Injustice and Fate

The cruel hand of fate hangs over all the characters and actions of the novel, as Tess Durbeyfield's story is basically defined by the bad things that happen to her. Thomas Hardy himself, as the author of the novel, obviously causes the many unfair coincidences and plot twists that beset Tess, but as narrator he also manages to appear as her only advocate against an unjust world. Tess's hardships are described as mere sport… read analysis of Injustice and Fate

Nature and Modernity

Tess of the d'Urbervilles is set in both a time and place of societal transition from the agricultural to the industrial. The rural English towns and farm women often represent Hardy's idea of Nature, while machines and upper class men are associated with the modernizing forces of industrialization. Many of the descriptions and situations of the novel focus on the way that the characters and society are being separated from a more ancient lifestyle, “the… read analysis of Nature and Modernity

Social Criticism

As in many of his other works, Thomas Hardy used Tess of the d'Urbervilles as a vessel for his criticisms of English Victorian society of the late 19th century. The novel's largest critique is aimed at the sexual double standard, with all the extremities and misfortunes of Tess's life highlighting the unfairness of her treatment. Society condemns her as an unclean woman because she was raped, while Angel's premarital affair is barely mentioned… read analysis of Social Criticism

Paganism and Christianity

Thomas Hardy struggled with his own religious beliefs, and that struggle comes through in his work. He idealized the paganism of the past but was also attached to his family's Christianity, and generally he accepted some sort of supernatural being that controlled fate. Tess herself is usually portrayed as an embodiment of that pagan innocence, a sort of English Nature goddess. She first appears performing the fertility ritual of May-Day, then bedecked in flowers from… read analysis of Paganism and Christianity

Injustice and Fate Theme Icon

The cruel hand of fate hangs over all the characters and actions of the novel, as Tess Durbeyfield's story is basically defined by the bad things that happen to her. Thomas Hardy himself, as the author of the novel, obviously causes the many unfair coincidences and plot twists that beset Tess, but as narrator he also manages to appear as her only advocate against an unjust world. Tess's hardships are described as mere sport for the “President of the Immortals,” which contrasts with the Christian idea of a God who has a benevolent plan for everyone, and connects with the notes of paganism throughout the novel. Hardy points out and emphasizes the multiple unhappy coincidences that take place, like Tess overhearing Angel's brothers instead of meeting his father. The novel basically keeps asking the age-old question “why do bad things happen to good people?” Hardy even muses over the possibility that Tess's sufferings are a punishment for her ancestors' crimes, or else that some murderous strain is in her blood, foreshadowed by the d'Urberville coach.

The “justice” meted out by the society around Tess is just as cruel as the “President of the Immortals.” Both her community and Angel condemn Tess for her rape, which was not her sin but Alec's. She is seen as someone to be criticized and cast aside because of a terrible thing done to her, rather than something she did herself. Her final execution emphasizes the feeling that society, circumstance, and some external force, whether Thomas Hardy or a god, have been working against her the whole time.

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The plot sets Tess, who is associated with purity, fertility, unfallen Eve (i.e. Eve as she was in the Garden of Eden), and innocent paganism against the judgmental world of contemporary society. The farming machines are described with ominous imagery that contrasts sharply with the Eden-like Froom Valley. Alec and Angel, who are both well-educated and ranked socially higher than Tess, act as despoiling and condemning influences upon her rural innocence. Prince the farm horse is gored to death by a modern mail cart, and the dairy workers have to water down the milk so the townspeople can drink it without getting sick. The feeling throughout is of nostalgia for an idealized past; a kind of innocence that has been lost along with the coming of the modern age.

Social Criticism Theme Icon

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Even the title of the novel challenges convention. Because it was traditional at the time to see Tess as an “impure woman,” the title's addendum “A Pure Woman Faithfully Presented” immediately reveals the author as his protagonist's defender against condemnation. By delving so deeply into Tess's sympathetic interior life and the intricate history of her misfortunes, Hardy makes society's disapproval of her seem that much more unjust.

There is also a satirical thread running through the novel's social commentary. The emphasis on ancient names is played to absurdity with John Durbeyfield's sudden pretensions upon learning of his ancestry, and the newly rich Stoke family adding “d'Urberville” to their name just to seem more magnificent.

Social Criticism Quotes in Tess of the d'Urbervilles

Chapter 1 Quotes:Don't you really know, Durbeyfield, that you are the lineal representative of the ancient and knightly family of the d'Urbervilles, who derive their descent from Sir Pagan d'Urberville, that renowned knight who came from Normandy with William the Conqueror, as appears by Battle Abbey Roll?

Chapter 4 Quotes:Well, Tess ought to go to this other member of our family. She'd be sure to win the lady – Tess would; and likely enough ‘twould lead to some noble gentleman marrying her. In short, I know it.

Chapter 11 Quotes:“It was to be.” There lay the pity of it. An immeasurable social chasm was to divide our heroine's personality thereafter from that previous self of hers who stepped from her mother's door to try her fortune at Trantridge poultry-farm.

Chapter 19 Quotes:He was surprised to find this young woman – who though but a milkmaid had just that touch of rarity about her which might make her the envied of her housemates – shaping such sad imaginings. She was expressing in her own native phrases… feelings which might almost have been called those of the age – the ache of modernism.

Chapter 31 Quotes:Distinction does not consist in the facile use of a contemptible set of conventions, but in being numbered among those who are true, and honest, and just, and pure, and lovely, and of good report – as you are, my Tess.

Chapter 35 Quotes:Here was I thinking you a new-sprung child of nature; there were you, the belated seedling of an effete aristocracy!

Chapter 47 Quotes:Whip me, crush me; you need not mind those people under the rick! I shall not cry out. Once victim, always victim – that's the law!

Remember, my lady, I was your master once! I will be your master again. If you are any man's wife you are mine!

Chapter 52 Quotes:The old order changeth. The little finger of the sham d'Urbervilles can do more for you than the whole dynasty of the real underneath…

“Justice” was done, and the President of the Immortals, in Aeschylean phrase, had ended his sport with Tess. And the d'Urberville knights and dames slept on in their tombs unknowing.

Paganism and Christianity Theme Icon

Thomas Hardy struggled with his own religious beliefs, and that struggle comes through in his work. He idealized the paganism of the past but was also attached to his family's Christianity, and generally he accepted some sort of supernatural being that controlled fate. Tess herself is usually portrayed as an embodiment of that pagan innocence, a sort of English Nature goddess. She first appears performing the fertility ritual of May-Day, then bedecked in flowers from Alec, whistling to Mrs. d'Urberville's birds, and mercifully killing the wounded pheasants. Angel describes her as a “new-sprung child of nature” and compares her to mythical women like Eve, Artemis, and Demeter. There is another side of Tess's “divinity” as well, however: the role of sacrificial victim, which is a figure associated with both paganism and Christianity. Like Jesus, Tess is punished for the sins of another, assuming the weight of guilt for Alec's crime. When the police finally come to arrest her for murder, she is lying asleep at Stonehenge like a sacrifice on an altar. Stonehenge was thought at Hardy's time to be a heathen temple.

The Christian end of the spectrum is particularly associated with the Clare family and Alec d'Urberville. Each character seems to have a different form and expression of faith, and Hardy critiques them all with empathy from his own religious wrestling. Most of his respect goes to the intense but charitable Mr. Clare, while Alec's conversion is depicted more as a product of his fickle thrill-seeking than any deep emotion, and the conformist Clare brothers are mocked for blindly following every fashionable doctrine. Angel's skepticism and Tess's vague beliefs take the most prominence, and neither moves much past Hardy's own state of doubt.

Women

Hardy muses a lot about Tess's status as a woman and the various roles women assume in society. Tess often plays the part of a passive victim, falling asleep and inadvertently killing Prince, falling asleep before her rape, and falling asleep at Stonehenge where she is arrested. She and many of the other female characters also act as symbols of fertility, nature, and purity. They are linked with the lushness of Talbothays and the bleakness of Flintomb-Ash, as well the fertility ritual of May-Day. Hardy also places a lot of emphasis on the power of men over women, in terms of both society and strength. Alec obviously dominates Tess in many terrible ways, but Angel also wields power over the women at the dairy, driving Retty and Marian to a suicide attempt and alcoholism. Tess finally assumes the role of an active agent in her own life when she writes angrily to Angel, and her final murder of Alec takes it to the extreme, underscoring Hardy's critique of the oppression of women in Victorian society. Tess is only able to actively change her life and escape her male oppressor by murdering him, which then leads to her own execution. There is no place for a woman in her position to escape.

