

Ess of the d'urbervilles essay sample



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

In Hardy's tragic novel, nothing is as clear as it seems. Although Alec D'Urberville was the ostensible instigator of the protagonist Tess Durbeyfield's downfall, it must be argued that Angel Clare plays just as a significant role in her destruction. Initial contemporary readings saw Tess and Angel's relationship as doomed by Tess' past, while more modern interpretations point to Angel's decision to leave for the failure of the marriage.

Throughout the novel, Hardy makes great use of foreshadowing in order to emphasise how the numerous tragedies in his protagonist's life cumulate in disaster. This has never been more apparent than with Tess and Angel: as a keystone of the novel, their relationship is haunted by the spectre of the past all the way through. By introducing Angel almost as soon as he establishes Tess' character, Hardy makes it clear from the outset that this relationship will be more significant than any other..

It is evident that Angel and Tess will fall in love, but what is even more arresting is Angel's initial and lasting impression that Tess is the epitome of purity and maidenhood. Hardy starkly emphasises Tess' virginal aspects through compound nominal phrases such as "white shape" and "pretty maiden", creating the lasting image of her as a perfect woman. However, when Angel leaves and "dismisses the subject from his mind", Hardy at once shows Angel's objectification of Tess and how easily he can put aside her hurt, hinting at their relationship to come.

Even once Angel knows who Tess is, his initial impression of her as a "fresh and virginal daughter of Nature" does not change but only becomes deeper

embedded in his and the reader's subconscious, painting a cruel contrast between his expectations and the real knowledge of Tess' past. As soon as Angel and Tess meet again at the idyllic Talbothay's Dairy, Hardy introduces the severe contrast between Tess' simple nature and Angel's intellectual presence, foreshadowing more than ever that once Tess' past comes to light, the relationship is doomed.

When Angel first notices Tess at the breakfast table, Hardy subtly hints about his idiosyncratic tendency to see what he wants to see to the reader, saying that he " was ever in the habit of neglecting the particulars of an outward scene for the general impression". This may seem to be incongruous with Angel's introspective and thoughtful character, but when considered alongside his behaviour towards Tess, it fits perfectly. The use of the adverb " ever" suggests that Angel is fixed and unswerving in his beliefs and principles.

In particular, Hardy is setting the scene for Angel's refusal to take into account the mitigating circumstances of Tess' rape, as he only sees the gross magnitude of the sin that has been committed. He refuses to entertain the notion that her past is similar to his, gasping " My God- how can forgiveness meet such a grotesque- prestigidation as that! " Hardy's use of the adjective " grotesque" indicates how Angel simply cannot equate such a brutal act as rape with the innocent Tess, and it is anger at this, rather than at Tess herself, which causes his outburst.

Additionally, Angel is idealistic in his morals, " imaginative to impracticability" as Hardy later scorns him, and this early quotation shows

how Angel refuses to compromise his high ideals for anything, even his love for Tess. He takes advantage of her unshakeable belief in his views and asks her to “ Think of years to come... and this past matter getting known- for it must be known”, striking fear into her honest heart and preventing her from using her feminine charms as a tool of persuasion. Tess genuinely believes him and does not think to suggest emigrating: her loyalty to him is such that she does not question his decision.

Early on in Angel and Tess' relationship, Hardy describes Tess' unhappiness at her apparent want of intellectual capability compared to Angel, whom she sees as “ an intelligence rather than a man”. Straightaway, Tess' assumed inferiority is introduced, highlighting the insurmountable gap in the backgrounds of the two characters. Hardy even points out that during Angel's initial reaction to Tess' history, he still felt enough of a “ back current of sympathy through which a woman of the world might have conquered him”, but she takes his emotional confusion as a final judgement, simply because she continues to see him as so superior to her.

With the phrase “ woman of the world”, Hardy brings attention to Tess' pitiful lack of experience concerning men and relationships: he highlights how submissive Tess is that she will not attempt to change Angel's mind, but also how pure and innocent she remains, that she will not use “ her exceptional physical nature” in order to convince him to stay. However, through the use of the abstract noun “ current”, the novelist implies that Angel's emotions are transient and ever-shifting, portraying him as unreliable and untrustworthy.

