

“As wanton boys are we to the gods; they kill us for their sports.”
TESS OF THE D’URBERVILLES – THOMAS HARDY’S LIFE
PHILOSOPHY. READING THE NOVEL FROM PAST AND
PRESENT PERSPECTIVES

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ABSTRACT. THE AIM OF THE PRESENT STUDY IS AN INTROSPECTION IN THOMAS HARDY’S WELL-KNOWN *TESS OF THE D’URBERVILLES*, FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF THE AUTHOR’S LIFE PHILOSOPHY TOWARDS THE UNFAIRNESS OF EXISTENCE. THE DISCOURSE IS SCATTERED WITH ELEMENTS THAT FORETELL TESS’S UNHAPPY ENDING. TESS’S BEAUTY WAS NOT AN ADVANTAGE, BUT ON THE CONTRARY, A DISADVANTAGE: IT BROUGHT MISFORTUNE AND UNHAPPYNESS TO HER. THIS IS THE CONCLUSION, THE READER REACHES AT A FIRST READING. EXAMINED THROUGH THE EYES OF THE 21TH CENTURY READER, MORE PSYCHOLOGICAL ANGLES ARE REVEALED.

KEY WORDS: PHILOSOPHY, EXISTENCE, FATE, MISFORTUNE, DISCOURSE, PSYCHOLOGICAL ANALYSIS

1. Introduction

The motto in the title is a fragment from William Shakespeare’s *King Lear* and pertain to Gloucester, a noble man, loyal to king Lear. This philosophical thought, similar to a rhetorical question, represents the man’s incapacity in front of implacable fate and of Divine judgement. In a similar way, Hardy ends his novel, *Tess of the D’Urbervilles, A Pure Woman*: “Justice was done, and the President of the Immortals (in Aeschylean phrase) has ended his sport with Tess. As a parenthesis, Prometheus Bound was attributed to Aeschylus who lived between 525 and 456 BC in Eleusis; his birthplace is known for rituals of worship to Demeter, Earth Goddess. Some historiographers credited him with inventing drama, other scholars found that there were differences between Prometheus Bound and other Aeschylus’s plays. The protagonist of the play is Prometheus and scholars have seen the play as an act of rebellion against an unjust god.” Hardy’s philosophical thought on the one hand and on the other, the authorial discourse of an omniscient author represents the conclusion of the novel and the overall theme of the novel – The Injustice of Existence.

The motto has been used by Hardy himself in the Preface to the Fifth and Later Editions, written in July 1892. In fact, the novel is punctuated with many replicas from Shakespeare’s plays, making the reader aware of the contemporary predicaments that the English playwright

utilizes. The authorial Preface appears to have been written in response to those reviewers, “by far the majority” who enjoyed reading the novel “who have so generously welcomed the tale”. Nonetheless, there were voices who disagreed with the Hardy’s novel, “there have been objectors both to the matter and to rendering”. In his defence, Hardy states that the novel had not been intended to be “didactic, nor aggressive”. His intentions toward the novel were that “there were something more to be said in fiction than had been said about the shaded side of a well-known catastrophe”. I myself see this statement as reminiscent from the beginning of the novel in England, namely 18th century, when the writers were expected to write about real life and Robinson Crusoe is an example of the case. Nonetheless, the late 18th century and 19th century saw the development of the novel as sentimental and melodramatic, if we think of Dickens’s novels. Hardy’s novel is sentimental through the misfortunes and short happy events occurring in Tess’s life. Yet Hardy’s novel is different through the perspective, the author suggests his novel to be read, through the eyes of an objective reader, judging the facts from afar; the author himself feels solidary to the protagonist’s suffering.

Tess of the D’Urbervilles may also be viewed as an example of those people living in the country side, leaving their villages in search of a better life, the situation triggered upon by the Industrial Revolution in the British Empire. At large, the Industrial Revolution brought about advantages to the few rich contingents, nevertheless it brought poverty, unhappiness, and misfortunes to the many. Tess is such an example, when she goes to Alec Durbeyfield family to be hired by the rich relative. Her unusual beauty, even pagan, attracted Alec and from here derives Tess’s misfortune and the novel itself.

Tess of the D’Urbervilles together with *Jude the Obscure* marked the closing phase of Thomas Hardy’s career in fiction. They were both considered the finest of Thomas Hardy, on one hand and on the other, they both deal with sympathetic representative of working class, as Encyclopaedia Britannica explains. Speaking from the point of view of the period they were published, they belong to the 19th century, yet regarding the nature and treatment of the subject matter they anticipate the 20th century.

