



ISSN 2455-7544
www.daathvoyagejournal.com

Daath Voyage : An International Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies in English

A Refereed Open Access Journal
Vol. 6 No.1, March 2021

Editor: Saikat Banerjee

Editor: Dr. Saikat Banerjee
Assistant Professor, Department of English
Assam Don Bosco University



Tess of the D'urvervelies-APoignant fusion of divine and human injustice

Dr. Shikha Shukla

Department of Applied Sciences and Humanities,
Dr.A.P.J.Abdul Kalam Technical University,
Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh, India
Email: shuklasa.21@gmail.com

Abstract: The understanding of Tess demands a radically different approach from that which is appropriate to Hardy's earlier novels. In the novel " Tess of the D'Urbervilles " we see Tess suffering, apparently doomed to suffer; destroyed by two men, by society, by " the sun outside her and the blood inside her". Tess is among those crucified women characters of Hardy who are the most helpless victims and suffer the most on that account and their unmerited sufferings and their emotions make us realize that despite one's goodness one can not modify the will of Destiny.

Keywords: Doomed to suffer, poor circumstances, native innocence, physical and emotional womanliness, mental suffering , intense spiritual torture.

Hardy envisions life as a grim tragedy, in which "happiness is but an occasional episode in the general drama of pain." Fate conspires to push men and woman irresistibly to a predestined doom. Only it uses, at different times, different instruments such as love, chance, social iniquities and ingrained weaknesses of character to affect their ruin. It is completely impartial and makes no distinction between the sexes, men being as much its helpless victims as women. Only in "Tess" do we have a reference to the double standards of morality practiced in the case of men and women, weighted heavily in favour of men and against women. But that is only incidental and does not form an essential part of his vision of life.

Daughter of a worthless megalomaniac, Tess is a country girl with the native innocence of peasant girls. When we are first introduced to her, she is a living image of beauty. We are told,

"She was a fine handsome girl not handsomer than some others but her mobile peony mouth and large innocent eyes, added eloquence to colour and shape." ¹



In describing Tess's appearance Hardy seems chiefly to have had in mind the woman he thought the most beautiful in England, the wife of sculptor Hama Thorny craft. Tess is that woman character of Hardy in whom the novelist has put his best and whose personality manifests a rare synthesis of physical beauty and beauty of character. It seems that Hardy was like a painter who wanted to paint his masterpiece; that's why his instinct of refinement never appears to be satisfied and in every line depicting the beauty and charm of Tess he seems to be keen to adorn her natural beauty to the point of almost idealization. Hardy drew Tess from a glimpse he got of a girl driving a cart in the West Country, and certainly the picture has the warm reality of life- her long heavy clinging tresses of dark brown hair: her deep dark eyes,

Hardy loses himself in those " large tender eyes neither black, nor blue, nor gray, nor violet, rather all those shades together and a hundred other which could be seen if one looked into their irises - shade behind shade, tint behind tint around pupils that could have no bottom." ²

The pretty face of Tess is maddeningly beautiful. The novelist speaks about her mouth in a poetic language-

" Yet when all was thought and felt about her features in general, it was her mouth which turned out to be the magnetic pole thereof. Eyes almost as deep and speaking he had seen before, and cheeks perhaps as fair, brose as arched, a chin and a throat almost as shapely; her mouth he had seen nothing at all to equal on the face of earth. To a young man with the least fire in him, that little upward lift in the middle of her top lip was distracting, infatuating maddening." ³

This beauty of her mouth and eyes is responsible to some extent for her doom as they madden Alec and make him turn a black slide. Tess's physical and emotional womanliness are the qualities for which she is loved, but are also ultimately the qualities for which she suffers. Even Angel Clare is attracted to her because of her magnetism and beauty.



Tess's tragedy is not only due to her physical charms but her background; her parents and her circumstances all lead her to suffering and unhappiness.