But while Tess and the other female characters represent many things in the novel, Hardy ultimately celebrates the individual woman over a symbolic whole. Tess is not an “everywoman” or a symbol of fertility, passivity, or oppression, but a unique individual. Angel's relationship with Tess shows this tension between idealized image and living reality. He falls in love with his version of Tess, which is the Nature goddess and symbol of innocence, but when the real Tess reveals her troubled humanity and becomes truly alive for him, Angel rejects her. For Hardy, however, Tess remains both a symbol of many things and an individual soul, and it is because of this that she is so successful and sympathetic as a character

Themes are the fundamental and often universal ideas explored in a literary work.

The Injustice of Existence

Unfairness dominates the lives of Tess and her family to such an extent that it begins to seem like a general aspect of human existence in Tess of the d’Urbervilles. Tess does not mean to kill Prince, but she is punished anyway, just as she is unfairly punished for her own rape by Alec. Nor is there justice waiting in heaven. Christianity teaches that there is compensation in the afterlife for unhappiness suffered in this life, but the only devout Christian encountered in the novel may be the reverend, Mr. Clare, who seems more or less content in his life anyway. For others in their misery, Christianity offers little solace of heavenly justice. Mrs. Durbeyfield never mentions otherworldly rewards. The converted Alec preaches heavenly justice for earthly sinners, but his faith seems shallow and insincere. Generally, the moral atmosphere of the novel is not Christian justice at all, but pagan injustice. The forces that rule human life are absolutely unpredictable and not necessarily well-disposed to us. The pre-Christian rituals practiced by the farm workers at the opening of the novel, and Tess’s final rest at Stonehenge at the end, remind us of a world where the gods are not just and fair, but whimsical and uncaring. When the narrator concludes the novel with the statement that “‘Justice’ was done, and the President of the Immortals (in the Aeschylean phrase) had ended his sport with Tess,” we are reminded that justice must be put in ironic quotation marks, since it is not really just at all. What passes for “Justice” is in fact one of the pagan gods enjoying a bit of “sport,” or a frivolous game.

Changing Ideas of Social Class in Victorian England

Tess of the d’Urbervilles presents complex pictures of both the importance of social class in nineteenth-century England and the difficulty of defining class in any simple way. Certainly the Durbeyfields are a powerful emblem of the way in which class is no longer evaluated in Victorian times as it would have been in the Middle Ages—that is, by blood alone, with no attention paid to fortune or worldly success. Indubitably the Durbeyfields have purity of blood, yet for the parson and nearly everyone else in the novel, this fact amounts to nothing more than a piece of genealogical trivia. In the Victorian context, cash matters more than lineage, which explains how Simon Stokes, Alec’s father, was smoothly able to use his large fortune to purchase a lustrous family name and transform his clan into the Stoke-d’Urbervilles. The d’Urbervilles pass for what the Durbeyfields truly are—authentic nobility—simply because definitions of class have changed. The issue of class confusion even affects the Clare clan, whose most promising son, Angel, is intent on becoming a farmer and marrying a milkmaid, thus bypassing the traditional privileges of a Cambridge education and a parsonage. His willingness to work side by side with the farm laborers helps endear him to Tess, and their acquaintance would not have been possible if he were a more traditional and elitist aristocrat. Thus, the three main characters in the Angel-Tess-Alec triangle are all strongly marked by confusion regarding their respective social classes, an issue that is one of the main concerns of the novel.

Men Dominating Women

One of the recurrent themes of the novel is the way in which men can dominate women, exerting a power over them linked primarily to their maleness. Sometimes this command is purposeful, in the man’s full knowledge of his exploitation, as when Alec acknowledges how bad he is for seducing Tess for his own momentary pleasure. Alec’s act of abuse, the most life-altering event that Tess experiences in the novel, is clearly the most serious instance of male domination over a female. But there are other, less blatant examples of women’s passivity toward dominant men. When, after Angel reveals that he prefers Tess, Tess’s friend Retty attempts suicide and her friend Marian becomes an alcoholic, which makes their earlier schoolgirl-type crushes on Angel seem disturbing. This devotion is not merely fanciful love, but unhealthy obsession. These girls appear utterly dominated by a desire for a man who, we are told explicitly, does not even realize that they are interested in him. This sort of unconscious male domination of women is perhaps even more unsettling than Alec’s outward and self-conscious cruelty.

Even Angel’s love for Tess, as pure and gentle as it seems, dominates her in an unhealthy way. Angel substitutes an idealized picture of Tess’s country purity for the real-life woman that he continually refuses to get to know. When Angel calls Tess names like “Daughter of Nature” and “Artemis,” we feel that he may be denying her true self in favor of a mental image that he prefers. Thus, her identity and experiences are suppressed, albeit unknowingly. This pattern of male domination is finally reversed with Tess’s murder of Alec, in which, for the first time in the novel, a woman takes active steps against a man. Of course, this act only leads to even greater suppression of a woman by men, when the crowd of male police officers arrest Tess at Stonehenge. Nevertheless, for just a moment, the accepted pattern of submissive women bowing to dominant men is interrupted, and Tess’s act seems heroic.

MOTIFS

Motifs are recurring structures, contrasts, or literary devices that can help to develop and inform the text’s major themes.

Birds

Images of birds recur throughout the novel, evoking or contradicting their traditional spiritual association with a higher realm of transcendence. Both the Christian dove of peace and the Romantic songbirds of Keats and Shelley, which symbolize sublime heights, lead us to expect that birds will have positive meaning in this novel. Tess occasionally hears birdcalls on her frequent hikes across the countryside; their free expressiveness stands in stark contrast to Tess’s silent and constrained existence as a wronged and disgraced girl. When Tess goes to work for Mrs. d’Urberville, she is surprised to find that the old woman’s pet finches are frequently released to fly free throughout the room. These birds offer images of hope and liberation. Yet there is irony attached to birds as well, making us doubt whether these images of hope and freedom are illusory. Mrs. d’Urberville’s birds leave little white spots on the upholstery, which presumably some servant—perhaps Tess herself—will have to clean. It may be that freedom for one creature entails hardship for another, just as Alec’s free enjoyment of Tess’s body leads her to a lifetime of suffering. In the end, when Tess encounters the pheasants maimed by hunters and lying in agony, birds no longer seem free, but rather oppressed and submissive. These pheasants are no Romantic songbirds hovering far above the Earth—they are victims of earthly violence, condemned to suffer down below and never fly again.

The Book of Genesis

The Genesis story of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden is evoked repeatedly throughout Tess of the d’Urbervilles, giving the novel a broader metaphysical and philosophical dimension. The roles of Eve and the serpent in paradise are clearly delineated: Angel is the noble Adam newly born, while Tess is the indecisive and troubled Eve. When Tess gazes upon Angel in Chapter XXVII, “she regarded him as Eve at her second waking might have regarded Adam.” Alec, with his open avowal that he is bad to the bone, is the conniving Satan. He seduces Tess under a tree, giving her sexual knowledge in return for her lost innocence. The very name of the forest where this seduction occurs, the Chase, suggests how Eve will be chased from Eden for her sins. This guilt, which will never be erased, is known in Christian theology as the original sin that all humans have inherited. Just as John Durbeyfield is told in Chapter I that “you don’t live anywhere,” and his family is evicted after his death at the end of the novel, their homelessness evokes the human exile from Eden. Original sin suggests that humans have fallen from their once great status to a lower station in life, just as the d’Urbervilles have devolved into the modern Durbeyfields. This Story of the Fall—or of the “Pure Drop,” to recall the name of a pub in Tess’s home village—is much more than a social fall. It is an explanation of how all of us humans—not only Tess—never quite seem to live up to our expectations, and are never able to inhabit the places of grandeur we feel we deserve.

