

Thomas Hardy

He is a late victorian novelist, he was a pacific writer and he wrote a lot of novels. He has been defined as pessimistic, realistic, romantic, naturalist and, above all, regionalist. His regionalism is connected to the limited area where he set his novels, which he called Wessex. In Anglosasson times it was one of the seven kingdoms established in Britain and originally it covered the south-western part of the country between the Thames and South Coast, which is now called Dorsetshire.

He justified the adoption of the word Wessex by the need of giving territorial definition to his novels.

Wessex became a link between past and present, the major theme of the novel is the transformation of an agricultural society under the impact of modern industrial life.

This total immersion in nature together with a belief that only in rural life man could fully express his passions makes Hardy a Romantic. But while for the Romantics nature meant joy and consolation, for Hardy it was a hostile power for men's destiny.

LOVE, which is present in all his novels, it is another Romantic theme and quite often ends in disillusion and failure destroyed by institutions like society, marriage and chance.

He was quite pessimistic and this is linked to the intellectual and scientific movements of the time and to his studies of Darwin and Mills. He rejected the Bible so he elaborated a pessimistic theory according to which man is an insignificant object in a universe which is indifferent to him.

Man is a powerless victim of obscure faith which shows its workings in a series of accidents and coincidences.

The fathalistic determinism seem to deprive man of all responsibilities for his actions.

Hardy elaborated the idea of a kind of predestination, quite often to failure, according to which all men fulfil their destiny with no help from society which oppresses and destroys them, or from love which usually leads to unhappiness.

Hardy felt compassion for suffering people and for all living creatures.

His characters although failing when they try to improve themselves maintain dignity of their own. Around them there is the community moving, formed by people who are unable to provide help.

The technique he uses is architectural and cinematic, he was very good in giving unity to his novels although the plots are not always convincing because of certain melodramatic episodes and coincidences.

Cinematic= he starts with a panoramic effect and until he provides a closeup on a single detail.

Tess of the D'Urbervilles

7/01/2021

This novel has a subtitle: "a pure woman faithfully presented". Hardy wants to underline that the woman who is forced by circumstances to accept and use violence can still be called pure. She can still be pure in her heart, this is an open challenge to the moral conventions of the time.

In that time a woman could be a prostitute or an angel.

Tess is a pure woman although submitted to violence, this is the challenge.

The inner structure of the novel is formed by conflicts and opposites, antagonisms, for example prejudice is opposed to feelings, culture versus ignorance, individual vs community and human will vs destiny. All the novel is built around these opposites.

The idea that underlies the entire novel is that man is the victim of the decisions and choices forced on him by predestination. We are born and our destinies are predetermined. In Macbeth there is the Tale Told by an idiot, man has no freedom, choosing is an illusion, every step we take in a direction with the illusion of choosing freely takes us exactly towards the goal that a superior power or god had predetermined for us, so Shakespeare says that man is given the illusion to choose but actually he is just a puppet in the hands of the destiny.

The conclusion of the novel is tragic and melodramatic and the plot is imbued with fatalism and pessimism.

The most important themes:

1) NATURE, who is a coprotagonist, but it is indifferent to man's destiny (Leopardi)

2) INFLUENCE OF SOCIAL LAWS AND CONVENTIONS, Hardy says that the life an individual, of human being, follows the same pattern as all natural things. Life is subjected to growth and decay and it has a short season of joy (carpe diem= seize the moment) then it falls into despair.

Tess is a particular specimen of woman, she wishes to live despite the wounds that life has inflicted on her. She is continuously regenerated, she dies in herself and then she is reborn (fenice)

3) SOCIETY AND MORALITY CONTRASTED TO THE INDIFFERENCE OF NATURE

4) CHANCE, HAP

Tess's destiny is determined by the combination of several factors:

- it is inherent in her condition of human being and brings with itself the inevitability of sufferance and death

- the pressure of social forces that determine the future of a person from his/her birth, these conditions are sex, social conditions, poor or rich, and beautiful or not. At that time beauty is a bad omen. Tess inherits the tendency to accept other people's will passively. She will be destroyed because she is passive, her destiny is to be raped.

