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ISSN: 2278-9529



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Thomas Hardy's *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* as a Wessex Novel Which Shows the Role of Chance and Destiny in One's Life

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About the Author:

Thomas Hardy was born on 2 June 1840 in the village of Higher Bockhampton in Stinsford parish near the town of Dorchester in Dorset County, England where his father Thomas worked as a stonemason and local builder. His Birthplace, built by his great grandfather, is now a museum owned by the National Trust. Young Thomas was given to quieter childhood pursuits, often spending time alone wandering the countryside, exploring the nature and the familiar sight and sounds of his rural home country. His mother Jemima was well-read, and she educated Thomas until he went to his first school at Bockhampton at the age of eight. For several years he attended Mr. Last's Academy for Young Gentlemen in Dorchester and learned Latin. Because Hardy's family lacked the means for a university education, his formal education ended at the age of sixteen. His mother had a great influence on his imagination, entertaining him with stories and songs, many of which would later inspire his Wessex tales. Most of his fictional works –were set in the semi-fictional region of Wessex.

'Tess' as a Wessex Novel

Wessex was the old name for a territory in the South West of England, covering the present countries of Berkshire, Wilts, Somerset, Hampshire etc. Thomas Hardy made this region the setting of almost all his novels which for this reason have come to be known as the Wessex novels and which belong to the category of what is called "regional fiction." His description of valleys, villages, woods, meadows etc. is regarded as the most realistic.

Physical description:

Tess of the D'Urbervilles presents vivid description of the Wessex landscape. Tess's place of work changed with the passage of time and the landscape changed too. Vale of Blackmoor-the valley of Tess's was a fertile and sheltered track of country and Hardy gave a vivid account of its physical feature and its atmosphere. The landscape changed when Tess went to Tolbothays situated in the valley of the Great Dairies. It was different from Blackmoor Vale. Tess's next place of work was the village of Flintcomb-Ash and there the air was dry and cold. Hardy appears as a painter when he described the onset of winter. At last when Tess was reunited with Angel for only five days and enjoyed her short-lived happiness, he described the depth of the New Forest. Physical environment adds beauty to the development of emotional process and Hardy captures its extraordinary minute intensity.

Rural occupation description:

Along with the physical description of environment Hardy also highlighted the rural occupation of Wessex. Unmarried mother Tess worked as agricultural labourer. Hardy minutely observed each and every detail like milking of cows, songs in dairies. The old men talked of those days when they were young, when they accustomed to thresh with a natural talent on the oaken floor, when everything was affected with hand labour. But now machine took the place of man and this work was done by machines. Tess's work on the threshing machine was the hardest she had to do in all her life. Hardy described the work minutely step by step. There are also casual references to such odd jobs as well-sinking, hedging, ditching and excavating. All this shows that Hardy had first hand knowledge and relationship with rural occupations. This familiarity shows him as a true son of the soil and a genuine lover of the countryside and country folk. Sometimes these descriptions interrupt the story, but they are the essential elements in the creation of the environment and atmosphere so necessary in a Wessex novel.

Superstitions and beliefs in Wessex Society

Superstitions and beliefs always prevalent in the society and Hardy did not hesitate to highlight those superstitions and beliefs of the people of Wessex. In the starting of the novel Joan Durbyfield consulted the fortune teller and came to the conclusion that Tess would get married to some fine gentleman. When Tess and Angel got married and were leaving the dairy for their honeymoon, a cock began to crow and one of the men present there explained that it is a bad omen. Tess also disturbed to hear the cock crow at this hour because in Wessex society it was considered as a bad omen. It is a common thing that we follow the rules and regulations which are made by our ancestors. Tess inspite of her school education believed much of her mother's superciliousness. Tess believed in omens which were followed by the country people. When one of the Alec's roses pricked her chin and a thorn of the rose pricked in her breast, she was alarmed and thought that was an ill omen. In Angel Clare's company Tess recalled that he had not danced with her at the Marlott festival because that was also considered ill-omen.