2. Premises of *Tess D’Urbervilles* publication

Geoffrey Harvey’s in „*Tess of the D’Urbervilles*, *Jude the Obscure*, and the Abandonment of Fiction” [6] states that the novel came to be published in Hardy’s contemporary circumstances when the Victorian middle class image of women was culturally controlled. The women were deprived of political and economic power whereas men and women were viewed in separate spheres. The women’s sexual feelings were denied while they were twice victims: as idealization and abuse. Hardy depicted intelligent and sympathetic portrayals of women as a predicament of gender and class issues; nonetheless, education and marriage offered upward social climbing. With his early novels, Hardy encountered censorship, but once he became an established novelist, he advocated the achievement of selfhood and social freedom of the strong, intelligent, sexual women.

Facts and people came into Hardy’s attention and became inspirational sources for the novel’s overall plot. In this sense, some of them should be mentioned: a Turberville family buried nearby Bere Regis of which he found out during a visit to Manor House at Wool; a noble family’s decline was brought into his attention during a visit to the remains of Woolcombe, an estate that used to be in the ownership of the Dorset’s Hardys; the landscape in the novel was

inspired to him by a visit to the areas of ‘Valley of the Great Dairies’ and the ‘Valley of the Little Dairies’; his source of inspiration for Tess was a young milkmaid, Augusta Way; the midnight baptism of Tess’s baby was inspired by the experience of their maid, Jane Phillips; Tess’s hanging for murder was based on Martha Browne’s hanging; Elisabeth Martha Brown, the inspiration for Thomas Hardy’s “Tess of the D’Urbervilles”; Elisabeth Martha Brown (e) was an ordinary woman of humble birth who worked as a servant. It is thought that she was born in 1810 or 1811 and that her maiden name was Clark. Not much else is known about her early years. She became the last woman to be publicly hanged in Dorset, and is largely remembered as the inspiration for Thomas Hardy's famous novel "Tess of the D'Urbervilles", <http://www.capitalpunishmentuk.org/browne.html> Angel Clare’s attitudes remind of Horace Moule. Horatio Mosley Moule, the fourth son of Henry Moule, a vicar, was born on 30th May 1832 at Fordington. In 1851 Moule entered Trinity College, Oxford, but left without a degree. In 1854 he entered Queens' College, Cambridge, where he won the Hulsean Prize. Moule became assistant master at Marlborough College. He also wrote articles for various literary journals. Moule became friends with Thomas Hardy in 1856. Moule was eight years older than Hardy. Moule has been described as "a charming and gentle man as well as a brilliant teacher". Moule also introduced him to socialism and to the radical ideas being expressed in the Saturday Review. Edited by John Douglas Cook, it attributed the majority of social evils to social inequality. Under Moule's influence, Hardy wrote his first novel, “The Poor Man and the Lady”, <http://spartacus-educational.com/JmouleH.htm> ; the novel had many titles in the beginning, ‘The Body and Soul of Sue’, ‘Too Late, Beloved’, but the final title remained as it is known today.

There were many attempts to publish the novel, yet the Christian publishers were frightened by the story of violation, unauthorized baptism and murder. In the New Review, in January 1890, Hardy wrote an essay in which he expressed his frustration at the editor’s censorship, “Candour in English Fiction”. The conventionality of the Victorian society compelled Hardy to publish the novel without the scenes mentioned before. The novel appeared in weekly instalments from 4 July to 26 December 1891 and then published with much of the original manuscript restored, in December 1891, by Osgood, McIlvaine & Co., in three volumes. The Essex edition in 1912, also contained the dance scene at Chaseborough. In this edition, Thomas Hardy added the subtitle ‘A Pure Woman Faithfully presented by Thomas Hardy’, in defiance to the hypocrisy of the Victorian society.

Tess of the D’Urbervilles registered a great success and the critics described it as the greatest novel of the century and received gratifying critiques from the important publications of the time. Because of the different opinion on life and religion, Thomas Hardy and his wife, Emma separated, to say a few words on his personal life.

Despite his success as a novel writer, Hardy stopped from writing novels after *Jude the Obscure*. As Thomas Hardy himself put it, “the experience completely cured me of further interest in novel writing”. Because he was tired of being misread and because he was disgusted, Hardy decided to abandon fiction and devoted much attention to writing poetry.

3. Anticipatory elements announcing Tess’s grand finale. Text analysis

For the present paper, my aim is to comment on the last two chapters of the novel *Tess of the D’Urbervilles*, chapter LVIII and LIX. The author ending his novel with 59 chapters may be interpreted as the hope for a new beginning, as Tess had Angel promise to marry her sister, Liza

Lu, a purer Tess. Moreover, I can interpret the chapters LVIII and LIX as Ecstasy and Agony, jubilation and despair, since chapter LVIII has its protagonists, Tess and Angel live the most enchanting and happiest moments in their lives, whereas chapter LIX represents the denouement, Tess's death, the “fulfilment” of her unjust existence.