Variant Names

The transformation of the d’Urbervilles into the Durbeyfields is one example of the common phenomenon of renaming, or variant naming, in the novel. Names matter in this novel. Tess knows and accepts that she is a lowly Durbeyfield, but part of her still believes, as her parents also believe, that her aristocratic original name should be restored. John Durbeyfield goes a step further than Tess, and actually renames himself Sir John, as his tombstone epitaph shows. Another character who renames himself is Simon Stokes, Alec’s father, who purchased a family tree and made himself Simon Stoke-d’Urberville. The question raised by all these cases of name changing, whether successful or merely imagined, is the extent to which an altered name brings with it an altered identity. Alec acts notoriously ungentlemanly throughout the novel, but by the end, when he appears at the d’Urberville family vault, his lordly and commanding bearing make him seem almost deserving of the name his father has bought, like a spoiled medieval nobleman. Hardy’s interest in name changes makes reality itself seem changeable according to whims of human perspective. The village of Blakemore, as we are reminded twice in Chapters I and II, is also known as Blackmoor, and indeed Hardy famously renames the southern English countryside as “Wessex.” He imposes a fictional map on a real place, with names altered correspondingly. Reality may not be as solid as the names people confer upon it.

Symbols are objects, characters, figures, or colors used to represent abstract ideas or concepts.

Prince

When Tess dozes off in the wagon and loses control, the resulting death of the Durbeyfield horse, Prince, spurs Tess to seek aid from the d’Urbervilles, setting the events of the novel in motion. The horse’s demise is thus a powerful plot motivator, and its name a potent symbol of Tess’s own claims to aristocracy. Like the horse, Tess herself bears a high-class name, but is doomed to a lowly life of physical labor. Interestingly, Prince’s death occurs right after Tess dreams of ancient knights, having just heard the news that her family is aristocratic. Moreover, the horse is pierced by the forward-jutting piece of metal on a mail coach, which is reminiscent of a wound one might receive in a medieval joust. In an odd way, Tess’s dream of medieval glory comes true, and her horse dies a heroic death. Yet her dream of meeting a prince while she kills her own Prince, and with him her family’s only means of financial sustenance, is a tragic foreshadowing of her own story. The death of the horse symbolizes the sacrifice of real-world goods, such as a useful animal or even her own honor, through excessive fantasizing about a better world.

The d’Urberville Family Vault

A double-edged symbol of both the majestic grandeur and the lifeless hollowness of the aristocratic family name that the Durbeyfields learn they possess, the d’Urberville family vault represents both the glory of life and the end of life. Since Tess herself moves from passivity to active murder by the end of the novel, attaining a kind of personal grandeur even as she brings death to others and to herself, the double symbolism of the vault makes it a powerful site for the culminating meeting between Alec and Tess. Alec brings Tess both his lofty name and, indirectly, her own death later; it is natural that he meets her in the vault in d’Urberville Aisle, where she reads her own name inscribed in stone and feels the presence of death. Yet the vault that sounds so glamorous when rhapsodized over by John Durbeyfield in Chapter I seems, by the end, strangely hollow and meaningless. When Alec stomps on the floor of the vault, it produces only a hollow echo, as if its basic emptiness is a complement to its visual grandeur. When Tess is executed, her ancestors are said to snooze on in their crypts, as if uncaring even about the fate of a member of their own majestic family. Perhaps the secret of the family crypt is that its grandiosity is ultimately meaningless

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Brazil

Rather surprising for a novel that seems set so solidly in rural England, the narration shifts very briefly to Brazil when Angel takes leave of Tess and heads off to establish a career in farming. Even more exotic for a Victorian English reader than America or Australia, Brazil is the country in which Robinson Crusoe made his fortune and it seems to promise a better life far from the humdrum familiar world. Brazil is thus more than a geographical entity on the map in this novel: it symbolizes a fantasyland, a place where dreams come true. As Angel’s name suggests, he is a lofty visionary who lacks some experience with the real world, despite all his mechanical know-how in farm management. He may be able to milk cows, but he does not yet know how to tell the difference between an exotic dream and an everyday reality, so inevitably his experience in the imagined dream world of Brazil is a disaster that he barely survives. His fiasco teaches him that ideals do not exist in life, and this lesson helps him reevaluate his disappointment with Tess’s imperfections, her failure to incarnate the ideal he expected her to be. For Angel, Brazil symbolizes the impossibility of ideals, but also forgiveness and acceptance of life in spite of those disappointed ideals.

Fate

“This incident had turned the scale for her. They were simple and innocent girls on whom the unhappiness of unrequited love had fallen; they had deserved better at the hands of Fate. She had deserved worse – yet she was the chosen one. It was wicked of her to take all without paying. She would pay to the uttermost farthing; she would tell, there and then” (Hardy 223).

The theme of fate and control (or lack thereof) over one’s own life weaves its way throughout Tess of the D’Urbervilles. First introduced with the discovery of the Durbeyfield family’s aristocratic ancestors, fate seems to propel Tess along her journey through the novel. Her own mother acknowledges the power of destiny in Tess’s life, claiming that she “tried her fate in the Fortune-Teller” and knows that Tess is fated to marry a nobleman (Hardy 27). Yet, Tess and her story are also driven by Tess’s sense of guilt and responsibility for the events in her life, despite fate’s role in such events. After all, her guilt over having “killed the horse” is what makes her agree to go to Alec D’Urberville, though it is far from clear that she is to blame for its demise (Hardy 36).

In this section, Tess’s guilt over a situation wherein she is not directly at fault again pushes the plot along. In the passage above, Tess feels guilt – that she must “pay to the uttermost farthing” for the fact that “Fate” chose her to be Angel’s lover, while the other milkmaids were destined to die or go mad. While she recognizes that it is fate that has made her “the chosen one,” she still feels the need to “pay,” because to accept fate’s blessings without doing so would be “wicked.” But she has neither killed the others girls nor driven them mad. She knows that it is “at the hands of Fate” that the girls have suffered, which should absolve her of all guilt. Nevertheless, fate and guilt mingle together and cause Tess to “tell, then and there” her story to Angel, launching the novel into its next phase, again driving the plot forward.

Thus, through her guilt-ridden reactions, Tess becomes an agent in her own tragedy. She is, in the words of Garrett Stewart, a “sacrificial character in somebody else’s novel of violation” (Novel Violence). Yet, this does not seem quite correct. Tess does not simply succumb to fate (or, the narrative’s plot-steering). She feels guilt and reacts to it, which propels her on to new tragedies – first her rape at the hands of Alec and here the destruction of her nuptial bliss. She becomes, in a sense, a self-sacrificing character. Fate and guilt intertwine to muddy Tess’s plot. Is she guilty, or is she not? Is it fate, or is it a choice? These are the questions that remain as Tess’s story marches on.

**Fate** is the development of events outside a person’s control, regarded as predetermined by a super natural power. The cruel hand of fate hangs over all the characters and actions of the novel, as Tess Durbeyfield’s story is basically defined by the bad things that happen to her.

Thomas Hardy brings out many unfair coincidences and plot twists that beset Tess.

In the beginning, it’s by chance that Durbeyfield learns that he is the last remaining member of the once illustrious d’Urberville family. The Parson who tells him admits that he had previously resolved not to disturb him with such useless piece of information but he is unable to control his impulses. This event sets the tragedy of the novel as it compels the Durbeyfield’s to make unrealistic decisions.

Seemingly random events—the pub, the beehives, the dead horse—happen on the day on which the Durbeyfields learn that they are d’Urbervilles. It is as if awareness of their ancestry sets their fate into motion. It is fate, or predestination, that Tess cannot escape.

Fate is also addressed in more subtle ways. Tess’s goals are out of reach because of fate. “She had hoped to be a teacher at the school, but the fates seemed to decide otherwise.” In reality the obstacles she initially faces—her family’s poverty and her father’s drunkenness—are fated. She was born into this family, and their situation is out of her hands. She may strive to change the course of her life, but the novel sets forth the idea that fate cannot be overcome.

On her way to Casterbridge, Tess accidentally kills “Prince”, the horse which is the soul breadwinner. When Tess comes to know about her drunkard condition of her father, she immediately realizes that her father is physically as well mentally unable to deliver the load of beehives in the market in a few hours. Subsequently she decides to take the load of beehive to the market as soon as possible. But she does not know that something unwanted event is coming to shake her family life. When Tess and her brother named Abraham go to market, their horse name Prince collides with the local mail cart and the horse dies in this incident. In other words,it can be said that the death of the horse is sign of the coming of bad and unwanted time for Tess which is not in her favour.

