

Research paper on thomas hardy



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

The theme of tragedy is often discussed in terms of this book. Fascinated by Greek tragedy, Hardy uses tragic circumstances to enhance the Wessex countryside and its inhabitants. By doing so he not only develops his story, but attains a certain grandeur for his novel. His first attempts at tragedy were *The Return of the Native* and *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, but *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* is the culmination of his efforts. In this work, Hardy projects ancient drama into modern novel form.

To accomplish this, he models his book after Aristotle's formula for tragedy, although he focuses on a young country girl instead of a tragic hero. His many classical and Shakespearian allusions add strength to his modern tragedy. Source Citation: Sprechman, Ellen Lew. "Tess of the d'Urbervilles." DISCovering Authors. Online ed. Detroit: Gale, 2003. Student Resource Center – Gold. Gale. EAST CHAMBERS HIGH SCHOOL. 3 May. 2010 In *Phase the Second: A Maiden No More*, (12–15) Tess must now live with the consequences of Alec's violation.

It is now October, four months after her arrival, when Tess sets out to return home. "[I]t was terribly beautiful to Tess to-day, for since her eyes last fell upon it she had learnt that the serpent hisses where the sweet birds sing. . . ." Alec makes an unsuccessful bid for her forgiveness, stating that he is "ready to pay to the uttermost farthing." Tess deserts Alec along the road and soon encounters a sign painter, "an artizan of some sort," whose signs preach against vice and sin. "Thy, Damnation, Slumbereth, Not. 2 Pet. i 3," which message, "against the peaceful landscape . . . [in] vermilion words shone forth." When Tess finally confronts her mother with the rape and asks why she did not warn Tess about the dangers of "men-folk," Mrs.

Durbeyfield clings to the same ignorant and misguided belief that Tess should have compelled Alec to marry her for her own good and the benefit of the impoverished Durbeyfields. By now, Tess has fallen into abject misery and become the focal point of village gossip, finding no consolation in either her friends or attendance at church services. The bedroom she shared with some of the children formed her retreat more continually than ever. . . . So close kept she that at length almost everybody thought she had gone away. " The following August finds Tess working in the fields while taking breaks to feed her unbaptized baby. When the baby falls ill, she baptizes the child herself, appropriately naming him Sorrow, and shortly thereafter she must bury her infant son in a nearly forgotten part of a graveyard. " So the baby was carried in a small deal box . . . and buried by lantern-light . . . in that shabby corner of God's allotment where He lets the nettles grow. . . ."

By the end of this second phase, Tess resolves to re-enter the world and seek employment suitable to her social status. " She would be dairymaid Tess, and nothing more. " In Phase the Third: The Rally, a few months following this tragedy, Tess begins working at the Talbothays Dairy, owned by the kindly Richard Crick. Her spirits now being lifted by the beautiful countryside, Tess is very happy to be in new surroundings. Either the change in the quality of the air from heavy to light, or the sense of being amid new scenes where there were no invidious eyes upon her, sent up her spirits wonderfully. " It is here that Tess meets Angel Clare, a young man of twenty-six years and the son of a local parson, who aspires to own a farm in either England or one of the colonies, rather than be a minister as his father expects. Though he is working as a novice dairy-farmer at Talbothays, there

is that about him which suggests “ something educated, reserved, subtle, sad, differing. Furthermore, he is remotely familiar to Tess. A loving relationship between Angel and Tess begins to evolve. “ Every day, every hour brought to him one more little stroke of her nature, and to her one more of his. Tess was trying to lead a repressed life, but she little divined the strength of her own vitality. ” In the meantime, there is a crisis at the dairy when the milk does not begin to turn to butter, and a superstitious tale goes around that this is surely a sign that somebody at the dairy is in love.

Eventually, however, the butter begins to form and tranquility is restored, while one of the milkmaids, Retty Priddle, observes that Angel is in love with Tess. In the meantime, Angel has been observing Tess, waiting for the right moment to profess his love for her. However, Tess is convinced that a relationship with a man of his social status could never last, and thus she resists him. Nevertheless, despite her instincts about the success of such a union, Tess will eventually marry Angel Clare in the fourth phase. And that possibility is implied in the narrator’s final comment at the close of this third part. A veil had been whisked aside; the tract of each one’s outlook was to have a new horizon thenceforward—for a short time or long. ” Text Citation: Bloom, Harold, ed. “ Tess of the D’Urbervilles. ” Thomas Hardy, Bloom’s Major Novelists. Philadelphia: Chelsea House Publishing, 2003. Bloom’s Literary Reference Online. Facts On File, Inc. <http://www.fofweb.com/activelink2.asp?ItemID=WE54&SID=5&iPin=BMNTH60&SingleRecord=True> (accessed May 4, 2010). Tess of the d’Urbervilles stresses the subjectivity of experience and judgment.