Chapter LVIII begins with an anticipation of the grand finale, “he had walked in his sleep with her in his arms [...] and laid her down in the stone coffin at the ruined abbey”, the location being a recurrent Gothic motif in Romanticism and beginning of Victorianism. Other anticipatory words are uttered by Tess herself: “Who knows what tomorrow has in store?” The five days Tess and Angels lived in that “desirable mansion” were the happiest in their lives; with nobody interposing between them. Everything they could see was the weather changing and the birds of the New Forrest. “The birds” represent a motif recurrent in *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, only at this point of the story they signify their hope that Tess might escape from the penalty, since they continuously made plans.

In these two chapters, Tess's mood is mixed; sad with the events that are about to come “What will come, will come”, yet she is full of joy “All is trouble outside there, inside here content”. Her short happy interlude came to an end when the housekeeper interfered. They had to leave “the happy house” – Ah, happy house – good-bye”. The five days of happiness represented for Tess the last cigarette, a convict is allowed to have before execution and Tess herself admits: “My life can only be a question of weeks. Why should we have not stayed there?”

Another issue that is worth talking about is the role that nature plays in the development of the story. In this chapter, the reader encounters Stonehenge, “the heathen temple” as Tess characterizes it or “A very temple of the winds”, in Angel's opinion. Stonehenge, “older than centuries; older than the D'Urbervilles” was built to celebrate the sun. Hardy incorporating pagan elements, seen as ancient beliefs, aims at asserting that the human existence cannot be separated by religious practices and superstitions as they are closely related to the human society as a whole. Moreover, Charlotte Bonica [classprojects.Kenyor.edu] interprets Hardy's use of paganism as an “innate and inescapable human need to make sense of the universe in humanly understandable terms”.

So the pagan temple, Stonehenge is a stop for Angel and Tess in their way toward fulfilment. Tess remembers that one of her mother's relative was a shepherd “hereabouts” and that Angel himself called her pagan and says that she feels home here. Suddenly she feels relaxed in front of the imposing monument, too high in height and comprehension for her; she feels relieved before the final act, happy that Angel will have no occasion to despise her. Tess emphasizes her enjoying Stonehenge, even if Angel points out that she was lying on an altar: The stone on which she lies is a sacrificial altar, the sacrifices were performed to celebrate the celestial body of life. “I like very much to be here”, she murmured. It is so solemn and lonely – after my great happiness – with nothing but the sky above my face. It seems as if there were no folk in the world but we two.” Cliffsnotes interprets this as it follows: “Tess herself is sacrificed to the laws and morale of the nineteenth century.”

Chapter LIX, Hardy puts in stark contrast the city of Wintoncester, capital of Essex with its fine old buildings, Angel and Liza Lu want to “get out of the sight of houses” as if they could not think of the happiness that could have awaited Tess; and the “large red-brick building, with level grey roofs, and rows of short barred windows bespeaking captivity [...] with Gothic erections”. Chapter LIX represents the Agony, Angel and Liza Lu, walking toward Tess's final

scene as “Giotto’s two Apostles” or like lambs sacrificed for Easter on the Christian table. Chapter LXIX is the fulfilment of Tess’s punishment, punishment for what; what major sin has she committed? The crime of being young and beautiful and for living her life, because she wanted to be loved by the man she loved?

4. Thomas Hardy, regarded as a modern novelist from the psychoanalytical perspective of the novel

The novelty of approaching the much debated novel in the English literature is represented by the psychoanalytical angle. In “Psychological Approaches”, Geoffrey Harvey discusses Thomas Hardy’s modern tendency to analyse his characters from psychological standpoint through this anticipating the 20th century novelists James Joyce and D.H. Lawrence. Harvey’s endeavour relates to the early theory of Sigmund Freud and the more recent work of Jacques Lacan. The tread of psychological criticism has been running through Hardy’s novels since 1970’s. The scholar underlines the assumption that the analysis of Hardy’s characters reveals a possibility of uncovering the novelist’s psychological preoccupations.

Among those who dealt with this issue is Perry Meisel (1972) who asserts that, as early as writing the *Mayor of Casterbridge*, Hardy himself admits that ‘the unconscious is the true psychic reality’ [5, 168]. Yet, Meisel asserts that *Tess of the D’Urbervilles* and *Jude the Obscure* explore the psychological conflict between the ‘humanity’s natural and social components’. In *Tess of the D’Urbervilles*, Meisel puts it that Hardy examines the relation between the physical Tess and the intellectual Angel and the way in which the human relations are limited by ‘the imprisoning ego’ – the wandering ego thus defining the meaning of modern.