She gladly undertakes the journey to Trantridge with hope of getting a job there which sets pace for her tragedy.

Fate intervenes when it happens that Simon Stokes makes a fortuitous decision to call himself “d’Urberville,” owing to his wealth and desire to assume a legacy by one of the famous ancient aristocratic family. This partly contributes to Tess’s tragedy as she is sent by her family to seek kinship of Mrs Stokes d’Urberville.

It is by fate that when Tess calls at the d’Urberville’s mansion meets a wrong man. This wrong man, Alec, destroys her chastity and makes her “maiden no more”) Initially she feels hesitation going to the house of Mrs. D’Urberville but she does not have any other option to make her family survive. When she reaches the destination, she first meets Alec who is a beast in the form of human being. He does not think that there is a lot of gap between Tess and him in the context of age. At the first sight of Tess, Alec becomes attractive towards her beautiful and magnetic physical appearance. Tess does not get realized that she is being entangled in the seductive plan of Alec. Every Alec also accepts the truth regarding his character and says

“I can say no more. I suppose I am bad fellow – a damn bad fellow. I was born bad, and I have lived bad, and I shall die bad in all probability” (Hardy 125).

She is too young to recognize this tricky plan of Alec. He ends up taking advantage of her during the night at The Chase.

But her unpreventable sorrows do not end here. The problem becomes worse when she is unable to hide her pregnancy. She is persuaded to abort her child but being a mother, she cannot abort his child whom she loves very humbly much. She knows the bitter truth that she as well as his child will not be accepted in the family and society. It is comparatively worse for a girl who is not married. Without a marriage, having a child is sin and crime according to society. In case of Tess, she has committed both crime but no one knows the truth. By hook and crook, she succeeds in giving birth to her child. But her child is not healthy. Sometime it seems that God is against her will to give birth to her child.

Fate intervenes in the most obvious way when Tess writes Angel a letter telling him of her past, but upon pushing it under his door, she unwittingly pushes it under the rug on the floor. If only he could have found it and read it before they were married. Both the characters feel happy after marriage and go out for honeymoon. When they are on the top of their happiness, suddenly a storm of destruction comes in their lives and destroys their married life when both the characters decide to tell about their past secrets. Tess undoubtedly accepts his secret regarding his affairs with a girl. The situation completely gets turned when she tells him that Alec impregnates her in her past life. She explains all the circumstances under which she has to undergo but Angel Clare does not bear this bitter truth and says to her regarding her unavoidable past experience that"O Tess forgiveness does not apply to the case. You were one person; now you are another. My God – How can forgiveness meet such a grotesque – prestidigitation as that?” (Hardy 298).and decides to leave Tess on right now. She begs to him not to leave and tries to explain her perspective by saying that:

What I have done – what have I done! I have not told of anything that interferes with or belies my love for you. You don’t think I planned it, do you? It is in your mind what you are angry at, Angle: it is not in me. O, it is not in me, and I am not that deceitful woman you think me!” (Hardy 302)

Tess also looks at other characters’ fate rather than merely bemoaning her own. When hearing of Retty’s attempted suicide and Marian’s drinking after Angel and Tess married, Tess is critical of their treatment by fate.

“They were simple and innocent girls on whom the unhappiness of unrequited love had fallen; they had deserved better at the hands of Fate.”

But Tess, too, believes their actions are fated—they had no choice other than what they have done. To accept fate in such a way indicates determinism, that individuals have no control over their actions. And this is more or less Hardy’s belief.

Hardy points out the multiple unhappy coincidences that take place, like Tess overhearing Angel’s brothers instead of meeting his father. Tess, in her misery, decides to visit Angle’s parents at Emminster. After walking a distance of fifteen miles when she arrives at the Vicarage, it so happens that Mr. and Mrs. Clare are not at home. She turns away, deciding to come back after a while, but it so happens that she overhears the two brothers of Angel talking about Angle’s wife in a most disparaging manner.

She feels much hurt by this conversation, but another chance now occurs. The two brothers meet Miss Mercy Chant and all three of them comment adversely on a pair of boots which they discover behind a bush. The boots belong to Tess, and the comment hurts her still more. Tess had hidden her thick hoots behind the bush and put on thin ones of patent leather in order to look pretty to her parents-in-law. But Angel’s brothers and Mercy Chant take these boots to be a beggar’s. Tess’ feelings are now so wounded that she changes her mind and decides to return to Flintcomb Ash without meeting Angel’s parents. If she had been able to meet Angel’s parents, her subsequent life would have changed of the better.

Another mischance that brings disaster into Tess’ life is her unexpected meeting with Alec. For three or four years the two have never happened to meet on any occasion, and now, when Tess’ salvation lay only in continuing to keep out of his way, she runs into him. The meeting awakens Alec’s dormant lust once again; he renounces his missionary’s role and pursues Tess with a doggedness that surprises her. If this chance meeting had not occurred all would yet have been well with Tess. Clare was coming to claim her and she would at least have been re-united with him to spend the rest of her life blissfully in his arms. But a chance meeting with Alec becomes fate’s device for wrecking her chances of happiness.

Another circumstance now occurs to aggravate fate.. Tess’ mother falls seriously ill and her father becomes unwell too. Tess gives up her job and rushes home. As chance would have it, her father dies while her mother recovers – contrary to expectations. The death of her father means the eviction of the family from their cottage of Marlott and their becoming homeless. The house-owner at Kingsbere, by another mischance, hands over the possession of his house to another tenant, after having promised it to Tess’ mother. This misfortune is an ideal opportunity for Alec to put further pressure upon Tess who sees no way out of the predicament but to yield. Thus, a number of chance happenings seem to conspire against any possibility of Tess’ achieving happiness in life. Her surrender to Alec, which completes her ruin, thus comes about as a result of coincidences.

Hardy even muses over the possibility that Tess’ sufferings are a punishment for her ancestors’ crimes, or else there is a murderous strain in her blood, foreshadowed by the d’Urberville coach. The d’Urberville coach is an old legend of the family which Angel mentions and Alec later explains to Tess. It concerns some ancient d’Urberville who abducted a beautiful woman and then inadvertently killed her when she tried to escape his coach. Whenever a d’Urberville hears the sound of an invisible coach it is supposed to be a bad omen, or even to forebode that murder is about to be committed. The coach is a symbol of foreshadowing and the theme of fate that looms over all the characters in the novel. Tess cannot escape the cruel things that happen to her, no matter how “pure” she remains at heart. Her murder of Alec is also associated with this legend, as the symbol of the fateful coach implies both that she is the woman capture in Alec’s “coach” and that, as a d’Urberville she always had an inescapable murderous strain in her blood.

If only Angel could have danced with Tess during the May Day when they first met, but for Tess, the earth is a “blighted star “ without hope. She is fated to suffer. After Tess and Angel become engaged, she wrestles with whether or not to tell him about her past. She claims that she does not deserve him, and here she asks him why he did not ask her to dance when they saw each other years ago. She believes that if he had stayed and they had fallen in love, she never would have gone to work for the d’Urbervilles, and therefore would not have been raped by Alec and given birth to a child who died. In Tess’s mind, one change of history could have changed her entire fate.

On a Sunday, Tess trump’s fifteen miles to the paesonage of the elder of Clare to seek protection. There is no answer to her ring at the door, for the family is at church, at the just a wrong time, fate pushes her into Alec once more.

This is last phase of her life when her suffering and pain reach the culmination from where is no turning point in her life. When Angel Clare leaves Tess, she starts believing that her husband would come to her one day and they would unite forever. There is no doubt that they get united for some time. When Clare is far away in Brazil, she writes many letters to explain her traumatic and disastrous circumstances in which she has to live for long time. Alec comes again in her again to marry her. He is very possessive towards Tess and cannot bear any person in the life of Tess.

When he comes to know about the current status of her life, he enters into her life again and offers her for marriage but she denies the offer. His interference does not end here. He is oblivious of the fact that Tess tells Clare about her suffering through the medium of letter. So he hides all the letters written by Tess to Clare so that Clare does not the circumstances in which Tess has to undergo. To some extent, Alec gets succeeded in his plan of hiding her letters.

