

Setting in tess of the durbervilles



The Role of Setting In the novel Tess of the D'Urbervilles by Thomas Hardy, Tess is faced with many different levels of happiness, from pure joy to absolute unhappiness. As she moves from location to location, the setting of these places portrays Tess' joy. From her pure happiness at Talbothay's Dairy, to the turning point of Tess's joy at the old D'Urberville house, to her most unforgiving stay at Flintcomb-Ash, to her final contentness before her death at Bramshurst Court, the reader sees atmospheric changes that diminish then climb back up. Hardy thoroughly demonstrates through his descriptions of her surroundings how Tess will feel while stationed in each place. After Tess's life has been torn apart by Alec D'Urberville she needs to seek refuge. By leaving her home town of Marlott, she is able to start her life anew. She escapes to the jovial atmosphere of Talbothay's Dairy. As Tess crosses over the ridge of the hill it seems as though she is switching worlds. Hardy's description portrays the field as " a billiard table of indefinite length" (Hardy 98) with " a carpeted level, which stretched to the east and the west as far as the eye could reach" (97). The land is described as being as limitless as Tess' joy. The area is plush and beautiful, and here, Tess is able to relax and be free of her past. Tess' " whimsical eye" (98) sees " vivid green moss" (98). This gives the area a childlike appeal, as though you can be young and happy while at Talbothay's Dairy. Tess feels warm as she watches the " shadows... with as much care over each contour as if it had been the profile of a Court beauty on a palace wall" (98). Even the cows have a majestic magnetism as the " white of their horns reflected the sunshine in dazzling brilliancy" (99). Talbothay's Dairy is glowing with joy and this warmth finds its way to a well-needing Tess. Tess is able to feel happy again and " that she really had laid a new foundation for her future. The conviction

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bred serenity" (101). This happy feeling continues throughout Tess' stay, as she reunites Angel, and falls in love. After their marriage, Tess and Angel go to live in an old D'Urberville house near Wellbridge Mill. As they are leaving Talbothay's Dairy they hear a cock crow. The crowd immediately thinks of the old wife's tale of an afternoon cock meaning bad luck. While they try to dismiss it saying that it's "not what you think: 'tis impossible!" (Hardy 202), it sets the backdrop for what is to come. The mood and setting upon their arrival to the D'Urberville house are ominous, continuing the cock's effect. Tess is depressed by the house, exclaiming "Those horrid women!" (Hardy 203) when she sees portraits of her ancestors. As the night grew longer "the restless dead leaves of the preceding autumn were stirred to irritated resurrection, and whirled about unwillingly, and tapped against the shutters. It soon began to rain" (Hardy 204). Tess' happiness begins to falter with the rain. She proceeds to tell Angel the story of her past, while "the ashes under the grate were lit by the fire vertically, like a torrid waste" (Hardy 211). Hardy describes the coals in the fire as having "a Last Day luridness" which penetrates to Tess, and results in her separating from Angel. This mysterious atmosphere is portrayed by Hardy in order to be a turning point and start the decrease of Tess' joy. As a result of her past, Angel leaves Tess, and Hardy sends her to work at Flintcomb-Ash. Flintcomb-Ash is shown as a brutally unforgiving place. It is through this dismal atmosphere that Hardy shows when Tess hits the bottom of her happiness. Even while Tess is heading towards Flintcomb-Ash Hardy shows the change. The 'air was dry and cold and the long cart-roads were blown white and dusty within a few hours after the rain" (263). Tess becomes part of the "stroke of raindrops, the burn of sunbeams, and the stress of winds. There is no passion in her now" (262).

Tess finds herself approaching an area of "irregular chalk-table land" (263) compared to the lush, green fields of Talbothay's Dairy. She enters the "remains of a village... in a slight depression" (263). The land is horrid with its "stubborn soil" (264) and Tess realizes that "the walls seem to be the only friend she has" (264). It is appropriate that the village is filled with melancholy descriptions, as this is exactly how Tess feels. Her loneliness, like that of the village "was excessive" (264). This gloom remains with her for as long as she stays at Flintcomb-Ash. It is significant of all the hardships Tess has passed through, from her experiences with Alec to her strife with Angel, that Tess sees the "desolate drab" (267) of a land in different "degrees of dampness" (267). Tess' heart is as cold as the land. Flintcomb-Ash makes Tess spiritless. She is dismal without Angel and will remain so for as long as she stays. After Alec's death, Tess and Angel sneak happily off to an empty cottage snug in the woods of Bramshurst Court. While here Tess is able to become happy once more, especially due to the rejoining of herself and true love. The cottage is penetrating with good qualities, just as Tess feels; she is free and in love. "The weather was serenely bright, and during the afternoon it was quite warm" (365). After entering the cottage "a shaft of dazzling sunlight glanced into the room" (366), and Tess' burdens are able to "rest at last!" (366). The next morning, though "wet and foggy... apparently had no sign of sorrow" (367). "Not a sight or sound of human being disturbed their peacefulness, such as it was" (367). They were free to love each other in peace. The entire cottage was draped in amiable warmth. Upon their leaving Tess sighs, "Ah, happy house-good-bye!" (369). It is while at Bramshurst Court that Tess feels her greatest joy and peace, and Hardy shows that well through his light and joyful descriptions. From the playful atmosphere at

Talbothay's Dairy, to the mysterious gloom apparent at the old D'Urberville house, to the d

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