Another scholar dealing with psychoanalytical issue is Frank R. Giordano (1984) who concentrates on suicides and identifies Tess Durbeyfield as ‘altruistic suicide’ [5, 168]. In Giordano’s opinion, Hardy is concerned with his characters’ need to be loved and all the more his conclusion is that life is fragile though precious.

Leo Waldoff (1979) identifies various forms of determinism in the novel and finds psychological determinism as the crucial element in Tess’s tragedy. Waldoff explains that there is a discrepancy between the author’s insistence on inevitability and his ambiguous presentation of the events, concluding that “Tess is a victim of an ambivalent attitude towards that is traceable both to culture and to the culture in which he lived” [5, 165]. Moreover there is a split ambivalence between Alec and Angel, as Alec views Tess as a sexual object, while Angel regards her as an idealised non-sexual image; in Waldoff’s opinion, the determining element lies here in Angel’s attitude whose obsession with sexual purity stops him from reconciling his image of pure woman and the real Tess; Waldoff also suggests a biographical link between Angel’s obsession with purity and Hardy’s own unconscious obsession in the designing of Tess’s fate.

Rosemary Sumner (1981) develops psychoanalytical issues tackled with by her predecessors in saying that ‘by venturing in the taboos areas and his insights into neuroses, Hardy anticipates the oeuvre of noteworthy psychologists, namely Freud, Jung and Adler’. In dealing with the ‘psychological issues of modern man and woman’ [5, 170], Rosemary Sumner examines the problem of the ‘sexually inhibited thinker’ and she finds in Angel Clare ‘a dominant superego and repressed emotional conflict by projecting his ‘anima’ onto Tess’ [ibidem]; in this context we have the modern man interested in sexuality but repressed in a classical Freudian way, thus living on the edge of sanity.

Another scholar, T.R. Wright (1989) examines the psychoanalytical angle by drawing on Jacques Lacan who ‘postulates the subject as fragmented product of unconscious desire articulated in language’ and that rather than being sexual, the desire is directed to the realisation of unity [ibidem]. Wright [5, 171] views Hardy in *Tess of the D’Urbervilles*, as the voyeuristic narrator describing Tess with erotic fascination while attempting his purification as well as the male characters.

The film critic, Kaya Silverman (1981) goes further with the psychoanalytical introspective by combining Jacques Lacan and Julia Kristeva’s theories with the strategies of visual theory. Silverman deals with ‘libidinal economy’ [5, 172] of the novel and shows that the desire is ‘classically organized and sustained through representation’. Moreover, Silverman identifies Tess as the female object of the male gaze, the narrator’s gaze included. In Silverman’s vision, Tess represents the surface on which the pattern is designed by a tourist, a landscape painter or a passer-by. Geoffrey Harvey provides Silverman’s conclusion:

With its insistence upon relational identity and the coercive power of the signifier, figural history in *Tess of the d’Urbervilles* would finally seem to be nothing other than a nightmarish view of the symbolic order - a traumatic apprehension of the central role played in the constitution of the subject by the language and desire of the Other [5, 172].

Marjorie Garson (1991), [5, 174] also reads Tess through a Lacanian approach and finds Nature in Hardy’s novels as ‘present as a fragmented human body’. Garson makes use of some Lacanian concepts such as ‘mirror’, ‘the corps morceles’ and ‘the Woman as other’ suggesting that in Hardy the Other always includes the dimension of class and that the Nature is to be found behind the characters as the ‘Great Mirror’. Garson regards Nature as revealing the inadequacy of Tess as a figure of unity and she advances her theory that Nature reflects less the relations between the main characters, yet it reflects more the anxieties and concerns of the author himself who invents the characters with the aim of solving his weaknesses.

5. Conclusions

Hardy’s philosophical discourse represents the epilogue of the novel. It is also the epilogue of Tess. She ended her life of misery, of which she could catch short fragments of happiness. Hardy’s discourse demonstrates that life can sometimes be unfair and if this happens who is to blame? At this point, Hardy’s life philosophy, which we notice in the end of the novel, is that human existence can be unfair. A life full of suffering such as Tess’s can end even worse, with death, there is nothing to entitle anybody to a reward whether he/ she had an unhappy life; life itself is unfair and there is nothing the human can do to change that. This is what the novelist wanted the reader to see.

Yet, at a closer look of the psychoanalytical angles different scholars examined, the reader finds more than a life philosophy. *Tess of the D’Urbervilles* represents Hardy’s suppressed human weaknesses.

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