Finally, Tess marries with Alec and leads an unsuccessfully married life. Suddenly a new and disturbing turn knocks at the door of her life when Angel Clare appears in the life of Tess. Both Angle Clare and Tess get surprise to see each other because both have no hope of see and meet each other again. When he comes to know that she is wife of Alec, he does not say anything and accepts the truth. Again, Clare decides to leave her with Alec to lead a married life. After meeting with Clare, she goes to her bedroom. When she opens the drawer, she gets surprised to see the letter in the box which she writes to Clare. Now she completely fathoms the all situation that Clare does not come to her because the letters she writes do not reach to Clare. Alec hides all the letters. She believes that Alec is all responsible for all her suffering from the very beginning to end. Now she decides to take revenge from Alec and kills him in rage.

After killing Alec, Tess meets with Angel Clare and spends some memorable moment with him. She tries to make the last of her meeting with him a memorable moment because she knows the truth after this house, she would definitely not be able to continue her life with him due to the murder of Alec. Finally, she is hanged for murdering him.

At the end of the novel, after Tess dies, Hardy writes, ” Justice was done, and the president of the immortals, in Aeschylean phrase had ended his sport with Tess. This means that Tess was powerless to change her fate. The life of Tess is adversely affected by the fate from the very beginning of the novel to the end. It is clearly shown and observed that there is no single moment and event in the novel where there is no roll of fate in her life. This is the point which bring tears in the eyes of the reader because other characters in the novel experience some relief and moment of happiness in their lives but Tess is exceptional as there is no end of her sorrows.

‘Fate‘ has a more impersonal connotation than ‘destiny’, and is usually perceived as a more hostile force. That is why, as the coincidences stack up against Tess, the reader perhaps feels there is some malevolent force against her. Hardy emphasises this idea with his comment on Tess’s execution, that:

‘the President of the Immortals … had ended his sport with Tess.’

The life of Tess is adversely affected by the fate from the very beginning of the novel to the end. It is clearly shown and observed that there is no single moment and event in the novel where there is no roll of fate in her life. This is the point which bring tears in the eyes of the reader because other characters in the novel experience some relief and moment of happiness in their lives but Tess is exceptional as there is no end of her sorrows. It would not be wrong to say that the character of Tess would always be remembered for her unlimited sorrows and role of fate in her life. To observe the role of fate in her life, it will be very helpful and beneficial to divide the life of Tess in phases to understand the role which the fate plays.

The life of Tess can be divided among various phases due her various traumatic circumstances in her life but it would be easy to limit life of Tess to three phases ranging from her life in parental home, separation from his parents and lover and finely her end of life. Tess belongs to a poor family in which she is the eldest daughter on whom the whole responsibility of home banks on. Being an eldest daughter in the family, she has to take care of his younger brother and sister along with the chores of the home. On the other hand her father is drunkard who does not care for family as well as for Tess. He does not do anything to upend her impoverished conditions. Tess very well knows all about her father’s irresponsible behaviour. So she decides to help her family in the family business. Her decision to help in the family shows her responsible behavior to uplift the family’s socio-economic conditions. When Tess comes to know about her drunkard condition of her father, she immediately realizes that her father is physically as well mentally unable to deliver the load of beehives in the market in a few hour. Subsequently she decides to take the load of beehive to the market as soon as possible. But she does not know that something unwanted event is coming to shake her family life. When Tess and her brother names Abraham go to market, their horse name Prince collides with the local mail cart and the horse dies in this incident. On other words, it can be said that the death of the horse is sign of the coming of bad and unwanted time for Tess which is not in her favour. After the death of the horse, their economic circumstances become more worse and poor. Her family condition can be observed when she say; “Tis all my doing – all mine! No excuse for me – none. What will mother and father live on now? Aby, Aby! We can’t go on with our load – Prince is killed!” (Hardy 72). This is the first phase of her life which gets ended with death of Prince. The ending of this phase leads the life of Tess towards the second phase which is full of struggle and sorrows which get ended with death of Tess.

After the death of the horse, Tess has to do job in the house of ’Mrs. d’Urberville to support her family economically. Tess accepts the truth and says “Well, as I killed the horse, mother; I suppose I ought to do something. I don’t mind going and seeing her, but you must leave it to me about asking for help. And don’t go thinking about her making a match for me – it is silly” (Hardy 75). Initially she feels hesitation going to the house of Mrs. D’Urderville but she does not have any other option to make her family survive. When she reaches the destination, she first meets Alec who is a beast in the form of human being. He does not think that there is a lot of gap between Tess and him in the context of age. At the first sight of Tess, Alec becomes attractive towards her beautiful and magnetic physical appearance. Tess does not get realized that she is being entangled in the seductive plan of Alec. Every Alec also accepts the truth regarding his character and says “I can say no more. I suppose I am bad fellow – a damn bad fellow. I was born bad, and I have lived bad, and I shall die bad in all probability” (Hardy 125). She is too young to recognize this tricky plan of Alec. Whenever she is busy in works of his home, Alec tries to molest and seduce her to satisfy his physical appetite; his attempts are foiled and resisted by her. But the main question is that how much longer she can resist his seductive attempt because she works in his home and is surrounded by him all the time. He is always in search of finding her in the lonely place where no one can stop him to fill full his sexual needs. There are numbers of occasions when Alec finds her alone but fails due to unwanted reasons. Sometime he endeavours to show his feeling of love for her but Tess knows that he does not love her but he is attracted toward her physical beauty. Alec also says that he will definitely marry with her if she gets agreed to make physical relationship with him. His all attempts to woo her get failed.

Finally Alec succeeds in his attempt when he finds Tess with her friends when they are coming from some party outside from D’Urbervilles. Tess along with her friends is drunkard and enjoying each other’s company. When Alec meets on the road reading him home, he thinks that this is right time to entangle her in his plan. Initially Tess resists his offer of dropping her to the destination but finally he persuades her to go with him. But she does know that fate has decided something ominous for her disaster on the way. She is even not in condition in which she can out and out prevent his seductive plan. She is seduced by Alec. When she is being seduced, she does know what is happing with her. When Tess explains about her poor condition to mother by saying that “How could I be expected to know? I was a child when I left this house for months ago. Why didn’t you warn me? Ladies know what to fend hand against, because they read novels that tell them of these tricks; but I never had the chance of learning in that way, and you did not help me” (Hardy 131). No one is there to help her. She decides to leave her job in the D’Urbervilles.

But her unpreventable sorrows do not end here. The problem becomes worse when she is unable to hide her pregnancy. She is persuaded to abort her child but being a mother she cannot abort his child whom she loves very much. She knows the bitter truth that she as well as his child will not be accepted in the family and society. It is comparatively worse for a girl who is not married. Without a marriage, having a child is sin and crime according to society. In case of Tess, she has committed both crime but no one knows the truth. By hook and crook, she succeeds in giving birth to her child. But her child is not healthy. Sometime it seems that God is against her will to give birth to her child. After some days her baby child dies due to some health problems. The intensity of her sorrow increases when the priest denies performing the last rituals and rites of her dead child. No one helps and supports her because supporting and performing the last rites of the deceased child whose father is not known is considered to be sin and unsocial practice in the established codes of society because the so-called masters of society has established the codes of society. If these codes of society are breached by anyone, he/her has to face the wrath of society. So no one helps her. But she does not want her child to leave this world without the rituals because she believes that without such so-called rituals, the child would not get place in the heaven. So she performs the all the rituals of her dead child on her own.

