec to death. Before killing him, Tess blames Alec for using her family’s poverty to persuade her to be his mistress, and for telling her the lie that her husband would never come back to her. “And at last I believed you and gave way! . . . And then he came back! Now he is gone. Gone a second time, and I have lost him now for ever . . . and he will not love me the littlest bit ever any more—only hate me! . . . O yes, I have lost him now—again

because of—you.” (p.335) As she speaks, she gets more enraged with Alec. She sees him as the reason of all her mishaps and sufferings. She eventually shows a violent reaction, and kills him.

This barbarism of Tess can be “placed in a history of repeated events, as part of a cycle, or, through analogy, as a regional myth. Crimes by the aristocratic d’Urbervilles, for example, may be related to Tess’s barbaric murder of Alec, and, hence, run in the family.” (Shires, 1999, p. 150) This inherited atavism of Tess gives way to the murder of Alec. The act is also symbolic, signifying the vicious circle of hopelessness and the consequent reaction against this despondency which only increases the suffering of the character, making her more tragic, and more pathetic. In classical tragedy, the tragic heroine has the chance to make a choice, and she makes the wrong choice. In Hardy, however, the tragic character never has the chance to make a choice. There are things that she cannot change, and the particulars of her life constitute the antagonist. In fact, a series of relatively minor and logically unrelated events are responsible for the tragic fate of the character. In Tess’s case, beginning with the death of the only horse of the family, her mother’s not being educated and not educating Tess properly, Angel’s not selecting her from among the dancers, her father’s being informed by Parson Tringham that he descends from a noble family, the d’Urbervilles, all contribute to Tess’s downfall.

After the murder, Tess runs out to find Angel, and she finds him on the highway. Angel is surprised to find Tess “so pale, so breathless, so quivering in every muscle, that he did not ask her a single question, but seizing her hand, and pulling it with his arm, he led her along.” (Hardy, 2000, p. 338). When she says that she killed Alec, Angel thinks that she is in some delirium, and does not believe her at first. Still, Tess blames Alec for setting a trap for herself, and for coming between her and Angel. Still she cannot understand the workings of the natural laws. She simply thinks that there was an obstacle on the way, and she just removed it. This is Tess’s innocence. From beginning to the end Tess could not understand herself, her traditional logic, and the workings of the unknown powers acting over her, and thus she remained innocent. It is this inability to understand which has kept her pure even though her maidenhood was blackened by Alec. Her final reaction is another expression of her purity and her naiveté. When Alec, upon learning Angel’s visit, taunted her and bitterly and called Angel by a foul name, she did it. She simply says “My heart could not bear it.” (p. 338) This is a very naïve reaction, and she takes refuge in Alec for protection.

Angel agrees to help Tess, and the two make a plan: They will wait for the search for Tess to be called off, and then they will flee to another country. In the countryside, they find an old mansion. They find a window open and slip through into the Bramshurst Court. They spend the night there together. This is the third time Tess is happy. She is with her husband, and she wants to stay with him forever in this old mansion because

“All is trouble outside there; inside here content.” (p. 343) The caretaker, however, sees them together, and without disturbing them, she leaves the place to consult with her neighbors on the odd discovery. Meanwhile, sensing that something disturbing is about to happen, Angel and Tess leave the mansion. They set out to go, and reach at the ancient city of Melchester. And eventually, they reach the Stonehenge, the structure of a complex ancient building sequence,² built before Christianity. Their first reaction to this ancient monument is sheer bewilderment. In this sublime and “heathen” place where “All around was open loneliness and black solitude, over which a stiff breeze blew,” (p. 345) Tess turns back to the origin, the essence of her being: it is like turning back to the mother’s womb.