In basing the aesthetic effect of his work upon the principle of subjectivity, Hardy broadened a trail rather than blazed one, although I know of no earlier fictional tragedy to employ the concept. The aesthetic energy in subjectiveness was bizarrely thrust upon Western consciousness by Rousseau, especially in his *Confessions*, and its fecundity is still evident. Keats's odes and Wordsworth's *The Prelude*, and such later works as Conrad's and Faulkner's novels, are well known examples of the capacity of the mind to make its own self-signifying world. Hardy shares an essentially romantic perception with these writers, but less sophisticated.

Although an awareness of the principle is clear in all of his work—I have already remarked upon its appearance in *The Return of the Native*—the full exploitation of subjectivity as an index to tragedy appears first in *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*. It is perhaps partly because tragedy was not an active form during the era of the aggrandizement of common humanity by romanticism (though it does appear in the subgenre of Gothicism in both fiction and drama) that Hardy was the first to structure a tragedy upon the individual's comprehension of himself rather than upon his relation to a social world.

Each of Hardy's tragedies is in its own way a brief for the desirability of individual freedom, but in *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* he expands freedom of conscience to include freedom of consciousness, a near anarchy of perception. "The world is only a psychological phenomenon," says Hardy-as-narrator early in the novel (p. 108); and he demonstrates in a variety of ways within the novel the impossibility of objective and detached observation and evaluation of life.

The meaning of an action depends not only upon the situation, which in itself is probably unique, but also upon the beholders, who while broadly consistent in their characterizations are not constant. (Angel's declaration to Tess, following her story of her past, that she is not the woman he married earlier in the day; Tess's later decision that after marrying Angel she was a different person from the one she had been with Alec—these declarations reflect the evanescence of life as surely as they do Tess's and Angel's confusion about morality and their own evolving personalities. The emphasis upon subjectivity of experience locates the source of the tragic emotion in Tess of the d'Urbervilles within the human consciousness rather than within some sort of relationship between the individual and environment, or between individuals, or between an individual and the moral order of his world. Obviously, there are social and interpersonal relationships, and Hardy does not fail to show how they impinge upon and affect the consciousness of the separate individual. But the tragic emotion itself is subjective, centering in characters essentially isolated within selves that do not remain stable entities even within themselves.

Text Citation: Kramer, Dale. Thomas Hardy: The Forms of Tragedy (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1975): pp. 111-14. Quoted as "The Tragedy of Consciousness" in Harold Bloom, ed. Thomas Hardy, Bloom's Major Novelists. Philadelphia: Chelsea House Publishing, 2003. (Updated 2007.) Bloom's Literary Reference Online. Facts On File, Inc. <http://www.fofweb.com/activelink2.asp?ItemID=WE54&SID=5&iPin=BMNTH78&SingleRecord=True> (accessed May 4, 2010). One of Hardy's

memorable and cherished heroines, Tess plays the central role in *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*.

As indicated in the novel's subtitle, she is "A Pure Woman Faithfully Presented." The eldest of the many Durbeyfield children, she is the most responsible member of the family. When we first meet her, at the May Day Club-walking at Marlott, she is described as having a quality of freshness; she is a "fine and handsome girl" with a "mobile peony mouth and large innocent eyes . . . a mere vessel of emotion untinged by experience." When the village girls are dancing, before the young men arrive from work, Angel Clare and his brothers pass by.

He dances with another girl, but remembers Tess later and feels instinctively that she has been "hurt by his oversight." Tess evolves from a sensitive girl, burdened by her family, into a complex woman. She has been compared with a bird who has been caught in a trap—the trap of trying to assist her parents and of being seduced by Alec d'Urberville. Her father is obsessed with recapturing the glory of his paternal lineage, and her mother only wants her daughter to find a husband of a better class, regardless of his character.

Ironically, Tess's heredity is linked with old nobility, unlike Alec d'Urberville, whose father was a Mr. Simon Stoke. After the death of Prince, the family's horse, Tess goes to work at The Slopes, the home of Alec d'Urberville and his mother. Alec seduces her and she gives birth to a baby boy, called Sorrow. She refuses to marry Alec. After the baby's death she works as a milkmaid at Talbothay's Dairy, where she meets Angel Clare, her future husband. She has an unwavering loyalty to Angel and marries him; he then abandons her

after she tells him the truth about her past (a confession her mother had advised against).

She takes up arduous farm work at Flintcome Ash, where Alec finds her. In the hope of helping her family she agrees to live with him at Sandbourne. Angel returns, but Tess is in such a state that she ceases to “ recognize the body before him as hers—allowing it to drift, like a corpse upon the current, in a direction dissociated from its living will. ” She realizes that Alec has deceived her in telling her that Angel would never return, and she stabs him. Angel helps her flee, and they enjoy a brief period of happiness before she is arrested at Stonehenge and executed.