Something more worse is waiting for her when she decides to leave home in the search job to sustain and support her family economically. In this phase some moments of happiness are witnessed in her life when she meets Angel Clare who works in the diary fare. Angel Clare is a handsome and attractive man whom almost all the women like him but he gets attracted towards the beauty of Tess. To some extent he falls in love with her at the first sight of her beauty. There is no doubt that it is this short period of time when she feels happiness after long time of depression. This happy moment with Angel Clare does not long for last because her past life is hovering over her like a ghost. Whenever she stays time with Clare, she unsuccessfully tries to tell him about her past life but cannot tell as she feels fear and believes Clare would leave her after knowing the truth of her life. Sometime she thinks that Clare would not leave her as she has done nothing wrong. The incident of pregnancy is just a mistake done by Alec. But being a true woman, Tess does not want to hide anything from him. Before they get married she writes all about her past life in the letter and lefts the letter in the room of Angel Clare so that he does not feel that she has betrayed him in love. But unfortunately Clare does not get the letter and both get married. Both the characters feel happy after marriage and go out for honeymoon. When they are on the top of their happiness, suddenly a storm of destruction comes in their lives and destroys their married life when both the characters decide to tell about their past secrets. Tess undoubtedly accepts his secret regarding his affairs with a girl. The situation completely gets turned when she tell him that Alec impregnates her in her past life. She explain all the circumstances under which she has to undergo but Angel Clare does not bear this bitter truth and says to her regarding her unavoidable past experience that “O Tess forgiveness does not apply to the case. You were one person; now you are another. My God – How can forgiveness meet such a grotesque - prestidigitation as that?” (Hardy 298) and decides to leave Tess on right now. She begs to him not to leave and tries to explain her perspective by saying that:

Finally Tess marries with Alec and leads an unsuccessfully married life. Suddenly a new and disturbing turn knocks at the door of her life when Angel Clare appears in the life of Tess. Both Angle Clare and Tess get surprise to see each other because both have no hope of see and meet each other again. When he comes to know that she is wife of Alec, he does not say anything and accepts the truth. Again Clare decides to leave her with Alec to lead a married life. After meeting with Clare, she goes to her bedroom. When she opens the drawer, she gets surprised to see the letter in the box which she writes to Clare. Now she completely fathoms the all situation that Clare does not come to her because the letters she writes do not reach to Clare. Alec hides all the letters. She believes that Alec is all responsible for all her suffering from the very beginning to end. Now she decides to take revenge from Alec and kills him in rage. After killing Alec, Tess meets with Angel Clare and spends some memorable moment with him. She tries to make the last of her meeting with him a memorable moment because she knows the truth after this house she would definitely not be able to continue her life with him due to the murder of Alec. Finally she is hanged for murdering him.

After observing all the tragic and sorrowful experience of Tess, it can easily be concluded that the life of Tess is controlled and directed by the fate. Every aspect of her life is preplanned by fate or destiny. From the very beginning of her life she does not experience a single day of happiness in her life. It would not be wrong to say that Tess is one of most memorable tragic and unfortunate characters in the history of English literature. While reading the story of Tess, the readers do not feel that they are just reading about a fictional character in the novel. Undoubtedly her unstoppable suffering and endless pain make her unique character. More painful thing in the novel is that she is not responsible for any wrong doing but she has to face and experience excessive and unjustified situations in her life. In other words, fate performs a significant role in the life of a pure woman. She does not left any stone unturned to change her fate but she do not know that she is nothing but just a pawn in the hand of fate. It may be said that goodness in her character is responsible for her suffering because she gets failed to understand the nature of human. Whatever the reason is behind her pain, it is clear that the experiences of life under which she has to undergo are traumatic and disastrous.

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SUFFERING

Tess undergoes immense suffering, throughout the whole novel. This is very well displayed by Thomas Hardy’s excellent usage of language. He expertly describes Tess’s actions and language. Hardy also vividly describes what Tess feels and other people’s behaviour towards her. The very first case of suffering starts when Tess had to get up extremely early in the morning to take the hives to market. Tess had to light the lantern on the cart and drive to market. Tess was exhausted. This is the first example of physical suffering that Tess undergoes in the novel.

Tess was so tired that she actually fell asleep whilst driving the cart. Tess was woken by a sudden jerk. She realized that she had been asleep for some time and she had travelled a fair way down the road. Tess found that the cart was on the wrong side of the road, and that the cart had stopped. There was a low groaning sound coming from her horse, Prince. He had been wounded very badly and as a result of this, he later died. This is where Tess’s emotional suffering began. Tess felt very upset and felt she was entirely to blame.

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PESSIMISM

a) The root cause of Hardy’s pessimism was the absence of a divine order. This harmonious order is also absent in Tess of the d’Urbervilles. Brennecke claims that Hardy “cannot reconcile the idea of an omnipotent and merciful Deity with the human sufferings that he witnesses daily” (79). The world portrayed in Tess of the d’Urbervilles comes across as a hostile world bereft of a compassionate God. In the absence of a benevolent God, human suffering seems meaningless. Moreover, the absence of God makes the possibility of retribution seem like a myth. Consequently, human beings have no reason to hope for an optimistic outcome. This viewpoint is highlighted throughout the novel. For instance, after Tess discloses her past to Angel, he utters the following verse to express the “anguish of his heart”

God’s not in his heaven –

All’s wrong with the world! (Hardy 272). These lines are a variation of the verses featured in Robert Browning’s poem entitled, “Pippa Passes”.

b) The presence of an uncaring universe or a cosmological order that does not sympathize with the tragic predicament of humanity is another factor that contributes to the pessimistic streak of the novel. This notion of human vulnerability and alienation amidst an uncaring universe is reflected in the following song chimed by Tess and her siblings during their last night at their home in Marlott:

“Here we suffer grief and pain,

Here we meet to part again;

In Heaven we part no more (Hardy 377)

c) Pessimism also implies that sorrow and tragedy will always outweigh happiness. This aspect of pessimism is evident in Tess of the d’Urbervilles as well since throughout the novel, moments of happiness, serenity and contentment are short-lived. This viewpoint is highlighted by Tess prior to her getting arrested when she says: “it is as it should be…Angel, I am almost glad – yes, glad! This happiness could not have lasted. It was too much!” (Hardy 417).

d) The prevailing notion at the end of the novel is not that humanity will prevail but rather that death brings an end to human suffering. This dismal perspective also reinforces the pessimistic tone of the novel. Tess’s tragic plight only comes to an end through her execution. This notion of death as a promising escape to a torturous life is perhaps best conveyed through the pitiable death of Sorrow that is described as “the hour of emancipation for that little prisoner of flesh” (Hardy 108).

e) A vision of bleakness and heartache permeates Tess of the d’Urbervilles – even at the end. The final image is not one of salvation or happiness but of bleak, unmitigated suffering which is highlighted through the “pale faces” and “bowed heads” of Angel and Liza-Lu as they walk together and the “grief of sun’s rays” smile “on pitilessly” (Hardy 418). The most pessimistic aspect of the novel is the absence of divine n or poetic justice. Tess inhabits a society in which

Tess inhabits a society in which malevolent people like Alec are allowed to prolong their conniving schemes while the vulnerable individuals like her are forced to pay a price for their transgressions. Despite Tess’s tragic death, the chaotic, unjust for of life moves on, and according to Shires, “The last chapter offers no catharsis . . .” (158).

Moral

The moral structure of the traditional English novel

The traditional English novel is very moral in its structure:

Good is rewarded, eventually and bad punished

True love finds its consummation

Pretence and guilt are exposed

The good people learn from their mistakes after a period of testing.

Below you will find the important quotes in Tess of the d'Urbervilles related to the theme of Nature and Modernity.

Chapter 2 Quotes:The forests have departed, but some old customs of their shades remain. Many, however, linger only in a metamorphosed or disguised form. The May-Day dance, for instance, was to be discerned on the afternoon under notice, in the guise of the club revel, or “club-walking,” as it was there called.

Chapter 4 Quotes:The morning mail-cart, with its two noiseless wheels, speeding along these lanes like an arrow, as it always did, had driven into her slow and unlighted equipage. The pointed shaft of the cart had entered the breast of the unhappy Prince like a sword, and from the wound his life's blood was spouting in a stream, and falling with a hiss into the road. In her despair Tess sprang forward and put her hand upon the hole, with the only result that she became splashed from face to skirt with the crimson drops.

Chapter 5 Quotes:He watched her pretty and unconscious munching through the skeins of smoke that pervaded the tent, and Tess Durbeyfield did not divine, as she innocently looked down at the roses in her bosom, that there behind the blue narcotic haze was potentially the “tragic mischief” of her drama – one who stood to be the blood-red ray in the spectrum of her young life.

Chapter 18 Quotes:What a fresh and virginal daughter of Nature that milkmaid is!

Chapter 19 Quotes:He was surprised to find this young woman – who though but a milkmaid had just that touch of rarity about her which might make her the envied of her housemates – shaping such sad imaginings. She was expressing in her own native phrases… feelings which might almost have been called those of the age – the ache of modernism.

