

Thomas Hardy's *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*: A Derby of Fate and Destiny

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ABSTRACT

Thomas Hardy's approach towards life is marked with a fervent tone of destiny. He gave destiny as the lead role in this novel where he projected man as a powerless creature, a mere puppet with its strings in the hands of destiny. Man in Hardy's novels is not allowed to have his own will. Hardy believed that there is a wicked power, which rules the world, conquering every effort of man to improve his fortune and to find joy. The present novel shows that destiny is hostile to human pleasure and plays with man in order to bring his ultimate fall. As a result of this a tone of melancholy runs through the novel.

The main character of the novel, Tess who has moved the readers with her charm, purity and beauty will be seen fighting against her misfortunes which will ultimately lead to her tragic death. There are many factors that will contribute to Tess's tragic end where destiny is the prime one. She is not permitted to choose the path of her life as obstructions and weaknesses prevent all her hopes and ambitions.

The readers for the presentation of life often appreciate Thomas Hardy's novels in a different manner. It has often been noticed that his plot revolves around the game play of fate and destiny. The exposure of man to destiny can be witnessed in this novel. Destiny and fate plays an important role not only in Hardy's novels but in his personal life also. When he was born, the surgeon declared him dead and was thrown aside until fate intervened and beckoned a nurse to notice that he was infact alive and destined to live. This incident made Hardy's belief in fate and destiny much stronger. The present novel is woven with the same thread of fate and destiny where many occurrences such as fateful incidents, overheard conversations and letters which could not be delivered to someone important symbolize the forces of fate working against man's destiny.

Hardy belonged to the Victorian era where industrial revolution was destroying the nature around him. As a result, scuffle between man and nature became a representative of fate. As nature is shown unalterable so characters close to her are also consistent. Hardy remarked that:

In the ill-judged execution of well-judged plan of things, the call seldom produces the comer; the man to love rarely coincides with the hour of loving. Nature does not often say, 'See! To her poor creature at a time when seeing can lead to happy doing or reply 'Here' to a body's cry 'Where?' till the hide and seek has become an irksome outworn game. (11)

Tess, the chief protagonist is a pure woman and suffers from a spiritual encounter. It is her docility and frailty that makes her dependent on fate. Similarly, several coincidences also contribute to make Tess's fate hostile. The very first out of many is when her parents learn that John, Tess's father is a descendent of a rich family named D'Urbervilles. He comes to know of this tidings from a local person that he is one of the D'Urbervilles and embarks his celebration in a bar by taking wine, giving up his daily jobs. His wife Joan, Tess's mother also lends her company to him in having drinks. On learning

about her parents in such an inebriated condition she decides to take up her father's job of transportation, which is dependent on Prince, the horse that pulls their cart. On the way the cart meets with an accident resulting in Prince's death, their only source of livelihood. Tess accounts herself guilty for the loss of horse and takes an occupation so that her parents and siblings do not suffer. She is therefore, forced to go to Mrs. D'Urbervilles that aggravates her tragedy.

Hardy's Tess is not malevolent and mean still she is made to undergo some disaster lined up for her. Alec tries to seduce her and one night he rapes her, leaving her shattered and broken for the rest of her life. After her bitter experience with Alec, she returns to her parents only to find them in a deplorable state. However, Alec who is irresistibly attracted to Tess continues his endeavors to take advantage of her family's depressing condition. Tess's mother is worried about the lost chance of Tess and Alec's marriage. During that course of time, she finds another job in a dairy farm and leaves her home to join there as dairymaid. There she meets Angel Clare, the owner of the dairy farm. He finds her engrossing and falls in love with her despite her efforts to avoid him. He even proposes her to marry him, which forced her to give a serious thought to his proposal. After taking a lot of time she agrees to his proposal and decides to acquaint him with her past, but fails. Then she writes a letter and pushes it into Angel's room with a hope that he would get to know of her past and then take the decision of marriage. Unfortunately the letter gets stuck under the carpet and never comes to Angel's notice.

On the wedding night, Angel reveals his past life, which gives Tess courage to reciprocate and discloses everything related to her past. On hearing her past account he abandons her and leaves for Brazil to find new business opportunity. Left alone she again takes up different jobs involving hard physical labour in order to keep her family alive. As fate had some evil design in store for her, she bumps into Alec who is now playing the role of a preacher. Poor Tess falls prey to his bad intentions and after waiting for Angel Clare for a long time, giving up all hopes, she accepts to be Alec's mistress. After a short while

Angel Clare appears in the picture and with a sense of penitence inquires about Tess and tries to meet her. However, finding her with Alec, he leaves her and goes away in frenzy. In the end, when Alec in a tipsy state abuses Angel Clare, Tess in a fit of anger kills him. After that incident, Tess and Angel lived happily for one week where she was caught and hanged for her crime. However, the punishment she got for her crime came as justice that freed her from all the tortures and pain which life inflicted on her.

Throughout her life, Tess was treated unjustly by the society, which followed the law in words and not in spirits. Hardy in this novel showed that destiny and fate played a game upon Tess and was responsible for bringing the tragic end of Tess in Tess of D'Urbervilles.

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