Also casual circumstances contribute to the building of her destiny, the death of her father's horse, the only wealth of the family, the letter not read by Angel (her lover) before their wedding.

5) RELIGION: Angel refuses the christian faith because it can no longer answer to the needs of modern men, only the primitive worship of nature, for example the celebrations of the druids in Stonehenge, the temple of the sun. These primitive worship of nature seems to find an inner response in the heart of unsophisticated and innocent creatures like Tess.

6) PROGRESS: Hardy believes that the rural countryside shouldn't be spoiled by the effects of industrialisation. The life of the village is disturbed/upset by the arrival of the railway.

12/01/2021

ALEC & TESS

The passage is a climax in the story. Her father's horse had died and he has discovered that his family belongs to a branch of the D'Urbervilles family, so rich relatives. The D before the surname means that the family is rich.

He is a very low character, moreover he continuously bear children, they are a big family.

When the horse dies he sends his elder daughter to work in the farm of this rich relatives, here there is a rich cousin, older than Tess. She becomes a poultry made, but from the very beginning Alec wants to seduce her because she is beautiful.

The first occasion takes place one night, in September, the weather is foggy and she is coming back to the farm from the village on foot with the other servants.

But she is an outcast in this group because the girls think she is too beautiful and they are envious, the boys all want to seduce her but she refuses them, she is isolated.

She is particularly tired and she hasn't taken part to the revelry because she is very shy, it happens that a horse comes and Alec is riding his horse coming back home. He immediately spots the possibility and she asks her whether she wants a lift and she accepts, act of submission.

They ride through the forest and at a certain moment she realises he has taken a wrong turn, it is very late.

In the first lines are described the different stages of mind she is going through, the first is absent-mindedness, weariness and then suspicion and uneasiness, indignation and embarrassment. During the ride Alec takes advantage of his position, he makes advances to her, he is very tender and affectionate.

Tess is not in the position to reject Alec's advances and she even feels guilty at her treatment of him. She feels guilty because he is her master and she will discover that he has been giving her family some gifts, a horse and toys for the children.

He rides the horse in close proximity and this is an anticipation of the sexual act.

She has a moment of oblivion, she is falling asleep, she can't think consciously and he takes the wrong way, she gets angry. She wants to walk home but he says no.

He promises her he will go into the wood and up the hill in order to understand where they are. He kisses her while taking advantage. They stop in a place and he ties the horse to a tree and prepare a nest for her, he goes up the hill and try to understand where they are.

Lines 45-105= Tess experienced other states of mind, distress, passivity and helplessness.

She is a victorian girl, she doesn't leave, she stays there, every clever person would have left but she doesn't. Her main feature is passivity, she remains there.

Alec is both a man and a master, she cannot leave.

There is another symbol, Tess's muslin dress, which represents her fragile innocence.

Alec understands where they are and he comes back with difficulty, the fog is another symbol, of Alec's behaviour, he is not behaving in a clear and decorous way. He gets back and he is able to find her because of the colour of the dress.

Line 104= she was sleeping and there were tears on her face, we get to know that she had cried because she knew what was going to happen, and the tears were still on her eyelashes.

Line 106-108= details of the wood which make us understand that nature is indifferent and society does not wish to know or understand.

The act of seduction is not described, but from line 108 we get to know that the act has taken place, Hardy talks about Tess's guardian angel and he says that in that moment the angel was absent, this denies the possibility of relying on religion.

From 112-end= the narrator addresses the reader directly and he makes this by putting the activities of the human beings into the contest of nature and of supernatural powers. He talks about the birds and animals in the wood going about their business, then he considers that the past affects the present. He states that man's life is regulated by chance

Line 123-124= reference to the fact that they belong to two very different social classes and their relationship is not acceptable to either class.

