



The Subtitle Of ‘Tess Of The D’urbervilles’:A Study

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ABSTRACT: Thomas Hardy was a Victorian poet and novelist whom himself denominated his novels, “Novels of Character and Environment”. His novels rendered psychological insights and revelations which elucidate the characters who are accompanied by complex passions, arriving in strange predicaments. *Tess of the D’Urbervilles*, subtitled “A Pure Woman Faithfully Presented”, published in 1891 can be considered as his tragic masterpiece which relates the story of a simple, sensuous and passionate girl Teresa “Tess” Duberfield. The novel encountered severe criticism for depicting the heroine as a “Pure Women” which was against the sexual norms of the Victorian days. The novel was rejected by many publishers for its pessimism and obsession of sex, before it appeared in the periodical as a serial story in *The Graphic* between July and December 1891 and in its complete original version of Wessex edition in December 1891.

KEYWORDS: Fate, Religion, Victim etc.

Received 13 October, 2018; Accepted 29 October, 2018 © The author(s) 2018. Published with open access at www.questjournals.org

I. INTRODUCTION

During the Victorian age, the life of women was confined to the household, where they were viewed as sexual and reproductive tools by the male dominating society. Men worked at the public space and women’s service were limited, taking the roles of daughter, wife and mother. Women were denied the freedom to get a profession as they didn’t share the intellect of men. Much moral goodness was expected from them in their domestic responsibilities and devotion to their husbands. The educational system moulded women to meet social expectations, teaching them the ways to become good wives, household management, to create a pleasing behaviour and atmosphere that would render happiness to men. The Victorian ideal of womanhood is clearly evident in the poem ‘The Angel in the House’ by Coventry Patmore:

Man must be pleased, but him to please
Is woman’s pleasure down the gulf?
Of his consoled necessities
She casts her best, she flings herself
In marriage life, a woman was exacted to view her husband as God, regarding her own body as his object of pleasure and sexual fulfilment. Motherhood was seen as the greatest virtue in a woman’s life, it was a sign of emotional satisfaction. Women were considered as spiritual and moral guardians, the moral conduct and virtue of women were perceived as necessary factors which strengthened the basis of a society.

It was in this context Hardy gave the subtitle “A Pure Woman Faithfully Presented” to his finest novel which gives the sympathetic representation of the heroine Tess, from her initial hopeful journey traversing to troubled upheavals, finally causing her seizure and death. Tess was a ‘fallen woman’ who got pregnant by pre-marital sex, she was the one who revealed this secret on her wedding night with another man and above all, she was a murderer. Then how can she be called the pure woman? This was the question which aroused in the mind of every Victorian reader. The description was also against the moral values upheld by Christian religion which equated purity and virtue with virginity. Hardy, the creator deliberately assigned this title to startle his Victorian audience by making a distinguishing, unique, magnificent character through Tess by calling her the ‘pure woman’. He gave his view on describing his heroine in an interview with Raymond Blathwayt:

I still maintain that her innate purity remained intact to the very last; though I frankly own that a certain outward purity left her on her last fall. I regarded her then as being in the hands of outward circumstances, not morally responsible, a mere corpse drifting with the current to her end (Interviews, 282).

At the beginning of the novel, though Tess in a rape or seduction becomes pregnant by Alec d’Urberville, Hardy presents her as a pure woman who was obliged to act according to the unfortunate torments and upheavals of life. Hardy’s choice of the appellation of ‘a pure woman’ is lauded by the feminist critic Clementia Black in her review:

Mr. Hardy's story [...] is founded on recognition of the ironic truth which we all know in our hearts, and are all forbidden to say aloud, that the richest kind of womanly nature, the most direct, sincere and passionate, is the most liable to be caught in that sort of pitfall which social convention stamps as an irretrievable disgrace. It is the unsuspecting and fundamentally pure-minded girl in whom lie the noblest possibilities of womanhood, who is the easiest victim and who has to fight the hardest fight. (Illustrated London News, 9 Jan 1892, p. 50)