Chapter 24 Quotes;Amid the oozing fatness and warm ferments of the Froom Vale, at the season when the rush of juices could almost be heard below the hiss of fermentation, it was impossible that the most fanciful love should not grow passionate.

Chapter 31 Quotes:Distinction does not consist in the facile use of a contemptible set of conventions, but in being numbered among those who are true, and honest, and just, and pure, and lovely, and of good report – as you are, my Tess.

Chapter 35 Quotes:“I repeat, the woman I have been loving is not you.”

“But who?”

“Another woman in your shape.”

Here was I thinking you a new-sprung child of nature; there were you, the belated seedling of an effete aristocracy!

Nature and Modernity

The very setting of the novel is the time of the transition from the traditional agricultural society to the modern industrial one. We see the countryside as a somewhat idyllic place, where the ancient Pagan rituals and worldviews are preserved almost intact. The contrast between rural and urban areas repeats the contrast between the women from the countryside who represent the nature and its forces and the rich men from the upper class of the society who represent the modern humanity that conquers nature. The detachment from the ancient, natural way of life is portrayed by the author as the main reason of the moral shallowness of the modern people, showing it as loss of innocence.

Tess in the novel is presented as Eve, the pure primal woman from Garden of Eden and the symbol of ancient, Pagan femininity. She is conquered and raped by men as was the Nature itself, but, as a Pagan Goddess, she rebels against her oppressor and kills him with her wrath. The symbolism of it is again emphasized by the farming machinery that is described as horrifying monsters who violate the peaceful soil of Froom Valley. Of course, both Alec D’Urberville and Angel, despite being rich, well-educated and eloquent, are shown as cruel and heartless in comparison to the women they hurt.

Even Prince the horse is killed by a modern cart. The milkmaids have to add water to milk, because people from the town are too pampered to drink natural milk without getting sick. The overall feeling of the novel is bittersweet and nostalgic, people stepping away from the path of nature are shown as going to their doom.

Justice and Judgment

The question of judgment and justice is the one that will be inevitably raised by the readers throughout the story. It seems that the very story and life of Tess are determined with her sufferings and misfortunes that happen to her. Surely, the author exaggerates a lot, compressing all the possible wrongness to the short period of life of a single woman, but still, he clearly stands on her side, advocating her against the world, no matter how powerful and unjust it is.

Moreover, there is no visible divine justice too. Tess’ fate is described just as an amusement, a kind of sport that is enjoyed by the “President of the Immortals”. The Christian God is an omniscient and benevolent being who cares about every single creature on Earth. The vision of the god who sees the mortals just as toys is closer to the primal religions of the Pagans. The multiple unfortunate coincidences are emphasized by Thomas Hardy and are clearly portrayed as something more than just accidents. They are presented as bad things that are deliberately happening to a good person just to see how much she can endure. But something as mysterious and primal makes Tess rebel against this malevolent force of unjust fate: the author states that there is something in her blood that hammers Tess’ fate. She is suffering for the crimes of her ancestors (that corresponds to the Pagan beliefs), but it is also the fiery blood of her ancestors that allows her to stand for herself and kill Alec D’Urberville.

Alec falls victim to ancient divine justice – or the justice of the cornered woman who couldn’t stand her sufferings anymore. But the justice of the society condemns Tess, instead of her oppressor. Angel agrees with it and just vocalizes the social opinion of Tess being a seductress, not the victim of rape. The victim blaming becomes the main motif of the novel, showing to the readers the overall injustice of the Victorian society.

The culmination of it happens when Tess is blamed for everything – both for being raped and for killing Alec. This is the ultimate injustice of both the divine powers and the society. We see that the entire world (represented by the author) is determined to smash poor Tess, thoroughly working its way to its goal.

Marriage Theme

The idea of marriage is very controversial in the novel. We see that the author presents the concept of marriage as a social invention, not an idea that people are born with and follow instinctively. Hardy asks the readers about the difference between social marriage and natural marriage. We see the author condemning and disapproving Angel, rejecting Tess right after their marriage and learning about her previous life. But Angel is only a representative of the society that prefers to follow the rigid norms of the social marriage.

The responsibilities and commitments in natural and social marriage seem different and we can see it while comparing the relationships of Tess with Alec and Anger. We aren’t sure still who is the real husband of Tess, and, in the end of the novel, we can say that no one was worthy of being called the husband of such a woman.

We see that Alec claims Tess his “natural wife” meaning only that he can do with her whatever he pleases and after she was raped he considers her his property. Obviously, this isn’t the kind of “natural marriage” Tess is ready to accept. Enslaving another person via rape can’t be considered marriage. On the other hand, Tess’ connection with Angel has much more emotional bonds. Still, Angel appears too weak to accept Tess as she is, without the charm of the Pagan symbolism surrounding her.

Male domination

The first male to cause Tess injustice is her father, John Durbeyfield. An incident occurs when Tess is forced to take the family’s horse to market after her father comes home drunk and doesn’t fulfil his gender role of going to work, and the horse dies after a collision. As a result, Tess feels heavily responsible for the death of the horse, “Nobody blamed Tess as she blamed herself.”

Men take the role of the governing gender; they are the ones capable of earning an income and making a living for themselves. This is shown when Tess’s family falls short of money due to the death of their horse, Prince, and the family persuades Tess to go to Tess’s mother, Joan asks Tess to go and “Claim kin” off their nearest relatives, the d’Urbervilles. Tess is persuaded on the matter and simply say’s “Well, as I killed the horse, mother… I suppose I ought to do something. Tess’s family chooses to overlook the fact that she does not want to go for they want her to marry Alec and bring her family wealth. This shows male dominance during the Victorian age.

Tess, for all of her hard work and struggles, is constantly plagued by men. The men, in particular, are of course Alec and Angel, who both share the same love and show the same domination over the same woman. Though very different characters overall, the ability for both Alec and Angel to hold such emotional (and at some times, physical) power over Tess is used by Hardy to show just how bad the discrepancy between males and females were during the time the novel was written.

Male dominance is visible in Tess’s relationship with Alec. In one of the novel’s most iconic episodes, Hardy uses diction choice to imply Tess’ sexual passiveness. The strawberries are shown to Tess in a ‘green-house’ – they are not naturally ripe yet, much like how Tess is not sexually ‘ripe’ and is not ready for Alec’s advances. The strawberries, in this case, are a metaphor for Tess’s sexuality – Alec asks her if she likes strawberries, and she replies ‘Yes, when they come.’ Alec then insists that the strawberries are ‘already here’. It’s obvious that Alec is trying to metaphorically coerce Tess into losing her virginity prematurely.

The Victorian society victimises Tess for expressing or acting on her sexuality. When Alec feeds her the strawberry, Tess protests that she would ‘rather take it in (her) own hand’, then Alec ‘insist(s)’ and ‘in a slight distress, she parted her lips and took it in’. This is the first example of the repeating cycle of Tess not wanting to do something, Alec coercing her, then her accepting reluctantly. The strawberry episode is obvious foreshadowing on Hardy’s part, of Tess’s imminent loss of virginity. Alec’s dominance over Tess is obvious from his ‘insisting. This portrays Alec as forceful and assertive.

There is further evidence of Tess being submissive to Alec’s demands when he is giving her flowers to place in her bosom and on her hat. Hardy writes that Tess simply “Obeyed like one in a dream.” Further on in the novel, Alec’s dominance is seen when he is driving recklessly with Tess and demands a kiss from Tess before he will slow down. Alec demands “Let me put one little kiss on those holmberry lips Tess or even on that warmed cheek, and I’ll stop.” This further supports my argument that Alec needs sexual dominance over Tess because once again, by putting her in an impossible situation, Tess will have no choice but to give in to his demands.

The most literal example of male domination is in the act of Alec sexually assaulting Tess. This act in and of itself is disturbing regardless of its implications and is the most direct instance of male domination over a woman character. The act of being sexually assaulted is not one done out of ignorance, as Alec is both fully aware and even acknowledges how awful he is for seducing Tess for his own pleasure. Tess is affected by this event for the rest of the novel, but in the grand scheme of things, she still goes back to Alec at times. It can be argued that even in sin men still dominated women, and would exploit this often.