"Her parents belong to a class ranking above the farm labourers, a class including the carpenter, the smith, the shoemaker together with nondescript workers other than farm – laborers; a set of people who owed a certain stability of aim and conduct to the fact of their being life holders..."⁴

Her parents are slip shod and slack to twisted . The father is invalid, shiftless, and in poor circumstances. He has a large family to support. The children are consequently neglected. Tess, therefore could not receive any proper schooling. She is intelligent and could have been successful in her life, but her proper growth and mental development are arrested and heavy responsibilities are placed on her shoulders early in life. The poverty of his parent and the starving children compels her to go to Tran ridge with such tragic results. Her moral education had been totally neglected. Her mother does not mind even if her daughter has sex before marriage. In contrast to her parents, Tess represents innocence burdened with the responsibility of looking after the family almost replacing her as the head of the family. Even then Tess remains unsullied. She is prone to a melodramatic view of her self which increases her sense of guilt. Her conscience is too sensitive to be good for her. Her family encourages this by regarding her as their potential saviour. After her day dreaming precipitates the Prince's disastrous death, Tess sees herself as a murderess. She considers herself responsible for the death of the horse and filled with remorse at the tragedy, agrees to go to establish kinship with the

D'Urbervilles, against her better judgement . Her meeting with Alec and her seduction and undoing lead her to cope with a new situation. From the moment of her seduction by D'Urbervilles, Tess's life becomes a hopeless struggle against overwhelming odds to maintain her self-respect. She faces the harsh reality of life she has brought upon herself by braving it with dignity and courage.

Though physically stained, mentally Tess progresses. As soon as Tess realizes the true nature the full significance of the wrong that has been done to her, she leaves the place in horror and disgust.



She lives within the seclusion of her home, entirely cut off from society till the death of her child. The tragedy of Tess is to be taken as implying not only her physical and mental suffering but also the intense spiritual torture that she undergoes in the course of the novel. She suffers because; she is too sensitive for the coarse environment in which she finds herself. Her tragedy is further compounded when she falls in love later with a person whom she respects greatly but considers herself undeserving of him.

At Talbot Hays, where Tess goes after the death of her child to become a milkmaid, it is also just a stroke of luck that she meets Angel Clare who in a more insidious but surer way is to lead her to her tragic end. Angel, it turns out, had met Tess earlier when, on a walking tour with his two brothers, he discovered the maidens of Merlot celebrating the May Day, and danced with her. Hardy paints this meeting in a graphic way;

"... he seemed to discern in her something that was familiar, something which carried him back into a joyous and unforeseen past, before the necessity of taking thought had made the heavens gray. He concluded that he had beheld her before, where he could not tell. A casual encounter during some country ramble it certainly had been, and he was not greatly curious about it. But the circumstances were sufficient to lead him to select Tess in preference to the other pretty milkmaids".⁵

Tess's torture is really the intense suffering caused by her mental dilemma whether she should tell Angel about her past or not. The pure-hearted and honest Tess wishes to disclose her past to her would-be husband and writes the whole episode of her encounter with her spoiler Alec, but fate strikes a blow as the same letter is accidentally pushed under the carpet and Angel does not recover it even by the day his marriage is being ceremonies. Tess's confession after her marriage leads to her separation and more chapter of suffering is added in her life. Of course her tragedy is that Linc can not understand her and this finally leads to the extinction of the bright and suffering flame of life. Angel refuses to forgive Tess for the same sin that he himself had also committed knowingly and voluntarily and for which Tess has gladly forgiven him. He regards her different woman from



the one act which was the result of treachery and for condemns her for an act responsible. This is just the blind operation of social prejudice. Arnold remarks,

" Angel, the intellectual, turns out to be more rule than D'Urbervilles, the sensualist. Angel, with all his emancipated ideas is not merely a prig and a hypocrite, but a snob as well. He understands nothing of the meaning of the decline of the D'Urbervilles and his attitude to Tess is one of self-righteous idealisation."⁶

And when Angel's dream of rustic innocence is shattered, he taunts Tess with:

"Don't Tess; don't argue. Different societies, different manners. You almost make me say you are an unpretending peasant woman, who has never been initiated into the proportion of social things..."⁷

Angel Clare's impression of Tess as pure and innocent milkmaid receives a stock when his illusion of her purity is shattered. A stranger points out to him his folly in his relationship with his wife. Hardy does want to show the stupidity of Victorian social prejudices and he decries the attitude of Angel Clare who thus becomes an instrument for the suffering of Tess. Noorul Hassan comments –