Tess, really tired by this time, flung herself upon an oblong slab that lay close at hand, and was sheltered from the wind by a pillar. Owing to the action of the sun during the preceding day the stone was warm and dry, in comforting contrast to the rough and chill grass around, which had damped her skirts and shoes. (p. 346)

Why Hardy planned the finale to his work in such a womblike murky setting is because as an agnostic, he creates his most striking irony about human existence here in this place. Stonehenge becomes a metaphor signifying the primeval existence of man since the construction is unidentifiable but real with the erected stones. There is no definite information about the construction date and function of this “temple.” As human beings, we share a common fate with this ancient structure. We do not know who built it and why. By extension, we do not know who created us and why. Hardy never suggests that God created man and Christ is the savior. And when Tess asks Angel whether they will “meet again after [they] are dead,” (p. 347) he just kisses her to avoid a reply. Even a moderate intellectual like Angel Clare cannot say that there is life after death, and Tess’s final question suggests that she spent her life in vain with that traditional logic which Hardy criticized in *Tess* from beginning to the end.

Tess is caught by her pursuers at Stonehenge, where ancient people are said to have sacrificed human beings to the sun. Even though the concept of God changed through thousands of years, Hardy shows that the concept of “sacrifice” has not changed. Sixteen officers have surrounded the fugitives, and there is no escape. Angel asks them to “Let her finish her sleep!” (p. 348) They all watch Tess sleeping soundly, like the victim before being taken to the shrines of gods to be sacrificed: “All waited in the growing light, their

² Archeologists assume that the standing stones were erected around 2200 BC and the surrounding circular earth bank and ditch, which constitute the earliest phase of the monument, have been dated to about 3100 BC. Stonehenge was produced by a culture with no written language, and at great historical remove from the first cultures that did leave written records. Many aspects of Stonehenge remain subject to debate. This multiplicity of theories, some of them very colorful, is often called the “mystery of Stonehenge.”

faces and hands as if they were silvered, the remainder of their figures dark, the stones glistening green-gray, the Plain still a mass of shade. Soon the light was strong, and a ray shone upon her unconscious form, peering under the eyelids and waking her.” (p. 348) And the poor victim wakes up; she understands that this is the end. So weary of life, she is even glad for being caught.

In the last chapter of the novel, the shortest indeed when compared with the other chapters, Tess is executed at Salisbury Prison. Tess’s sister Liza-Lu, the budding girl who Tess entrusted to Angel and asked him to take her as his wife, and Angel Clare watch the prison from a distance: “Upon the cornice of the tower a tall staff was fixed. Their eyes were riveted on it. A few minutes after the hour had struck something moved slowly up the staff, and extended itself upon the breeze. It was a black flag.” (p.350) Hardy’s final note about the execution is excessively ironic: “Justice was done, and the president of the Immortals, in Aeschylean phrase, had ended his sport with Tess.” (p.350) The sarcastic use of the word “justice” and the depiction of cruel fate (not God) as sporting with the poor character show that there is, in fact, no God and no poetic justice in this world as man understands. The phenomena are just the constructions of man’s culture, the result of his traditional logic. This ending of the novel is too disturbing for the reader “not only because Angel follows Tess’s directive to marry her sister, but also because the implied author denies us an outlet for the deep emotional involvement we feel. The last chapter offers no catharsis . . .” (Shires, 1990, p. 158)

Tess of the d’Urbervilles is the richest novel of Hardy. Both Victorian and modern, the novel is the culmination of the Victorian texts produced before and during Hardy’s career as a novelist. He involves in this novel the tragic construction of the classical playwrights but moulds it into a new shape to merge it with multiplicity, irony, and surprise. Enriching his style with the strands of intellectual formation, he makes his unique contribution to novel genre, starting the transition from the Victorian to the modern.

Unlike the other Victorian novelists, Hardy never turns his work into a didactic discourse achieved through satire. He, therefore, takes the Victorian novel to its limits. Questioning the existence of man in the light of the new scientific and philosophical discoveries, and assuming an anti-traditional tone, he reveals that man is the victims both his traditional logic and the forces beyond his control. In a Godless universe, man is just a victim for man is unable to change his fate.

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