Despite the fact that Tess, and women in general, are often held accountable for and looked down upon for their sins, the men at the time are permitted to roam freely, for they are impervious to judgment. When Tess tells her mother about Alec taking advantage of her, Tess’s mother does not put any of the blame on Alec for raping her. Instead she tells Tess that she “ought to have been more careful, if [she] didn’t mean to get him to make [her] his wife” (Hardy 64). Tess is held accountable for her actions more than Alec is despite the fact that Alec seemed to have a more prevalent role in the sin that was committed.

In addition, Alec is never mentioned after When Tess gives birth to his baby, and no one expects Alec to provide or take care of Tess and the baby. The responsibility is put entirely on Tess while Alec continues to do as he pleases. She is later treated as a social outcast because of the fact that having a child outside the wedlock is considered morally inappropriate during the Victorian age.

Another man who lets her down is the priest, as after her baby dies, she begs him to give her baby a Christian burial even though Tess is fully aware that her baby was born out of wedlock. The priest refuses, and this further supports the argument that females struggle to find justice under the rulings of male dominance, as Tess believes she can depend on the priest but he disappoints her.

Tess is at a disadvantage because of her gender, due to the patriarchal society she lives in puritanical Victorian England. The narrator describes Tess’s resilience in the face of abuse and loss. Tess leaves home to go to work for the Talbothays Dairy after the death of the child conceived by Alec’s rape. This casual treatment of such traumatic experiences shows that, at the time, women had no choice but to accept what happened to them and move on. She is no longer the milkmaid, but a visionary essence of woman whole sex condensed into one typical form.

After the death of Tess’s baby, we meet Angel Clare for the second time after a brief meeting at the May Day dance, at a dairy farm, where Tess has now moved to gain employment. Tess moved away to gain some independence, even though Hardy displays to us that the wanting of independence and strong will aren’t enviable qualities in a woman in the Victorian period, as some characters such as Mr Crick seem shocked and surprised by her character, “to the surprise – indeed, slight contempt – of Dairyman Crick,” meaning he dislikes Tess’s odd character upon their first meeting.

The men in the novel reduce women to the sum of their expectations. As Angel and Tess get to know each other while working at the dairy, Angel becomes infatuated with her and sees her as the epitome of womanhood. Readers learn the various qualities he admires about her, which include his perception of her innocence and modesty. Although Angel does not disrespect women as explicitly as Alec does, he still expects Tess to accept him for a lover.

Even when Tess first rejects owing to the fact that she has vowed not to fall in love again, her refusal, though unexpected, does not permanently daunt Clare. The narrator observes Angel’s reaction to Tess’s declining his offer of marriage. Although she gives the reason that she has never planned to marry anyone, he sees her refusal as coy encouragement to propose again. His belief that a ‘no’ represents a female stratagem sounds eerily reminiscent of Alec’s treatment of Tess, showing the disregard all men seem to have for what women truly want.

Angel represents the emotional control men have over women. One example is when Angel reveals he prefers Tess over other women, one of Tess’ friends Retty attempts to commit suicide while Marian is “found dead drunk” despite the fact that she is not known to have ever drunk alcohol before (Hardy 175). The girls’ love for Angel, rather their love for the thought of him, affects them so much that they are driven to such extremes upon him marrying a woman other than them, despite Retty and Marian knowing that he would never marry either of them. The reactions of Retty and Marian show the emotional side of women

The idea that men are not subject to judgment is also present in Tess and Angel’s relationship when Tess confesses about her past and asks Angel to forgive her. Angel has already confessed to his past with a woman, and Tess forgives him, but when Tess asks for Angel’s forgiveness, he says to her, “forgiveness does not apply to the case. You were one person: now you are another” (Hardy 179). Tess and Angel have both committed the sin of premarital sex. Furthermore, Tess consented less to the action than Angel did, yet Tess is held accountable for her sins more than Angel is for his. When he tells her that her sins are unforgiveable, she does not question him in that. She does not bother to point out the similarity of her and Angel’s sins. Instead, she begs for forgiveness and feels ashamed while not holding him accountable for his injustice towards her.

Furthermore, upon Angel refusing to forgive Tess about her past with Alec, Tess begins thinking of committing suicide for the sake of Angel. She says to Angel that “[the suicide] was thought of entirely on your account—to set you free without the scandal of the divorce that I thought you would have to get. I should never have dreamt of doing it on mine,” which shows the severity of Angels influence on her since she would go so far as to commit suicide not for her own benefit, but so that he can rid himself of her. What she wants for herself is a secondary thought while Angel’s desires are the forefront. Tess’s willingness to sacrifice herself so that Angel can live without having scandal to his name shows the selfless side of women. Men don’t necessarily have to assert their dominance for them to have influence on women’s lives.

Angel then creates a mode by which Tess is supposed to belong to, rather than actually loving her for herself. Angel describes Tess as “dead” (260) in response to learning about her secrets. This suppression of female identity, which to Tess is “all is vanity” (287) is the dominating emotional force behind the institution of marriage at the time, where females lost their name, their money, and what little freedom they had. The identity of Tess is never her own but is rather at the design of men who hold perceived power over her.

Angel further shows his domineering role when he says “Different societies, Different manners” as well as adding further insult to Tess by saying she is “Childish”, “Unformed” and “Crude”. This is complete unjust towards Tess as Angel is the one person in her life that she can supposedly depend on to love her unconditionally, but Victorian double standards are largely visible here. Angel decides that he will leave Tess and go to Brazil to run a farm, leaving her with no financial security. Tess falls in a downwards spiral of despair from this point and we are led to

The women depend on the men to bring them wealth, rather than women trying to provide money for themselves. When Tess and her family, once again, need money due to Angel’s disappearance from Tess’s life, Alec acknowledges that Tess needs a man to provide for her and he offers to help her if she marries him. Tess rejects him claiming that she has plenty of money at her father-in-law’s house if she asks for it (Hardy 280). Women do not have the option not to marry: it is simply a necessity for survival. Alec uses this to his advantage when asking for Tess’s hand in marriage; for he acknowledges his social dominance over her and knows that she needs his income in order for her and her poor family to survive.

Even when she says that she has another source of money, Tess still validates the statement that women depend on a man’s income for she refers to the money that Angel left for her. Therefore, Men automatically have social dominance, for even if a woman wishes to gain an income that would sufficiently provide for her and her family, the opportunities for work that are given to women do not cover the expenses that a family needs, so a woman needs to marry so that a man can cover her expenses.

Tess is portrayed as a submissive and passive woman, as expected of women at the time, especially when given orders by the most prominent man in her life, Angel. Angel’s orders are not to be questioned, and she never even has a thought to disobey him. In fact, she gladly and blindly follows his order. When talking to Angel after the revelation of her past with Alec, Tess says,

“I shan’t do anything, unless you order me to. And if you go away from me, I shall not follow ‘ee: and if you never speak to me any more I shall not ask why, unless you tell me I may” (180). This shows Tess’s submission to Angel as she willingly obeys him whole-heartedly without questioning any of his orders or actions. As she continues to show her loyalty and obedience, Tess says, “I will obey you, like your wretched slave, even if it is to lie down and die” (180).

So, Hardy portrays Tess as the stereotypical woman in the Victorian era, for her passivity and willingness to abide by the orders of her husband, Angel, causes her incapability of having original thought

In correspondence with Angel’s expectations of a virginal wife, despite not being one himself, reveals the unfair treatment of women in the Victorian society. Women were expected to be virgins to even be recognized as a potential wife, yet this requirement of chastity and absolute purity Is not expected of men, as the potential husband has the freedom to participate in premarital and extramarital sexual relationships which explains Angel’s reluctance to accept and forgive Tess’s past. In this regard, men view themselves as superior to women for they commit sins freely and don’t expect judgment from neither women nor society.

In addition, this explains why Alec is not held accountable for taking advantage of Tess, for premarital relationships were not abnormal for men, and it also shows why Angel’s past relationship does not not carry as much weight as Tess’s, despite the fact that Tess does not consent to sex in her past while Angel does.

As a result of her committing murder, she is hunted down my males, further showing the power they hold over women, and she is hung. Some critics think the death of Alec is unnecessary because Tess is promoted as a pure woman, and a true pure woman wouldn’t commit