

In society of the victorian era was

Literature, Russian Literature



In his novel " Tess of the d'Urbervilles" Thomas Hardy writes about Victorian women being victims of male dominance, specifically through the character of Tess who's presented in a tragic light due to the dominance she has been subjected to. " The World's Wife" by Carol Ann Duffy also explores the effects of male dominance by presenting historical figures anew for the reader to look at women that were previously obscured behind the men who dominated their society. In Hardy's novel ' Tess of the D'Urbervilles' the concept of male domination is first explored in the Tess' relationship with her father, John Durbeyfield. Whilst he does not directly exert any dominance onto her his role as the ' shiftless head of the house' is what predominantly controls Tess' fate.

Due to the patriarchal society of the Victorian era all of John's actions inadvertently reflect upon the rest of his family, especially Tess due to her being the oldest female. As a result of this it becomes Tess' duty to make up for her father's shortcomings as his ' shiftless' nature implies that he is unable to properly provide for his family. John's indolence indirectly harms the character of Tess, as it is what forces her to find work in a society where she should not be relied on as the main breadwinner. This demonstrates how the male oriented society of the Victorian era was harmful towards females as they were often coerced into situations that they did not want to be involved in order to please male figures. It can also be argued that her father's reliance on her to provide for the household is a catalyst for Tess' eventual downfall due to the fact that if she did not have to find work she would've never experienced the events that caused her fate. The inherent dominance that Tess' father has over her also strips her of what little

independence a Victorian woman would have, thus causing her to live a life that puts her parents needs before her own forcing her to abandon aspirations of socially rising and living a better life. Whilst Tess accepts the notion of not being independent the titular character of Carol Ann Duffy's poem 'Thetis' spends the majority of the poem trying to maintain the little independence that she has. In the poem she is unable to live without being in the constant fear of being attacked by an unnamed male figure that is constantly trying to dominate her.

The concept of the antagonistic character of the poem being unnamed could be implying that they are a representation of men in general and even though we have progressed from the male dominated society present in 'Tess' society is for the most part still patriarchal. In contrast to how the character of Tess conforms to the abuse and dominance that is placed upon her, Thetis incessantly tries to escape the harsh reality of abuse that the male figure tries to place upon her. In the first stanza Thetis is initially portrayed as a sweet 'bird in the hand of a man'. The imagery of a bird suggests freedom and independence, as a bird is able to roam the sky as freely as they wish.

However, this idea is juxtaposed by the fact that she is 'in the hand of a man' which implies any freedom is dependent on whether he allows her to be free or not. The false security of freedom that Thetis believes she has is quickly stripped by her dominator who abuses his power and "squeeze(s)" her with his "fist". This initial demonstration of violence makes it obvious that she is not in control as much as she believes to be and makes

her aware of the posing threat of violence and dominance that men pose towards her. Similarly in 'Tess' the initial sexual violations of Alec towards her is what causes the character to become more wary and uneasy in the presence of men. Whilst Tess does not initially accept the thought of being controlled by a man and giving up her freedom the character of Tess never truly has any form of freedom with her decisions constantly being manipulated to suit the needs of the male characters in her life (i. e.

her father, Alec, Angel). Throughout Hardy's novel it is reinforced that Tess is a 'pure woman' and is often described in a way that depicts her as innocent such as her first introduction at the May Day dance where she is in a company of girls wearing a white dress. The white implying purity, innocence and chastity that she is supposed to represent. However the purity of the white is offset by the red ribbon in her hair, red being a colour typically associated with sin, sexuality and danger. She is described as "the only one of the white company who could boast of such a pronounced adornment" suggesting that out of the entire company of girls it is her fate to be tainted with the sexual violence that she will have to face at the hands of Alec, thus the ribbon being a physical representation of the eventual ruining of her innocence. Alec first exercises his dominance over Tess when he coerces her to eat a strawberry from his hand and even though she is uncomfortable "in a slight distress she parted her lips and took it in".

The verb 'distress' displays that she felt uncomfortable in giving in to what Alec wanted but due to his position as a rich, white, powerful male she felt an obligation to give in, as it is what would be expected of a woman in Victorian

society. Alec abuses his position of being at the top of the Victorian hierarchy to abuse Tess knowing that she would be too afraid to go against him, especially due to her position of being poor and a woman. The red colour of the strawberry reiterates the fact that she is in a dangerous position, which is also sexually charged as strawberries can be considered to be symbolic of passion and sexual desires. This initial violation, whilst small, displays that Alec believes he can successfully have control over Tess, as she is unlikely to fight back against him. The peak of his dominance and control over the character of Tess is when the implied rape happens in 'The Chase'. The sexual dominance and violence that Tess goes through during the rape shows how little control that she has even over the most intimate aspects of her life with her virtue being taken away against her will. The rape ultimately exhibits who holds the power in their relationship.

Hardy makes it clear to the reader that Tess is unwilling in the entire situation and that "Upon her eyelashes there lingered tears", signifying that the event caused pain and hurt for her. The line "Where was Tess's guardian angel?" displays the fact that Tess herself could not fight back against the injustice that was happening to her and instead was hoping to rely on an 'angel' to save her from the dominance exhibited by Alec. As a direct result of the rape, Tess becomes pregnant and due to this becomes a social pariah, whilst Alec continues with life as normal highlighting the double standards between Victorian men and women. Even though she did not fight against Alec's sexual dominance, Tess does manage to insure that he doesn't dominate every aspect of her life by refusing to marry him despite him being her only potential suitor due to her being an "impure" woman. This would've shocked

Victorian reader as modern critic Ann Mickleson put it “ Tess is part of a class-conscious society, which regards the peasant as an inferior member of society and woman as inferior to man”, thus meaning that they wouldn't have expected her to have her own free will to make such a brave decision due to her lowly status.