Moreover it is the woman who pays the social price of her lost reputation, so Tess will be a fallen woman, she has lost verginity and had a child out of the marriage.

From this moment on she will no longer be simple and joyful but will have a darker side to her personality.

Tess is not responsible and Hardy always presents her as a victim.

Tess's baby

After the seduction the relationship goes on, and he visits her bedroom every night, and he seems to be in love with her. She is his mistress.

Tess gets pregnant and she decides to leave the farm, she never says anything to Alec, he doesn't know she is pregnant.

She keeps her child with her and goes to work to the field, very hard work, much harder than in Alec's farm. She is only interested in her child, the baby has never been baptised because she had him outside the marriage. When the child is 3 years old she left him to the care of her family to go to work, the baby falls ill and her family is unable to look after him so they let him die also because he was a burden, so she has to bury him. She goes to the priest and asks him to baptise the baby before burying him, unbaptised children go to hell and she is worried.

The vicar tells her that he is not going to baptise her and so she decides to baptise the child herself.

The parson experiences a conflict between his feelings and his nature as a man and his duties as a clergyman.

Hardy wants to underline that religion is no longer capable of fulfilling the needs of modern men because rules are too strict.

The passage can be divided into four parts:

- 1) Line 1-16: there is the baptism, Tess performs the ceremony by herself with her brothers and sisters and calls the baby Sorrow. The baptism is a baptism for Tess as well and marks a new sense of self-worth that she lacked
- 2) Line 17-25: the description of Sorrow's death and the obtrusive narrator comments on his unlucky and short life. In this part there is also the contrast between Sorrow's short and meaningless life and the eternity and vastity of the universe and also the contrast between the baby's existence and the refusal opposed by society
- 3) Line 26-58: there is Tess with the vicar, she asks him if the baby has the right to be buried in holy ground, in the cemetery.
- 4) Lines 59-end: the baby is finally buried in a forgotten part of the churchyard among the unbaptised drunkard and the suicides, the damned.

Tess is making a crusade against society.

Little Father Time

The passage is divided into 4 parts:

1) Lines 1-15: Jude's discovery of the little corpses. Hardy uses a cinematic technique, Jude is virtually converted into a camera focusing on the main object followed by details, this is highlighted in yellow in the passage. He detects all the details.

Highlighted in pink we have Jude's immediate reactions after the seen. Fast rhythm.

2) Lines 16-31: Sue's despair, her reactions are opposite to Jude's, she breaks down and cannot find consolation.

3) Lines 32-50: it contains the doctor's explanation, he doesn't talk about illnesses, he describes the features of the last generation, children have no hope, they have been deprived of the faith and of the wish to live. Unlike Dickens's children who suffer hardship, misery, exploitation but always maintain their wish to live and to improve their miserable condition thanks to their qualities, Hardy's children have no hope because they have been deprived of an optimistic vision of life.

Words highlighted in light blue are the reasons for Father Time's choice, why he has decided to kill the other children and himself, they are related to Sue's and Jude's mistakes. Little Father has acted out of despair in fact he had been told the previous night that Sue was pregnant again.

4) Lines 51-end: Jude's and Sue's attempts to find an explanation and they have two completely different reactions. Jude thinks chance has acted against them and he thinks they can overcome these difficulties and hope is symbolized by the baby that is going to born. Sue thinks their perfect union has been shadowed by death, stained by blood and therefore it is ruined.

Sue is characterised by the sense of guilt, which is due to the strict moral code of the Victorian society, in fact society considers their relationship obscene while the church condemns them as sinner and doesn't recognise their sorrow. Once more religion is not able to help.

The words underlined in blue contain the ironical description of God's love for his people, actually Hardy wants to say that God has forgotten Jude and Sue and their need, their sorrow and despair.

After this novel he was told not to write novels anymore because they were unacceptable and to write poems, but they were as pessimistic and dramatic as the novels.