Customs and occasions of Wessex Novel

Hardy described Wessex markets, club and fairs that were held periodically in certain towns. Candlemas Fare which was an important occasion for agriculturists in Wessex was described by Hardy. At that fair new engagements entered for twelve months for following the ensuing Lady Day. There was a prevailing custom according to which Tess's family was evicted from their cottage on the death of Tess's father. Set in the rural town of Wessex, Tess of the D'Urbervilles examines the impact of Victorian hypocrisy and social struggles on the rural classes. Tess's actions are determined by heredity as well as her environment.

Role of Chance and Destiny in *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*:

No other novelist shows the role of chance, coincidence and destiny such an effective manner in his works as Thomas Hardy shows. When character is in a dilemma about his or her life, chance and coincidence often operates as the deciding factors. Hardy felt that an evil power ruled the universe, defeating every endeavor of man to better his fortune or to find happiness. He believed that fate or destiny was sometimes indifferent, often

unfriendly to human happiness. Irony of circumstances also effects the characters' life direction.

Chance and destiny are the hall marks of Hardy's works and this is also shown in such a powerful manner in 'Tess of the D'Urbervilles' that it seems an agency of the Immanent Will. The whole novel seems non-stopping series of chance happenings—the 'chance' discovery of Joan Dubreyfield's noble ancestry, his getting drunk and unable to take a cart to the market, Tess's being forced to substitute for him, her 'philosophic' mood making her inattentive, the cart accident in which the horse is died, Tess sense of guilt, her agreeing to go to D'Urbervilles to claim, Tess taking her stride Alec's indecent advances because she cannot go home empty-handed, Alec taking it as her tacit consent, Tess visit to Chaseborough, forcing her to take help of Alec, Tess's seduction seems inevitable. But when her meeting with young Alec D'Urberville does not go as planned, she returns home a ruined woman. A kinder man, Angel Clare, seems to offer Tess a more stable life—but she must choose whether to reveal her past to him and risk losing everything, or stay quiet and live a lie.

A number of coincidences forced Tess to come closer to Angel. Tess suffered because the confession letter she had written to Angel on the eve of their marriage which she pushed under Angel door, going under the carpet and never reached him. If Angel has received this confession in time, he would have either forgive her or refused to marry her. In both the cases, the tragedy of Tess has been averted. A minor mischance has grave consequences. Angel Clare was conscious of his own purity, but unconscious of his deep insincerity, broad-minded but conventional—an odd character.

Another mischance that brought disaster into Tess's life was in her unexpected meeting with Alec when the later, now a missionary, was preaching a sermon and Tess was returning from her abortive visit to Emminster. All would have been well if this chance meeting was not occurred. The death of Tess's father, this misfortune was an ideal opportunity for Alec to put further pressure upon Tess who saw no way out of the predicament but to yield. Her surrender to Alec, which completed her ruin, thus came about as a result of coincidences. Her baby died and had to be buried in the shabby corner of the churchyard meant for drunkards, suicides, unbaptized infants and other supposed to be damned. "Sorrow" is the name which Tess gave to her baby. "The Undesired" is added by Hardy to describe a child that had came into this world without anybody wants it. Undoubtedly, chance and coincidence play a certain role in every human being's life, but this is limited, there is real life happy accidents as well as sad ones but Hardy focuses our attention only on that part that is always hostile.

In this way, from first to last, the plot of *Tess* is dominated by chance events. It is a tragedy brought about by wrong things happening unexpected!' at the wrong moment. Tess suffers because everything happens contrary to her wishes and expectations. The excessive use of chance and coincidence by Hardy makes his stories implausible. Hardy's representations of life and characters of Wessex society is not only realistic, but he incorporated each and every event in such a way that the reader feels himself a part of that society and feel the pains and torments of the characters. Etched against the background of a dying rural society, Tess of the d'Urbervilles was Thomas Hardy's "bestseller," and Tess Durbeyfield remains his most tragic heroine. Hopelessly torn between two men--Alec d'Urberville, a wealthy, dissolute young man who seduces her in a lonely wood, and Angel Clare, her provincial, moralistic, and unforgiving husband—

Tess escapes from her vise of passion through a horrible, desperate act. Tess thus remains an artistically portrayal of Hardy's philosophy of immanent Will and Fate which he showed in terms of a Wessex novel.

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