Tess in the novel is a victim of her fate. Tess's father discovers that he is a descendant from a medieval novel family, the d'Urbervilles. They send their reluctant daughter to "claim kin" as they envied to take advantage of their illustrious ancestry. She is seduced by Alec, the playboy son of the newly rich family of D'Urberville who in fact have no association with the original d'Urbervilles. Tess returns home without informing him of her pregnancy and this manifests her varied perception of life. She gives birth to their son whom she called 'Sorrow'; the name can be seen as a reflection of her painful mind. Her innocence and purity of mind are made clear from her words she pitifully tells to her mother: "Why didn't you tell me there was a danger? Why didn't you warn me? Ladies know what to guard against because they read novels that tell them of these tricks, but I never had the chance of discovering in that way and you did not help me!" (Tess, 91)

Life gives the next trial for her by the death of Sorrow, as an addition to her despair, Tess was forced to bury him in a corner of the cemetery where the extreme sinners were buried, for he was the fruit of her adultery. Tess starts working in a dairy to overcome the grief, leaving behind the memories that haunt her. There she meets Angel Clare, a virtuous man from a noble family who perceives her as an innocent girl, despising the difference in their social positions. Tess confesses her sin for before Angel for forgiveness on their wedding night, but it causes a great blow for him leading to a complete change in his attitude towards her: "The woman I have long been loved is not you, but another woman in your shape" (Tess, 275). Clare considers her as impure; he was not able to understand the inner purity of her mind, which made her reveal the secret of her life before her husband. She could have kept it in her mind and live happy with Angel. Her confession reveals the purity of her heart, the purity in her thoughts. Angel leaves informing that he will come back if he takes a decision to endure with her. He can be seen as a representative of the society of the time, his inner conflicts evoked by social constraints that regulated the purity of a woman and the religious notions which gave definitions of the expected principles of a good wife, purity and virginity. The sudden torments and upheavals forced Tess to move according to the current because fate made her a constant sufferer. She again takes the role of a labourer in the farms, a return to her lonely existence, which becomes her only way to survive.

Tess's life makes the next turn with the reappearance of Alec, who is presented as a repented sinner asking her hand in marriage. She turned away from him as she waited for the return of the love of her heart, Angel. But fate was not willing to leave her in her choices; it rendered her situations which made her a real victim. Tess's father dies and the family was forced to shift to the countryside taking with them all their possessions, searching for employment and lodging. Alec makes his appearance again, taking advantage of the situation and Tess, due to outward necessities accepted his proposal desperately because it was the only way before her to support her family, though her mind was longing for Angel. Meanwhile, Angel, who remained as a prisoner of his conventions repents for his act of deserting Tess. Realizing his mistake, forgiving her, he returns to unite with Tess. The change in the mind of Angel can be seen as an attempt of the author who calls for a change in the traditional concepts and prejudices of the Victorian society.

Angel discovers his wife living with Alec, as his mistress. Tess was shocked by seeing him and in anguish and despair, she sends him away. When Alec insults her husband she stabs him to death. Her act of murder can be interpreted as an attempt to wipe out her disgrace, which purifies her sins in Angel's view and in another way it becomes a heroic deed as she was a woman who always played a submissive role before the dominating outside world. The murder was the only response that she makes against the endless sufferings of life. Hardy makes a clear definition for her last great sin: "The murder that Tess commits is the hereditary quality, to which I more than once alluded, working out in this impoverished descendant of this once noble family. That is logical. And again, it is but a simple transcription of the obvious that she should make reparation by death for her sin" (Interviews, 277).

The murder of Alec leads Tess to the fearful punishment. At the Stonehenge, she asks Angel to take care of her younger sister Liza-Lu. In the end, Tess gets executed and Hardy writes thus: "Justice" was done, and the President of the Immortals in Aeschylean phrase had ended his sport with Tess" (Tess, 447).

Tess can be seen as the most tragic portrayal of Hardy, a helpless victim who was utmost pure in her mind and heart, there was much purity in her motivations and intentions. She was an innocent woman victimized throughout her life in the unpredictable parables of fate, her acts and decisions were inevitable for her existence, which at the end delivered a striking character with unique individuality. Every reader who journeys along with Tess, identifying with her pain and sufferings, will stand with the definition assigned to her by Hardy; Tess is 'pure', she is a pure woman. There is no doubt that Tess and her creator will remain forever in

the wonderful world of literature, reflecting the true literary spirit, imaginative spirit and creative impulse of the great genius, who used his tool of writing as a reforming aid, which ignited the mind of every generation.

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Chrisna Jose "The Subtitle Of 'Tess Of The D'urbervilles':A Study " (Quest Journals) Journal of Research in Humanities and Social Science 6.10 (2018): 12-14