During the idyllic early morning meetings, Hardy illustrates a hazy new transitional world “ in that strange and solemn interval, the twilight of the morning” to mirror Angel’s rose-tinted and not entirely clear vision of Tess. The author continually uses a semantic field of religious references to illustrate the significance of certain moments.

For instance, Hardy describes “ a feeling of isolation, as if they were Adam and Eve”, which not only confers heroic status on them, but creates an ominous sense that Tess’ past will eventually catch up with them and drive them from the lush, fertile Eden that is not only Talbothay’s Dairy, but the bubble of idealism in which the lovers are living. While Angel may be raised to “ godlike” status while Tess is referred to as “ the Magdalen”, supporting Tess’ idolatry of him, they cannot escape the third presence in their relationship.

In one of Hardy’s most sensual descriptions of Tess, he describes “ the red interior of her mouth” and compares it to a snake’s. The sensuality of the colour red and the snake both reference Alec D’Urberville, who is consistently given Satanic attributes such as “ animalism” and “ Paganism” as well as possessing “ black angularities” in both appearance and personality, here symbolising the temptation that drove both Adam and Eve from Eden.

Hardy cleverly employs the religious lexis: owing to his contempt of traditional, “ quaint and curious” religion (which is divested in Angel and Tess’ rebellious views), his use of instantly recognisable Biblical features makes the point that Angel and Tess’ doomed relationship is simply a sad

story that has been played out many times at some level over the centuries. Due to his portrayal of Tess as pure and guiltless, Hardy uses religion to emphasise how women like Tess have been in similar predicaments ever since Eve.

It also gives a greater gravity to Tess and Angel's romance, as the reader knows that it is finite. Hardy continues to expose faults in Angel's character, namely his hypocrisy and ability to change his mind easily, showing how the relationship only leads to disaster. During their courtship he staunchly argues that her low position as a milkmaid does not and will not deter him- on the contrary, Angel insists he needs a wife " who knows all about the management of farms" and Tess, therefore, is better suited to him than the Mercy Chant.

However, during the passionate argument when Tess follows Angel out of the house after her confession, Angel states firmly that he and Tess belong to " different societies" and compares her to " an unapprehending peasant woman" who has never experienced any form of society. This example is not unique: Hardy portrays Angel as eager to seize on an idea and find any evidence to fit it, regardless of previous beliefs: for instance, his ever-changing opinion of " old families" which only depends on his attitude to Tess at the time.

One of the most obvious events that foreshadows the ending of the novel is Angel's somnambulation. Hardy wrote this scene to symbolise all of Angel's conflicting emotion and Tess' self-destructive nature. The outpouring of Angel's love for his " dearest, darling Tess! So sweet, so good, so true! ",

which he kept so carefully hidden during the day, hints at yet another change of mind on his part later on in the novel, while his exclamation ““ dead, dead! ” signifies not only how Tess is morally dead to him, but how he feels his actions have killed the spirit and love within his ““ poor, poor Tess””.

Even though Tess suspects multiple times that Angel’s actions could lead to her death, either intentionally or accidentally, “ self-solicitude was near extinction in her”, linking to how she remains placid and uncomplaining even throughout temptation and harsh conditions at Flintcombe-Ash.

When Angel “ carefully laid” her in the open coffin, Hardy is symbolising that due to Tess’ devotion to Angel, she will allow herself to be led to her death, arguably the greatest moment of symbolism in the novel. In Tess of the D’Urbervilles, Hardy as the omniscient narrator remains firmly on the side of his protagonist: she is the vehicle for him to express his contempt of the traditionally misogynistic values so strongly upheld by Victorian society.

Although Angel professes to reject these conventions, he ultimately submits to them, thus creating an even greater divide between the two lovers. In her final hours, Tess herself states that her happiness with Angel “ could not have lasted” and that it was better that she would be gone, fulfilling Hardy’s portrayal of a love that was sincere, almost ethereal, but lavished on a fallible, human man, and therefore inevitably doomed to fail.