"Her marriage with Angel Clare, marking the end of the Talbot hays idyll, is only a prelude to her great, grotesque career of suffering and victimization. Angel's rejection of Tess on the night of their honeymoon initiates for her the process of depersonalization and separation from meaning. She is suddenly left in a world without identity, a world where personality and emotions are anomalous. Material objects, no less than familiar human beings, betray a total loss of sympathy and habitude."⁸

"But the complexion even of external things seemed to suffer transmutation as her announcement progressed. The fire in the grate looked impish – demoniacally funny, as if it did not care in the least about her strait. The fender grinned idly, as if it too did not care. The light from the water bottle was merely engaged in a chromatic problem. All material objects around announced their responsibility with terrible iteration."⁹



Tess suffers mainly because of mischance and social prejudice. Her own character does not contribute directly, but in the vital sense that only sensitive people suffer, it can be said that in the ultimate analysis everyone is responsible for his or her suffering. But this in the context of Tess is an abstract answer. It is only in Shakespearean tragedies that suffering arises from some tragic flaw in the hero. Here it is clear that Tess does not have that kind of flaw. As Douglas Brown puts it,

"The situation is blurred for her; the forces that have defeated her are beyond her comprehension...."¹⁰

We are tempted to ask what is Hardy's vision of the cause of Tess's tale of suffering. Hardy tresses that Tess is damned, and damns herself according to man-made laws which are as arbitrary as they are cruel, says Tony Tanner,

"If the book was an attempt to show an innocent girl who is destroyed by society though justified by Nature, Hardy could certainly have left the opposition as direct and as simple as that. Social laws hang Tess; and Nature admits no such laws. But it is an important part of the book that we feel nature itself turning against Tess, so that we register something approaching sadism of both kinds the man-made and the natural, directed against her."¹¹

This suggest a universe of radical opposition , working to destroy what it works to create , crushing to death what it coaxes into life. From this point of view society only appears as a functioning part of a larger process whereby the vertical returns to the horizontal, motion lapses into stillness and structure cedes to the unstructured.

What Tess to suffer as a deserted wife passes all description? She undergoes great privation. Her love for Angel does not permit her to reveal her condition either to her parents or to others; for it would bring dishonor upon him. She does the roughest

kind of work in ruin and snow at Flint comb- Ash and suffers great torments at the hands of a revengeful farmer, but she does not write to Angel for help. Noorul Hassan writes.



"It is at flint comb – Ash that the forces apposed to Tess's sensibility and culture are most vividly dramatized. The mechanical, meaningless toil, the inclement weather, the brooding annul and hostile human presences all combine to create an 'anti-utopia' in which Tess's soul is cast to starve and perish. It is a vision of help."¹²

She seems to have been separated from her essential self and become a female automation toiling through the sheer force of exhaustion. This terrible experience that Tess undergoes makes her feel that –

"... birth it self was an ordeal of degrading personal compulsion whose gratuitousness nothing is the result seemed to justified."¹³

On this level the novel becomes a sustained attack on bourgeoisie morality which, with it's inflexible demand for purity in woman, only in women, reduces Tess to terrible poverty and so finally drives her back to Alec and eventually to murder and hanging,

"Tess dies but the meaning of her life and of the whole book, lies in her vibrant humanity , her woman's power of suffering, renewal and compassion which has restored Angel to his right full nature as man, conscious of guilt and imperfection. One could not wish to be angel or animal while Tess exists in her human love, passion, beauty, trust, forgiveness, pity, sensitivity, responsibility, morality and the terrible beauty of the earth to discover the absurdity of immutable law that makes her fitness a death – trap, and yet to oppose her will against the universe as she found it..."¹⁴

Hardy carefully points out the contrast between spontaneous morality and the artificial distinctions of a code based on social and economic convenience, when he once more identifies Tess with animals – this time with the wounded and dying game birds that have been shot at bye the sporting country gentry. In their different ways both Tess and the birds are helpless victims of a society which distorts Nature- Tess represents a repressive moral code and the birds a calculated cruelty which protects them so they can be latter shot for fun. Seeing the dying birds Tess exclaims-



"Poor darling – to suppose myself the most miserable being on earth in the sight of so much miser as yours... And not a twinge of bodily pain about me! She was ashamed of her self for her gloom of the night, based on nothing more tangible than a sense of condemnation under an arbitrary law of society which had no foundation in Nature."¹⁵

What sin does Tess commit? None at all, for she is the victim of the blackest act of treachery. She is violated when she is exhausted and does not understand the true significance of the act. Her final surrender to Alec is an act of frustration and she atones for it by murdering her seducer. It is her only self willed action to blot out the past. It is a kind of suicide, aligning her with all the great tragic. Heroines prepared to die to save or avenge their honour. She continues to be pure spiritually and morally, up to the very end of her life. Tess shows us just how unnatural the bourgeoisie nation of sexuality really is especially female sexuality. Says Hardy that in blaming herself for her seduction by Alec , Tess is substituting a false idea of sexuality for a natural one. Her own poor opinion of herself and her conduct, he tells us,

" Based on shreds of convention, peopled by phantoms and voices antipathetic to her, was a sorry and mistaken creation of Tess's fancy- a cloud of moral hobgoblins by which she was terrified without reason. It was they that were out of harmony with the actual world, not she. Walking among the sleeping birds in the hedges, watching the skipping rabbits on a moonlight warren, or standing under a pheasant, laden bough, she looked upon herself as a figure of guilt, intruding into the haunts of innocence"¹⁶

The character of Tess is very obviously an expose of social obscurantism as it is also equally vividly a demonstration of the loneliness and uniqueness of each individual soul in this harsh and un responding world. Tony Tanner comments very aptly-

“ Tess is the living demonstration of tragic ironies. That is why she who is raped lives to be hanged; why she who is so physically beautiful feels guilt at 'inhabiting the fleshly tabernacle with which Nature had endowed her: why she who is a fertile source of life comes to feel that 'birth itself was



an ordeal of degrading personal compulsion, whose gratuitousness nothing in the result seemed, to justify.' It is why she attracts the incompatible forces represented by Alec and Angel. It is why she who is a lover is also a killer."¹⁷

Tess is a pure product of Nature; but she is nature subject to complex and contradictory pressures. Angel wants her spiritual image without her body (when he finds out about her sexual past he simply denies her identity, "the woman I have been loving is not you "); Alec wants only her body and is indifferent to anything we might call her soul; her distinctly human inwardness. Tess herself is the story of a woman whose struggle for self-fulfillment follows a universal or archetypal tragic pattern individualized by cultural imagination of Hardy.

Works Cited

- ¹ Hardy, Thomas-Tess of the D'urbervelies P.26
- ² Hardy, Thomas-Tess of the D'urbervelies P.28
- ³ Hardy, Thomas-Tess of the D'urbervelies P.28
- ⁴ Kettle, Arnold-An Introduction to the English Novel P.45
- ⁵ Hardy, Thomas-Tess of the D'urbervelies P.155
- ⁶ Kettle, Arnold-An Introduction to the English Novel P.47
- ⁷ Hardy, Thomas-Tess of the D'urbervelies P.231
- ⁸ Hasan, Noorul-Thomas Hardy-The sociological Imagination P.146
- ⁹ Hardy, Thomas-Tess of the D'urbervelies P.270
- ¹⁰ Brown, Douglas-Thomas Hardy P.93
- ¹¹ Darper, R.P.-Hardy the Tragic Novels P.205
- ¹² Hasan, Noorul-Thomas Hardy-The sociological Imagination P.147.



Daath Voyage

: An International Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies in English

ISSN 2455-7544

www.daathvoyagejournal.com

Vol.6, No.1, March, 2021

¹³ Hardy, Thomas-Tess of the D'urbervelies P.28

¹⁴ Duffin, H.C.-Thomas Hardy P.211

¹⁵ Hardy, Thomas-Tess of the D'urbervelies P.28

¹⁶ Hardy, Thomas-Tess of the D'urbervelies P.28

¹⁷ Darper, R.P.-Hardy the Tragic Novels P.205.